

## LOOK, HE IS COMING

Revelation 1:1-20

Key Verse: 1:7

“‘Look, he is coming with the clouds,’ and ‘every eye will see him, even those who pierced him’; and all peoples on earth ‘will mourn because of him.’ So shall it be! Amen.”

Many people are interested in Revelation. Some are very enthusiastic to discover what happens in the future by interpreting its prophecies regarding economics and politics. On the other hand, some people are afraid to study Revelation, thinking that they will fall into error and go astray. Neither of these approaches are proper. As we study, we need to keep in mind the main point of this book: it reveals the glory of Jesus Christ, who comes again as King and Judge and establishes the new heaven and new earth which he shares with his people. Then God’s enemies will be punished, and God’s people will be rewarded. This is our hope. When we keep this in mind, we can find in Revelation meaningful messages which all Christians can understand. The atmosphere we are living in is so chaotic and morally confused that what is evil is called good, and what is good is called evil. Recently, institutions which have held Christian values, such as the Hallmark TV channel, and Chick-fil-A, have been put under such pressure by evil forces that they have compromised these values to survive. It is a sign that America is drifting in the direction of Sodom and Gomorrah. As the truth is distorted, sexual immorality, injustice and violence are spreading. In this environment we can expect Christians who stand on the truth to be harassed, even persecuted. Many will become nervous and tempted to shrink back. This is why we need to study Revelation. It gives us assurance of victory over the power of evil. Chapter 1 tells how the vision of the glorified Jesus came to John and how he sends it to the churches. This vision has come to us. When we see the glorified Jesus, everything changes. Let’s see and hear the glorified Jesus!

First, the revelation of Jesus Christ (1-3). Verse 1a says, “The revelation from Jesus Christ....” The word “revelation” comes from the Greek word “*apocalypsis*,” which also means “disclosure and unveiling.” It reveals divine

truth about what is yet to come. It exposes the hidden power of evil that comes from Satan and reveals God's judgment and victory over him. Supremely, it reveals the glory and majesty of our Lord Jesus Christ through his coming again. This revelation came from Jesus Christ. It was not conceived in the minds of men, nor can it be known by human effort or reason. It comes from Jesus Christ, who received it as a gift from God (1b). This divine origin assures us that it is reliable and authentic. Jesus made it known to his servant John by sending his angel (1c). John saw divine visions and heard the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ (2). John simply testified to what he saw and heard. In this way the revelation comes to us. Some people think that they need to have their own unique revelation from God. We don't need some kind of extra-biblical experience. We should simply accept the testimony of the Apostle John about Jesus Christ. As we do, we can participate in Jesus' revelation and receive a heavenly blessing.

Let's read verse 3 aloud: "Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it, because the time is near." This blessing is the first of seven pronounced in Revelation. The word "blessed" refers to happiness which comes from God--true spiritual joy and peace. This blessing is given to those who read, hear and take to heart the words written in the book. Reading aloud means public reading among a congregation. It is not just personal but a communal sharing of God's words. When we share God's word with our families and in our small groups, we can experience the power of God's word. Reading aloud is more than sight reading; it involves one's whole being--mouth, ears, mind, heart and strength. As we hear and receive the word of God, it makes us wise for salvation. Why is this a matter of utmost importance and urgency? It is because "the time is near." The Bible warns us in many places to be alert: "Keep watch" (Mk 13:35,37).

Second, blessings from the Father, Spirit and Son (4-8). Now John introduces himself as the sender of the letter, and greets his audience, the seven churches in the province of Asia. This greeting is very special because it comes from God the Father, the Spirit and the Son--the Triune God. They say to us, "Grace and peace to you...." This letter begins with grace and ends with grace (22:21). Grace is unconditional, undeserved kindness. Peace is wholeness and well-being; in Hebrew it is "Shalom." This blessing of grace and peace was

given to the churches at a time of persecution. When times are tough and we face adversity because of our faith, we need grace and peace. Where does it come from? No human being, organization or nation can give us true grace and peace. Only God can. The blessing is great because the giver is great. John describes some attributes of the Triune God. God is “him who is, and who was, and who is to come.” He is here in the present, was there in the past and is there in the future; he is eternal. The seven spirits refer to the Holy Spirit in perfection and fullness. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of grace and produces peace in believers’ lives (Heb 10:29; Gal 5:22). Though the blessing is given from all three persons of the Trinity, John focuses on Jesus: who he is, what he has done, and what he will do (5-7).

Jesus is the faithful witness. A faithful witness is one who always speaks and represents the truth, even when it is costly. While Jesus was on trial before Pilate, he said, “You say that I am a king. In fact, the reason I was born and came into the world is to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me” (Jn 18:37). Jesus is the best example of a faithful witness (1Ti 6:13). Jesus is the firstborn from the dead. This means that his resurrection is preeminent, and he triumphed over death (Col 1:18). Jesus is the ruler of the kings of the earth. It is easy for us to think that our lives are ruled by earthly powers, such as the president, the mayor, our boss, and so on. But that’s not true. Our lives are in Jesus’ hand. There is always meaning and purpose to our struggles, as well as national and international events. Let’s remember that Jesus is the sovereign Ruler.

Verses 5b-6 tell us what Jesus has done for us: “To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God and Father--to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen.” Though Jesus is the sovereign Ruler, he does not use his power like worldly rulers do. Rather, he uses his great power in three ways. First, he loves us. When we face hardships and go through painful experiences, we can easily think that Jesus does not love us. But even when we don’t feel it, Jesus loves us. In the popular poem, “Footsteps in the Sand,” the author noted two sets of footprints on the seashore. Metaphorically, they are his and Jesus’. Yet at the saddest and most troublesome times of his life there was only one set of footprints. He asked why Jesus was not with him at those times. Jesus said, “My precious child, I love you and will never leave you...it

was then that I carried you.” When we know that Jesus loves us always, we become victors in all we do (Ro 8:37).

Jesus’ love was expressed by giving his life as a ransom for our sins. Jesus freed us from our sins by his blood. When we live in this world, we suffer most because of our sins. Sin enslaves us to evil thoughts, lustful desires, jealousy, laziness, pride, selfishness, and destructive habits. Sin brings condemnation and guilt. How can we escape the power of sin? We need Jesus’ blood which breaks the chains of sin. Jesus’ blood can truly change anyone and set them free from the power of sin. With this freedom we can live for our divine purpose. Jesus has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father. As citizens of God’s kingdom, we enjoy his protection and provision. We live in loving harmony with our brothers and sisters, dedicated to the service of our King. Jesus has also made us priests. We have the privilege of sharing the gospel and helping others come to God and worship him properly. These are really great blessings and privileges. As John pondered who Jesus is and what he has done, he burst into a doxology of praise: “to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen.”

After praising Jesus for what he did, John exhorts his audience to pay attention to what Jesus will do. Let’s read verse 7. “‘Look, he is coming with the clouds,’ and ‘every eye will see him, even those who pierced him’; and all peoples on earth ‘will mourn because of him.’ So shall it be! Amen.” Jesus’ second coming is the main theme of Revelation. As Jesus promised in the gospels, he will come again in great power and glory (Mk 13:26). The sun, moon and stars will be darkened. The creation will become pitch black. Then Jesus will appear in a cloud of glory. Jesus’ own magnificent splendor will fill the clouds, shining brighter than the sun. When he comes, “every eye will see him.” It will be very different than his first coming. It will not be local and hidden, but universal. It will not be as the humble servant, but as the King and Judge of all mankind. The verb tense “is coming” indicates that he has already started and is on the way. His coming is imminent. At this present moment, there is still an opportunity for people to turn to him and be saved, as the door of Noah’s ark was open until the last possible moment. But just as the ark’s door was closed, so when Jesus appears, there will be no more opportunity to be saved (Mt 25:10; Lk 17:30). “Those who pierced him” may refer to the people of Israel seeing him (Zech 12:10). And “...all peoples on earth will

mourn because of him.” These are most likely unrepentant people mourning their destiny at the time of final judgment. Though they had already been punished severely as a warning, they refused to repent until it was too late (9:20,21; 16:9,11,12). Jesus’ judgment is righteous. John affirms this, saying, “So shall it be! Amen.” Jesus’ coming again to destroy all evil and unrighteousness is good news to his followers. So we can also say, “So shall it be! Amen.” The Lord God stamped his seal of approval, declaring, “I am the Alpha and the Omega, who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty” (8). The Lord God is eternal, omniscient and almighty in fulfilling his salvation plan. No one and nothing can stop Jesus’ coming again in glory.

Third, glorified Jesus among the seven churches (9-20). Through gospel study, we are familiar with humble Jesus who serves all kinds of sinners. Jesus is our good Shepherd. Jesus died on the cross for our sins and rose again. This Jesus has forgiven us, healed us, and comforted us so much with grace and mercy. But there is another side of Jesus which we will see at his coming again. He is glorious--so glorious that we can scarcely comprehend it. John saw a vision of the glorified Christ and shares it with us.

Though John had received a great vision, he was very humble, loving and understanding toward Jesus’ suffering people. He identified himself as their brother and companion in the suffering and kingdom and patient endurance that are ours in Jesus (9). John had been exiled to the island of Patmos during the reign of Emperor Domitian. At that time, the Roman Empire was demanding loyalty to Caesar as though he was God. But John testified that Jesus is the ruler of the kings of the earth. It was because of this testimony that he was exiled. Patmos was not a vacation site at that time; it was a Roman penal colony. John was a political criminal who was cut off from society. There was no cell phone service, grocery store or shopping mall. He was isolated, lonely and abandoned. He was too old to take care of himself. It would be easy for him to be discouraged and fall into helplessness and sorrow. However, he was full of spirit. On the Lord’s Day, when he was in the Spirit, he heard behind him a loud voice like a trumpet (10). The voice said, “Write on a scroll what you see and send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea” (11). These seven churches were made of actual people in real places in local congregations in Asia Minor. According to church history, John had been the shepherd of the church at

Ephesus, which was a mother church to the other six. He must have been deeply concerned about the spiritual condition of these churches. Though given to these local churches originally, the Spirit still speaks through these letters to all churches everywhere, including us.

John turned around to see the voice that was speaking to him. And when he turned, he saw seven golden lampstands. The golden lampstands represent the churches (20). In the tabernacle of the Old Testament, there was a lampstand with lamps which were kept burning 24 hours a day, every day (Ex 25:31-40). These lamps represented God's light shining in the world. In the same way, the church where Jesus is present is the light of the world. Sometimes the church is slandered by worldly people. However, to God, it is precious and important like a golden lampstand. Jesus was among the lampstands. Jesus empowers and guides his church. John described this glorified Jesus. He was dressed in a robe reaching down to his feet with a golden sash around his chest (13); he was serving as the Great High Priest. The hair on his head was white, like wool or snow, signifying the purity, eternity and wisdom of God the Father (14a). His eyes, like blazing fire, represent his ability to see through all hypocrisy and lies to perceive the truth about our sin, faith and life direction (14b). No one can hide the truth from him or deceive him. His feet were like bronze, glowing in a furnace (15a). These powerful feet refer to his ultimate triumph over all the forces of evil, including the power of sin and Satan. His voice was like the sound of rushing waters--like Niagara Falls (15b). His word has power to purify, refresh and regenerate people. In his right hand he held seven stars, which represent the angels of the seven churches (16a; 20). These angels seem to be human messengers who delivered his words to his people. The fact that he holds them in his hand indicates his personal protection, empowerment and guidance. Coming out of his mouth was a sharp, double-edged sword; his word gives life to those who accept it and judges those who reject it. His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance (16b). Jesus' face reflects God's holiness and glory. Just as the sun dispels the dark of night, so Jesus burns away all spiritual darkness with the brilliance of his presence.

This vision of the glorified Jesus was so awesome and holy that when John saw him, he fell at his feet as though dead (17a). John had known Jesus personally, and glimpsed his glory at the Mount of Transfiguration. He had

grown to be a mature apostle of Jesus. Yet, when he saw Jesus as he truly is, he was overwhelmed. The great theologian Thomas Aquinas, who wrote the epic work: *Summa Theologica*, once had a vision of heaven. Then he said, "The end of my labors has come. All that I have written appears to be as so much straw after the things that have been revealed to me." We all have our own concepts about Jesus based on our experiences, study and thoughts. But the glorified Jesus is so much greater than we realize. As we study Revelation let's see the glorified Jesus as he truly is and have a vision of his coming again in power and great glory. Then we will not be discouraged by the things of the world. Rather, we will be full of vision and hope. This is how we can overcome all kinds of challenges and live a victorious life.

When John was utterly helpless, glorified Jesus placed his right hand on him and said: "Do not be afraid." Why? Because Jesus was with him. Jesus said, "I am the First and the Last. I am the Living One; I was dead, and now look, I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades" (17b-18). This Jesus is the Creator and Sustainer of all life. He holds time and space in his hands and controls history from beginning to end. He died and rose again, conquering the power of sin and death. He has authority to decide who dies and who lives, and who goes to eternal glory and to eternal condemnation. Those who believe in him will never die but have eternal life. When this Living Jesus is with us, we don't need to be afraid of anything. We can serve him in holiness and righteousness all our days (Lk 1:75). Jesus told John to write down what he had seen so that all believers might have this glorious vision. Through this passage I thought about my vision. I want to see our church thriving with spiritual life through the ministry of God's word, prayer and the work of the Holy Spirit so that lifelong discipleship can take place and we can evangelize and disciple college students. I want to see spiritual revival in my nation and many servants of Christ raised. I want to see my family members grow in Jesus and serve him willingly and joyfully. These are good and important visions. But if I focus on these things, I can easily get discouraged by present realities. The Lord gives us a much greater vision--the vision of the glorified Jesus, coming in great power and glory, and the new heavens and new earth. I pray to fix my eyes on glorified Jesus and see God's great vision in this new year. Through Revelation study, let's all glorified Jesus and his kingdom. May 2020 be the year of 20/20 spiritual vision for all of us.