

The Gospel in Revelation

This gospel brought to light life and immortality for all men. The problem is that all men will not, by the exercise of faith, embrace, accept or personally receive the immortality that the gospel brings. Faith does not make facts; it merely embraces the facts already present in the gospel. Christ tasted death for every man (see Hebrews 2:9), enabling every person—past, present and future—to receive the “unspeakable gift” (2 Corinthians 9:15). “The grace of God, and the gift by grace, which is by one Man, Jesus Christ, hath abounded unto many” (Romans 5:15), even to all. So, grace and peace *be* unto you, every one of you, whether you are near or far off.

This, then, is the theme of the book of Revelation—the glorious, eternal gospel proclaimed with a shout of joy. This message of God’s love for the world is Revelation’s theme in word and symbol. Take a look, for example, at the first vision. It is found in Revelation 1:12-18. What do you see? Is it a vision of eerie horsemen, balls of fire, hideous horned beasts or a fearsome red dragon? Not at all! John actually sees Jesus Christ, the “Son of Man.”

God is without question the most misunderstood character in the history of our world primarily because our enemy knows that our understanding of who God is shapes our destiny. Jesus once said, “This is life eternal that they might know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou has sent” (John 17:3). And the apostle Paul warned:

“But even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them. For we do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your bondservants for Jesus’ sake. For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to *give* the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Corinthians 4:3-6, NKJV).

All the forces of evil are working to blind our eyes to the glorious gospel of Christ because He offers a revelation of the character of God. We, like billions of others, have been blinded to the truth of who God is. Jesus Christ came for the one purpose of making God known. This, then, is the purpose of the Revelation of Jesus Christ—to unveil God.

So before we get to beasts or judgments, we are introduced to Jesus. We are directed by a trumpet-like voice to turn our attention to the Son of Man (Revelation 1:10). And when we turn to Jesus we see some

impressive symbols of God’s unchanging love for a sin-soaked world. We see a living Savior who now holds the keys over hell and death. Christ, who is the essence of God’s love, could not be held by death. And with this love he bids us, “Do not be afraid” (Revelation 1:17, NKJV). Christ is alive! So don’t be afraid of death. God loves you! So don’t be afraid of guilt. He died for you! So don’t be afraid of rejection. Revelation’s first vision directs us to Jesus.

O soul, are you weary and troubled?

No light in the darkness you see?

There’s light for a look at the Savior,

And life more abundant and free.

Turn your eyes upon Jesus.

Look full in His wonderful face.

And the things of earth will grow strangely dim

In the light of His glory and grace.

Summary

The theme of any good book is found in the introduction. The introduction to the book of Revelation contains both the message of God’s love and a vision of His victory over death and hell. When we capture this theme we will be blessed in the reading, blessed in the hearing and blessed in the keeping of the things written in this book.

To be blessed means to be “happy, content,” not cursed with nightmares for the rest of our days. The book of Revelation is a closed and fearful book only when we fail to see in it the blessed hope of redemption through Jesus Christ. If we study Revelation without the message of the gospel, without the vision of Jesus, without the hope and victory He has gained for us, then it becomes a tale of terror rather than the blessing God designed it to be. All prophecy is written to introduce us to Jesus, to give us faith in His word, and faith in His power to change our lives.

So there we have it, the first message of the book of Revelation. Not a message of judgment, or plagues, or gloom and doom. No way! The Revelation of Jesus Christ is what it has always been—a revelation of God’s love for the world! But is this the theme of the entire book of Revelation? Let’s find out.

Preludes of Hope

Introduction

Mysterious, symbolic, sealed, strange, weird, scary and hard to understand. The book of Revelation has a bad reputation. In general people are a little spooked by the book known in the Greek as the *Apocalypse*, with its mysterious beasts and symbolic number 666.

The book of Revelation has captured the curiosity of millions, yet its images of doom arouse fear. Even Christians feel safer in one of the gospels than stepping in among beasts, dragons and impending plagues. Among the most terrified are those who believe that if they open the book of Revelation, some horrific beast will leap from its pages and gobble them up. Exaggerated? Perhaps. But once, while I was conducting a seminar on Revelation, a young man shared this story:

“When I first began to study the book of Revelation,” he explained, “my own father, a church elder, and the pastor warned me not to study it. ‘If you study this mysterious book,’ they warned, ‘scary beasts will come to take you at night.’”

Now that’s a story I had to hear firsthand to believe. Then again, even my wife traces her first nightmares to the Revelation Seminar she attended when she was a young girl. It’s true, though. Not the part about the beasts gobbling you up, but the other part. There are fearful characters and horrific judgments in the book of Revelation. Yet, would you believe me if I suggested that this prophetic book is not just about beasts and judgments?

Look, for example, as the opening line in the first chapter. It does not say: “the revelation of the beast,” or “the revelation of the dragon,” or “the revelation of the antichrist.” It does not even say the revelation

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of “Saint John the divine,” as the title in my King James version reads. Instead it says (and this is the first verse of the book) “the Revelation of Jesus Christ.”

Now that’s odd for a book about beasts and judgments. Of course we could assume that the opening words “the Revelation of Jesus Christ” should describe its origin, rather than its subject matter. And in a sense this is true. Revelation is a message *from* Jesus Christ, to be sure. But it is also a revelation *of* Jesus Christ. Revelation’s message does not just come *from* God; it is also a revelation *about* God. The actual focus of the book is the gospel, from the very first verse to the last chapter. Now if that sounds different from what you’ve seen or been told, look at verse 4:

“John to the seven churches which are in Asia: *Grace be unto you, and peace, from Him which is, and which was, and which is to come; and from the seven Spirits which are before His throne; and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful Witness, and the first begotten of the dead, and the Prince of the kings of the earth. Unto Him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and His Father; to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen*” (Revelation 1:4-6).

Grace.

Peace.

Jesus Christ, who loved us, washed us from our sins in His own blood and made us kings and priests.

Sounds like a far cry from beasts and judgments to me. What do you think? The message of these verses is so gospel-saturated that it reechoes the most precious verse of the Bible:

“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:16).

These few verses tell us exactly how God the Father *and* God the Son think and feel toward humanity:

“For God so loved the world” (John)

“Jesus Christ loved us” (Revelation)

“that He gave His only begotten Son” (John)

“[He] washed us from our sins in His own blood” (Revelation)

“whosoever believes should not perish” (John)

“made us kings and priests unto God” (Revelation).

You can’t get that close unless the same author is focusing on the same truth. And that’s what is happening in the book of Revelation. John the beloved, inspired by the Holy Spirit to write the gospel of John, is now inspired by the same Spirit to write the Revelation of Jesus Christ. The core truth of salvation is found in these verses—that God loves the world (which is good news, since we’re all sinners in need of love) and gave Himself, in the person of God the Son, for the sins of the world.

These verses speak a significant truth about the height and depth of God’s love. God was prompted to die for us by a love already existing in His heart. He loved us (the world) before anyone ever believed in Him. He died for our sins in the person of the Son to show us that He loves us before we believe. He even loves us if we refuse to believe. This core message is the good news about a God of love. It is the theme, not only of the gospels, but also of this book called “The Revelation of Jesus Christ.”

The Revelation of God’s Love

The most essential truth to be discovered in the Bible is the revelation of God’s unconditional love—the emphasis of both John and Paul. The apostle Paul was a man so engrossed in the gospel that he determined “not to know any thing” among the brethren “save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified” (1 Corinthians 2:2; Galatians 1:3-4). John’s focus was the same as Paul’s. Just five verses into his apocalyptic book we find that clear statement—God has loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood. This is the unmistakable theme of the gospel.

Pause for just one moment!

Take in a breath of air.

Do you feel it?

Your heart pumping?

Your senses acute to the environment around you?

Life.

However humble or high, God has given you life, and, with it, eternal possibilities.

This very life we now have is evidence of God’s love for us. The Bible reveals that sin is a killer and all sinners should already be dead (Romans 3:23; 6:23). But we are not dead because God has given every person the free gift of life. Not eternal life, but temporal life. It is “in Him”—in Christ—that “we live, and move, and have our being” (Acts 17:28). He has “given unto us all

things that pertain unto life” (2 Peter 1:3). In Christ “all things consist” (Colossians 1:17). Our living, eating and drinking—our very existence—is “in Him,” who is “upholding all things” (Hebrews 1:3).

God has overruled the design of sin and interrupted its power so that we might, in some moment of earthly joy, gain a glimpse of heaven. Picture, if you can, a moment in your life when you were truly happy. Think back, even if just for an instant, to a snapshot in time when all pain, sorrow and fear were vanquished and joy flooded your soul. Now imagine living in that moment for all eternity. If you have ever found even one moment of peace, this life has served its purpose in introducing you to God’s gift of eternal life.

Life is what brings us in contact with the prospect of eternal life. This temporal life, without its pain and evil, is a taste of God’s free gift—eternal life. In this sense, “the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men” (Titus 2:11, NAS). Grace is unmerited favor. We can do nothing to “deserve” God’s love. God in Christ is the One “who gave Himself for our sins” (Galatians 1:4). And He gave Himself personally. “To each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ’s gift” (Ephesians 4:7, NAS). This is “the grace that is in Christ Jesus” (2 Timothy 2:1, NAS).

Isaiah 57:19 also records the words of our Lord, “Peace, peace to him that is far off, and to him that is near.” Whether we are far from or near to Him, His words speak grace and peace to us. God is at this very moment speaking to our hearts of the unmerited favor and rest waiting for us in Jesus Christ. None have been left out, whether near or far off; all are included in His blessings of salvation. He speaks the same words now to us that Jesus spoke to the woman at His feet in Simon’s house: “Thy sins are forgiven. . . . Go in peace” (Luke 7:48-50). His peace has already been given; therefore, “let the peace of God rule in your hearts” (Colossians 3:15).

Again the Scriptures clearly indicate that this was the theme of Paul’s writings. If God “spared not His own Son,” wrote the apostle, “but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?” (Romans 8:32). He “hath saved us,” he wrote again, “and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began, but is now made manifest by the appearing of our Savior Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel” (2 Timothy 1:9-10).