

# **The Revelation of Jesus Christ**

**Part Two: Jesus the Resurrected and Living King**

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In the last study (Word of Encouragement, V:33) we learned the importance of understanding the Book of Revelation as a genre known as *apocalyptic*. We also considered why it is important to consider the blessing that God promises in 1:3 to those who read the words of this prophecy aloud, who hear, and who keep what is written in the book. We closed our last study by considering the importance of our humility in interpretation, our continual reliance upon the Holy Spirit as our Great Teacher, and how to compare Scripture with other Scripture. Our study will proceed according to the outline below:

## **JESUS IS THE...**

- 1. RESURRECTED AND LIVING KING (VV. 1-5A)**
- 2. COMING JUDGE AND KING (VV. 5B-9)**
- 3. SPEAKING KING (VV. 10-16; CHAPTERS 2-3)**
- 4. "EVER-PRESENT HELP IN TIMES OF TROUBLE" KING (VV. 17-20)**

We begin this study by considering how the Book of Revelation begins by revealing Jesus as Resurrected and Living King. When John wrote *Revelation* in the late 1st century A.D. the church was undergoing a great deal of suffering because of their faith. The Roman Empire was persecuting Christians in different places because of their unwillingness to sacrifice incense and worship Caesar. Rome wanted the Christians to do more than merely "give to Caesar what was his due" or to honor the governing authorities as Paul had taught in Romans 13. Caesar desired the worship that God's people could give to Christ alone.

This caused a great deal of tribulation and suffering. In fact, John as he wrote the Book of Revelation, was on the Island of Patmos himself, an exiled Christian because of his faith. He writes in Revelation 1:9,

**Revelation 1:9: "I, John, your brother and partner in the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance that are in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus."**

God was pleased to use John and inspire him to write to other suffering congregations who were being tested and tried in their faith as the persistent Roman persecution continued. This was a time of tribulation for John and the early Christians, as has been all of the days since Jesus ascended to the right hand of God and the gospel has gone to the ends of the earth, all the way up to the present (John 14:25-31; 16:33; 1 Tim. 3:1-12; 1 Peter 4:12-18).

Because of the great pain and tribulation of the last days since Jesus ascended to the throne of God as reigning Messiah (Acts 2:16ff; 1 John 2:18-28), the Apostle John was inspired by God to write the Book of Revelation to be a comfort and a help to Christians in every age as they await the coming of their Lord and Savior. The Book of Revelation reminds all of God's people to never give up or given in as we stand firm in Christ's victory! As we study the Book of Revelation, we should always keep the purpose of John in mind.

The main purpose of John in writing the *Revelation of Jesus Christ* was that God wanted to encourage his people in the Last Days before Jesus comes to stand firm and strong in the Name of Jesus, and to continue to persevere through the pain and struggles of living in a world full of sin and misery. God gave to his people the Book of Revelation as a revelation of hope to unify them and

Many throughout church history in these last days since Jesus ascended to the throne of God have suffered persecution and tribulation to the point of death.

### **Living in a Material World...and Suffering?**

Many who receive this 'Word of Encouragement' are Americans. As Americans, we have been blessed abundantly in our country and for that we should be grateful. However, sometimes prosperity and riches make us think we have godliness and all we need, then over time we find out that our prosperity, theological laziness, and spiritual apathy has caused us to allow some of our congregations in Christ's church to become "wretched, pitiable, poor, blind and naked", as Jesus tells the Church at Laodicia.

**Revelation 3:15-17:** "I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were either cold or hot! <sup>16</sup> So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth. <sup>17</sup> For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked.

Riches and prosperity can be a stumbling block. Paul tells us that godliness with contentment is the greatest gain (1 Tim. 6:16; cf. Phil. 4:13). We should be ever mindful of this temptation when reading the Book of Revelation. It is addressed to suffering congregations not merely in the early church, but also to all churches. It would be very sad if the very purpose for the Book of Revelation made no sense to Americans today because we were not undergoing the same kind of suffering for our faith and witness. What a horribly sad day when the witness of our congregations looks so much like the culture and the world that there is no real difference between the church and the world.

I am not saying that we should desire or look for suffering, it will find us (1 Tim. 3:12). I am merely saying that we must keep alert and sober in a culture being defined as the *pax sumptuoso*, the "Sumptuous Peace" or just plain "fat and happy". I realize some of us do suffer a great deal, but I am reminded that the purpose of *Revelation* in the midst of suffering is to bring God's people encouragement.

Many teachers in the American church believe that Revelation is functionally irrelevant apart from its ability to prognosticate precisely discernable future events. In contrast to this, we should ask ourselves: "Is Revelation relevant to me as a Christian today, or have I left the reading of it to the so-called prophecy experts and the so-called learned?" "Do I read this book or is my New Testament functionally only 26 books?" "Have I allowed my unhealthy preoccupation of the future blind me from the book's important encouragement for me as a Christian today?"

The reason I mention this warning for us all is that when I have taught this book I find that my middle class American students in my class (who I love very much) consider this book more of a mystery about the future to be unraveled. For them, *Revelation* is a book that is interesting and challenging, but a book that is more concerned with the future than the present. I have thought about this. Why would this be? Then I thought that perhaps it is because we do not understand the beauty of the "present tense" message because some of us are "wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked" (or, "fat and happy" if you would allow me a paraphrase translation). In other words, we aren't suffering, so the Book of Revelation holds no help for some of us. I'm not trying to be harsh, but we could do well to read and pray for our suffering and persecuted Christians throughout the world so that we do not become "fat and happy" in our Christianity.

Now, I do want to make an important clarification. I am not saying that Americans *do not suffer*. We do indeed suffer. Many of you who are reading this are undergoing personal persecution in your homes, workplaces, schools, and even some of your congregations. I realize many of you may be undergoing conflict with spouses, even abusive situations. I also realize that some suffer severe

victory, continuing through trials, sufferings, difficulties, hardships, and persecutions with the joy and strength that comes from Jesus' Spirit, for he has not left us as orphans! He has sent for the incomparable power of the Holy Spirit for those who believe.

***Soli Deo Gloria!***

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**For Further Reading**

Herman Bavinck- **The Last Things: Hope for this World and the Next.** Edited by John Bolt.

Translated by John Vriend. Published by Baker Books, 1996

G. K. Beale- **The Book of Revelation**, New International Greek Testament Commentary, Eerdmans, 1999

G. C. Berkhouwer- **The Return of Christ.** Studies in Dogmatics Series. Published by Eerdmans, 1972

Dennis Johnson- **Triumph of the Lamb: A Commentary on Revelation**, P&R, 2001

Vern S. Poythress- **The Returning King: A Guide to the Book of Revelation**, P&R, 2000

***Soli Deo Gloria!***

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**Next study: The Coming Judge and King**