

The Church from God's View: Introduction

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[0:00] We're going to spend several weeks here in the book of Revelation.

! Tom over there has taught it, I understand.

How long did it take you, Tom? First time, about two and a half years. Two and a half years. I'll say about two years. I narrowed it down. Yeah. You could probably quadruple of that with me, I think.

But we are going to look at the first few chapters, first three chapters of it. And so if you know anything about the book of Revelation, you know then.

And if we're going to be focusing on those chapters, then our primary focus is going to be on the church. I think after you get to the end of chapter three, we don't have the church anymore in the book of Revelation until you get to the end of the book.

[1:13] And the reason for that is why? Because none of that relates to the church. The church is going to be gone, going to be raptured. But anyway, the first few chapters focus upon the church and the letters written to the seven churches in Asia.

That would be Asia Minor. Today, that would be specifically where these churches were located. It would be kind of southwestern Turkey. Now, most believers, and maybe if we did a poll here tonight, we might bear this out.

Most believers tend to avoid the book of Revelation. Is that you? Anybody admit that you really haven't read much of the book of Revelation? No?

You all have read quite a bit of the book of Revelation. Well, I have misjudged you. We did a study. We did a study, but I mean your own personal time of reading.

When you have your devotional time, do you very regularly pick some passages out of the book of Revelation? Probably not. But nevertheless, there is a tendency among the people of God to kind of avoid getting into the book of Revelation.

[2:39] And the primary reason, of course, is because many people, many of God's people, are convinced that they could never understand it all. Now, you know, I've done a number of studies through Revelation, but I have, you know, I read the text, but also call upon the helpers.

I'm not the expert sometimes. But just reading it and trying to meditate upon the words that are just there in the print without the commentaries and Bible studies and other kinds of helps can be a daunting task.

It's intimidating, even. And so, you know, there are many of you who think, well, how can we really understand it, the book of Revelation? And maybe it's not supposed to be understood.

Maybe it's code, you know. And, you know, you've heard the story that it's in code so that, you know, the Christians were protected. And, well, you know, actually the plot of the book of Revelation is pretty simple, isn't it?

We could probably sum it up with one phrase. In fact, I heard a story about a certain seminary student who was working late into the night at the library.

[3:58] And he was about the only one left in the library, and the janitor of the seminary was there cleaning up. And he noticed that the student was very perplexed.

And he just had this look on his face. He was just a lot of consternation about something. And so he just, you know, because he loved the seminary boys, he went up and said, you know, are you okay?

I mean, what's the matter? And this student was honest. He said, well, you know, I've been studying the book of Revelation, and I just can't seem to figure it out. Can't seem to understand it.

And the janitor kind of chuckled. And he said, well, young man, I understand it perfectly. And the student said, you know, this seminary student, this young theologian, he says, you do?

You know, kind of an incredulous kind of voice. Maybe even condescending. He said, you do? And he said, oh, yes, of course I do. The man said, the book of Revelation means Jesus is going to win. [4:57] That's just, that's the answer. And, well, you know, most of us want a little bit more than that. You know, in our desire to understand all the ins and outs, we may have a pretty good grasp of the first three chapters.

They're pretty straightforward, though maybe not as straightforward as you think, as we shall see. But we want more than that, but that really does kind of sum it up. This is the end of the book. And it's the end of the story, in a sense. Though, you know, eternity goes on beyond into things and events that we know nothing about yet.

We won't know until we get there. But this is about it. This is Jesus wins. This is it. But, when you begin to read the book of Revelation, you know, you literally kind of step off into a very bizarre world.

And even very strange. You know, we've got angels. Of course, that may not seem so strange. And demons. We have angels and demons, certainly, in the Old Testament. But, a little different in the Revelation, there are lambs and lions and dragons and seals that are broken and trumpets that are blown and bowls that are poured out upon the earth.

[6:21] And beasts with horns and lambs with horns and horns with horns. And, you know, and dragons that speak. And that's just to name a few of the, you know, rather bizarre things that you'll find there.

And, yet, at the same time, very interesting. Now, I'm not wanting to whet your appetite and have you think that we're going to really get into the book of Revelation.

I'm not going to take this, in this series, we're not going to get past chapter 3. But, one day maybe we'll do that. So, I hate to disappoint you about that.

But, our primary focus, again, will be really more on chapters 2 and 3. One, but focus more on 2 and 3. And, I've entitled this study, The Church from God's View.

The Church from God's View. And, I think we can learn a great deal about what God thinks of the church. As we look at those seven letters to the churches in Asia Minor.

[7:25] Now, I would share, though, and this is just introduction here tonight. We're not going to even get to the first letter. If you've looked ahead in your notes, then you already know that.

And, these notes that I've given you, this kind of study guide is, you know, you've got some blank space there. You can jot in some notes. Just kind of a bare outline of where we're going to go tonight.

But, let me just share a few general thoughts here tonight about the book of Revelation. And, then, I think, though we're not going to study the entire book, these three things can, I think, help guide you.

The book of Revelation claims, makes three claims. Three claims. And, here's the first one. The book of Revelation claims to be divine in its revelation.

And, that may go without saying. But, the book of Revelation claims that for himself. In fact, I would even argue, though we'll not take the time to look at some of the passages throughout the Bible, that the Bible itself, a number of occasions, Old and New Testament, makes the claim for divine revelation.

[8:38] Some of its writers, Apostle Paul would be a prime example, very clearly make the claim, the statement, the declaration, that what we have here from cover to cover is, though written by men, who were moved by the Holy Spirit, though written by men, and what they wrote certainly did come out of their experiences, and so who they were, their character, their experiences, and so forth, did enter in, factor in, to the production of God's word.

It was still, all of it, divine. So, what they finally wrote down was, God breathed, inspired, it's divine. So, the entire Bible really claims that for himself.

We need to, you know, narrow our focus, at least in this study, and understand that the book of Revelation claims to be divine in its revelation. And what does that mean?

It means that this book, the book of Revelation, is the divine revelation of the Lord Jesus Christ. It was given by God the Holy Spirit to his servant John, the Apostle John, that's the Apostle John, and through John, of course, than to all born-again believers up to our day today.

Until Jesus comes again and takes us all out of here, however many more generations are left before that happens, the book of Revelation will be still given to, the information there, the

revelation there, will be given to the Lord's servants, born-again believers.

[10:21] That's what verse 1 tells us. Look at it. The revelation of Jesus Christ. That's what this book is. In fact, some Bibles, I think, I don't know if it's the King James, maybe the King James uses that first phrase.

No, I think it's the New American Standard uses the first phrase in verse 1 as the title for the book. But it is the revelation of Jesus Christ which God gave him to show his servants.

And show them what? Things which must shortly take place. Now, the word revelation is from the Greek word apocalypsis. And you may have heard of that word.

It sounds familiar. Apocalyptic. Apocalypse. Apocalypsis. Apocalypse. You know, we've heard that word and we kind of have the idea that this is something really grand and big and maybe even mysterious.

But it really technically just simply means to, or rather an unveiling. That's what the word apocalypsis, apocalypsis rather, is how it would be pronounced in the Greek text.

[11:32] That's what it means. An unveiling. You know, sometimes museums or parks will have, you know, some sculpture or statue or monument donated.

And, you know, and then when they do, they'll have kind of a ceremony and invite the public. And what do they do? They keep it shrouded in maybe a big sheet or a big blanket or some big cloth until the right time, you know, when it's to be presented.

And then they'll do what? They'll pull that off. It'll be the unveiling. And that's what the book of Revelation does for us. And it draws aside the veil so that we can see things that have been a mystery until we get to the book of Revelation.

And what does the book of Revelation unveil? Well, there are three things that I want to share with you tonight. Three things it unveils. First, we see the unveiling of an important person.

An important person. We don't have to guess who that is. Verse 1, the revelation. Or again, the unveiling of who? Jesus Christ.

[12:45] Alright, so right on the front end of the book, we're told the purpose of the book. It's the unveiling of the Lord Jesus Christ. First, this book reveals, unveils Jesus.

Now, you might be thinking, well, hasn't He already been revealed? Or unveiled? I mean, in the Gospels, for one thing. When you read through the Gospels, then the Gospels are about the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Gospel of Jesus Christ, according to Matthew, and Mark, and Luke, and John. And isn't Jesus unveiled there? Yeah.

Yeah. And even further than that, we can go to the other New Testament books, and you could argue that Jesus is certainly unveiled there. We learn more and more about Him. And not only about who He was and what He did when He lived on this earth, like we have in the Gospels, not only what He taught, but the doctrinal implications of the Lord Jesus Christ and the Gospel and so forth are taught all the way through the New Testament.

All right, so yeah, the Gospels and other books of the New Testament, we could even argue in the Old Testament. Christ is revealed, but not fully unveiled until we get to the New Testament.

[13:57] But though He is unveiled in the Gospels and other books of the New Testament, He is not unveiled in the same way He is in the book of Revelation. It might even lead a person, just a casual observer, to say, well, we're talking about two different people.

From the Jesus that is revealed in the Gospels and the New Testament letters and such, and the Jesus that is unveiled for us in the book of Revelation, it seems like two different people.

You know, because, you know, Paul wrote in Philippians 2:8 that Jesus came obedient unto death. So when He came the first time, He came what? To death. Even death upon a cross.

And throughout that period of time, when Jesus walked this planet, and that was recorded for us in the Gospels, throughout that time, no one fully recognized exactly who He was.

Not even His own disciples. His own disciples did, only half believed, if we could even say half, believed all of who Jesus was at the time.

[15:03] It wasn't until Pentecost, I think, that their eyes were truly opened when the gift of the Holy Spirit was given. Even James, Jesus' half-brother, the Bible tells us, did not know who He was.

Now He knows now, and He knew at some point, but throughout the time Jesus walked on this earth, He did not know Him because He was veiled. He was veiled. Now Peter and John were privileged to have some of the veil kind of drawn back a little bit there on the Mount of

Transfiguration.

And what happened there? What was on the inside came on the outside, and they were able to see at least a representation of His full glory.

Now one day, He of course is coming back, and when He comes back the second time, then His glory will be unveiled, fully unveiled.

So the book of Revelation is then that unveiling, the unveiling of Christ. So we see the unveiling of an important person. Second, we see an unveiling of an imminent purpose.

[16 : 16] an imminent purpose. Verse 1, to show His servants things which must shortly take place.

Now the word imminent is not in there, but the word shortly is what suggests that idea. Imminent. Shortly. Well, shortly in what sense?

In how we would define shortly? You know, when we talk about shortly or some short time, then we mean, it's just very soon. But yet it's still a vague kind of designation of time.

Well, shortly is vague. It means imminent. That means it could be at any time. Now or later. But it's imminent. Not only could it happen at any time, and it might happen at any time, but it also speaks to the fact that it will.

You can take it to the bank. It will happen. It's imminent. So very shortly, these things are going to take place. Now, it's been 2,000 years, you know, give or take a few years since the Apocalypse, the Revelation of Christ was written.

[17 : 30] And by our standards, that's not shortly the events that are going to take place. And yet they still haven't taken place, have they? And yet they're still imminent and may at any moment take place.

Now, you know that the Bible contains many, many prophecies. I don't know how many there are. Someone has said that there are about 2,500 separate prophecies or nuances of prophecies or restatements of some of those.

I don't know how many exactly. But we do know that the Bible is full of them from cover to cover. But do you know that the book of Revelation is the book we have in the Bible that draws all those prophecies together?

Those prophecies that have not yet taken place. Draws them all together. They culminate in the events that are laid out for us in the Apocalypse, the Revelation.

Such things as the rapture of the church, the marriage supper of the Lamb. Those are two very key events for the Bride of Christ. The Tribulation, something we're going to miss, thankfully.

[18 : 40] And the coming of the Antichrist and, you know, the Battle of Armageddon. Some of these kind of key events that we have heard about and get excited about.

And all those things come together here. The millennial reign of the Lord Jesus Christ we have in the book of Revelation. And possibly the most important thing would be the eternal destiny of mankind.

Those prophecies concerning that, they all come together here in the book of Revelation. And I'm talking about the eternal destiny of both the saved and the lost. So, that makes the book of Revelation pretty important, doesn't it?

with all of these key prophecies coming together, culminating and coming to fruition and being fulfilled there in the book of Revelation.

So, that's what the book of Revelation is. The unveiling of an important person. That's the Lord Jesus Christ. And the unveiling of an imminent purpose. And you might just jot this down.

[19 : 40] The book of Revelation teaches us to adore the person and to accept his purposes. Alright, now third, we see the unveiling of an ingenious process.

An ingenious process. And that's what makes the book of Revelation is this process of Revelation that makes this book unique. Now, we have some apocalyptic kind of literature.

Other places in the Bible, Ezekiel would be considered apocalyptic and some others. But, the book of Revelation is really from the first chapter of verse 1 all the way to the end of it is apocalyptic and so there's a very unique kind of ingenious process that the Lord, the Holy Spirit is using.

Now, the apostle John wrote it, of course. We know that. And God gave John a process by which he would unveil the truths of the book of Revelation.

And the process according to verse 1 is twofold. God sent it and God signified it.

[21:03] And that's just straight from the passage, verse 1. And he sent and signified it by his angel to his servant God. So, there's the servant John.

So, there's a process kind of twofold. Though, what does it really mean? God sent it, God signified it. I think in nearly all translations have the word sent it, but the word signified, signified is translated, I think, communicated in the New American Standard and made known.

Is that the ESV? Made known? And I think in the King James still says signified. So, both King James and New King James a little bit, well, what does that mean?

Signified. And I would suggest to you that translating it communicated or made known is kind of like punting. Punting because the word has an interesting meaning.

And with that, as soon as I explain it, I think you might agree with me that signified might be the better word because the root of the word signified is signs.

[22:21] Signs. And so, what does it mean? Well, the book of Revelation is a book of signs and symbols. I mean, there's no denying that. Some can argue that it was done that way as code so that if the book fell into the wrong hands, you know, they wouldn't be able to, you know, whatever.

I've never really bought into that theory. It may be true, it may not be. But I think there's a better explanation that, I mean, the question is, why did God choose to use these, in some cases, very bizarre kind of signs and symbols and images and so forth?

Why did He use that, choose that as His process to unveil Christ, the book of Revelation? And I think it's because signs, symbols, are more fixed.

That's the word I want you to want to supply there. And if you'd rather, you could use the word constant. Same thing, same idea. Symbols are more fixed than words.

Signs and symbols tend to carry the same meaning and they're not changed where words are constantly changing. you know, they constantly change in their meanings.

[23:44] I mean, just take the word gay for an example. All right? That certainly has taken on new meaning in the last couple of decades. But, so, messages and concepts and truths that are connected to symbols, such as mountains and seas and stars, etc.

and etc. etc. I mean, there are so many different symbols that are used. They're more fixed. They tend not to change and so, then the meaning is not lost.

So, you could just kind of sum it up this way. God unveiled truths in this book, the book of Revelation, about events that are going to take place several thousand years later.

And so, it was necessary to communicate these truths, these revelations, using symbols. Symbols that would tend never to change and people in every culture would understand and so forth.

All right. So, that's the first thing we should consider about the book of Revelation. This is God's divine revelation, which I think is further fortified or declared in verse 2, who bore witness to what?

[25:05] The word of God. That's characterizing all the words in this revelation as the word of God.

That's divine. And to add to that and to the testimony of Jesus Christ to all things that he saw. All right. So, the first thing the book of Revelation claims to be divine in its revelation.

Second, the book of Revelation claims to be divine in its reward. In its reward. Verse 3, Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy and keep those things which are written in it, for the time is near.

Now, there are three key verbs in that passage. You can probably pick them out yourself. The words are read, hear, and keep.

Read, hear, and keep. And the words are not only key, but they're put in a very deliberate order. Because it's the order of our experience.

[26:19] We read, hear, keep, or obey. All right, so first, you must read the words of this prophecy.

Now, this is what God's telling us to do. And He's not only telling us to do that, but He's attaching to it a blessing. He says, you're blessed if you read the words of this prophecy.

Now, you know, obviously, you cannot just simply put it under your pillow at night and expect to get anything out of it. and you've got to read it. But I would also add to that, you don't make the mistake of thinking that you're going to learn all that you need to learn from the book of Revelation from, just strictly from feeble preachers, fallible preachers, including your pastor.

And those that you might listen to on the radio or on the TV or maybe read in a commentary or some book on prophecy or some book on the book of Revelation.

You know, you're not going to get it all from that. God says that there's reward, a blessing for those who read commentaries on the book of Revelation. That's not what he said.

[27 : 32] Those who read the word of this prophecy. Now, and this is very logical, and I'm trying to insult you, but reading is not enough, is it?

Not enough. Second, you must also hear the words of this prophecy. You've got to hear them. Well, that's easy, you say. My ears are open and I can hear.

But I'm not just talking about the instrumentality of hearing, the physical process, you know, hearing things through that, you know, the eardrums and so forth and processing to the brain.

It's not just that. What we mean here is to listen to it. Listen to it, of course, not just with your ears, but also with the mind and with the heart.

And meditating upon the words and allowing those words to be processed in your brain and just spend some time thinking about it. This is what God is saying.

[28 : 30] He says, you're blessed. I heard about a couple of girls, little girls, who were looking at, you know, that famous picture of Jesus knocking on the door. You know, you've seen that picture, haven't you?

My grandmother had one. And they're looking at that thing and one of the little girls says, well, why don't they let him in? Innocent kind of response. And the other little girl said, well, maybe they're in the backyard, they can't hear him knocking.

Tell that, you know, to have us consider that there are a lot of Christians who are in the backyard on the truths of God's word.

Not just in Revelation, but in other parts of the book as well. They're out in the backyard or in the back 40 or out in left field, you know, spiritually, and they are not listening to the voice of God.

And so we've got to listen. We've got to allow those words that we're reading to enter into our eyes and we hear them with our minds and our hearts.

[29 : 34] And so we're listening to God speak. So, God is saying, I want to bless you, so read my word. He says, I want to bless you, my children, so listen to my word, hear my word.

And then he says, keep the words of this prophecy. What does that mean? It means obey them. You know, obviously, just reading them is not enough.

And hearing them, listening to them, even if we listen all the way with our heart and really think about them, that's certainly not enough.

We've got to act. We have to respond. We have to obey the words. And so that brings us really to the most important part of this process, and that's obedience.

So reading is not enough. Hearing is not enough. You have to keep his word, obey his word. James 1.22, doers of the word and not hearers only, that famous passage.

[30 : 42] As one preacher put it, he said, some people are sermon sippers who flip from one doctrinal dessert to another like helpless hummingbirds. hummingbirds. They're a lot like that today.

So they just kind of move from one preacher to the next, whether it's they're moving from one church to another church, one brand of church to another, or to one famous popular preacher on the radio to another, and they get tidbits of this and that, and they're kind of like flitting, flitting from one doctrinal dessert.

I like the way he put that, like helpless hummingbirds. That's what Jesus is saying here in Revelation 13. Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of his prophecy and keep those things which are written in it.

Alright, so we can sum all that up with this truth, that spiritual strength and maturity in our lives as believers, it's not, you know, to reach that point, it's not some mystery, complicated kind of formula that we have to go through.

We look and know of believers who are very mature in their faith and we kind of idolize them, but there's no secret to it, no mystery of that. It comes through an intense, kind of sustained look at God's word with a spirit of willing obedience.

[32 : 18] Now, over the next, I don't know, seven or eight Wednesdays, we've got seven letters to look at. I'm assuming that I can get one each Wednesday night, but I can't bet on that.

Not that I'm a betting man like that, but we Baptist preachers always have to add that little caveat in there, or a little disclaimer. But over the next, let's say, seven Wednesday nights, we're going to consider what the first few chapters of the book of Revelation says about the church from God's view.

But we're not going to be ready really to learn all that God has for us in those letters until we're willing to read, hear, and obey what the Holy Spirit is so graciously teaching us.

One more thing. The book of Revelation claims to be divine in its revelation, divine in its reward, and then third, divine in its retribution.

Retribution. We have to deal with that. Now, for this, we have to go to the end of the book. In chapter 22, verse 16, to begin with, I, Jesus, have sent my angel to testify to you these things in the churches.

[33:34] I am the root and the offspring of David, the bright and morning star, and the spirit and bright say, come, and let him who hears say, come, and let him who thirsts come.

Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely. That's a wonderful passage. Tremendous invitation, wonderful invitation in a sense. But now, following the invitation, there is a stern warning. A stern warning. Verse 18, For I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book. If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book. If anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the book of life, from the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book.

Now, there's a whole lot there in that verse, but suffice it to say that there's a stern warning here for those who would add or subtract from the word of God.

[34:38] Now, I believe that this promise of retribution that comes at the close of the book of Revelation extends to how one handles the entire word of God.

So, it may come at the close of the book of Revelation, but it also, according to the design of the Holy Spirit, comes at the close of the entire book. So, it applies to the entire book of God's word, and not just simply the book of Revelation.

And it's very clear that it's a dangerous thing to despise the word of God. Dangerous thing to deny its divine inspiration and authority, which is at the heart, at the root of this whole notion that we would add or subtract from the word of God.

It's not just simply talking about people who come up with new revelation and think it ought to belong in the canon. It's not talking about just that. It's talking about those who deny its inspiration and deny its authority.

And so, without, you know, scratching out words, they are in their own minds coming to the conclusion that certain words don't belong there.

[35:59] And those who are in positions of leadership go a step further to teach others that those words don't belong there. Or, to add to it, would be those who would look at the word of God and say, well, it doesn't mean that, it means this.

When really, it meant what it said. that. And so, there are many different ways that people today add and subtract from the word of God. And the very heart of it is this notion that it's not the inspired word of God.

Or at least, not all of it is. You know, and then there are those who think it is inspired, but only in spots. You've heard that, haven't you? You know, and they're inspired to spot the spots.

It's kind of a Dalmatian theology. But that's the same as adding or subtracting from the word of God. Over the years, there have been many scholars and theologians that have absolutely devoted their entire lives to a form of approaching God's word that's called higher criticism.

That sounds really high-minded and very spiritual and very scholarly. But it's a high critical view of the word of God.

[37:10] Not high view of, actually, it's a misnomer. It's really a low view of scripture, but it's a high critical view of scripture and they subtract from the word of God, they add to the word of God, they soften its intended meaning.

I've heard Adrian Rogers say, I don't know how many times, he'd say that when God puts a period, don't change it into a question mark.

That's what many have done with the word of God. My point is, because I don't think we have any scholars here who are just headlong into higher criticism of scripture.

The point of all this is this, when we begin to look at the church from God's view, as we look at these letters, we need to understand that he's not just talking to the churches at Ephesus and Smyrna and Pergamum and Thyatira and Sardis and Philadelphia and Laodicea.

He's not just talking to those churches that existed in ancient times. He's not just talking to them when we look at these letters, though they were addressed to them. He's not just talking about the church in general.

[38:27] We could say, well, no, not just talking to those churches. He is talking to them, but he really has a broader view. He's talking to all the church in general. That's true, but not just that.

And I would add that he's not just talking to any particular denomination of churches like Southern Baptists. And let me go a step further and say that he's not just talking to the collective membership of this church, Highland Park Baptist Church.

Rather, we ought to understand that he's talking to you, each of you, each of us, individually. That's how we need to approach, of course, all of God's word.

But as we look at these letters, we need to consider that he's speaking to me, specifically, individually. Now, how can I make such a claim?

Well, over and over again, you're going to find in chapters 2 and 3 in these letters, you're going to find this phrase, he that has an ear, let him hear. I say, well, ladies, you're thinking, well, then this is just for the guys.

[39:35] That's not the point. The point is that it's singular. Not they, not them, but it's singular. And so, God is going to speak to me in this series of messages as we find out what Jesus has to say to the churches.

And he's going to speak to you, each one of you, in this series of messages. And so, to wrap this up, this introduction, this is your divine revelation, book of Revelation.

It's yours. Each of you individually, not just you collectively. Your divine revelation. Concerning what? Your divine reward.

If you read and hear and keep the words of this revelation. And if you just will not, you refuse to, then this book will reveal your divine retribution.

Thank you.