

The Author, Audience, and Goal of Revelation

“John to the seven churches that are in Asia: Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven spirits who are before his throne, and from Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth. To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen...I, John, your brother and partner in all 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. I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet saying, “Write what you see in a book and send it to the seven churches, to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamum and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea.” Revelation 1:4-6, 9-11

Greeting

Good morning! Let's open to Revelation 1:4-6, 9-11. Read. Pray. This will be the 3rd sermon in Revelation. As Britt mentioned we'll be in this book for about a year, unless Jesus decides to come back before we finish!

Intro

Have you ever been museum with a friend who loves art? Like really loves it. Like they study it, they know everything about it?

Most of us are content to go look at a painting, even a masterpiece, stand there and enjoy it for about...10 seconds, and we're good! But then your friend is standing inches from this masterpiece. He has studied this masterpiece and can tell you what methods were used, how long it took, what the painter's emotional state was, his life history, how that completely

shapes *everything* about the work of art. And most of us don't really care, we just like looking at the painting and are content to say it's beautiful!

The truth is we really need both perspectives. On the one hand, when we do learn more about how long it took, or how the methods were revolutionary, it actually does help us to appreciate the work of art. For example, when we learn that it took Michelangelo over 4 years to paint the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel and that he wasn't even primarily a painter but a sculptor helps us to wonder even more at the art.

On the other hand, you can be such an art nerd, that you forget to even appreciate the work of art for what it is. You forget to simply stare up and marvel at it!

We really need to understand some background as well as a simple childlike wonder to appreciate art for what it is.

The same is true when we study Scripture. It really does help us to understand the background and context of the Bible. Yet we also must remember that after all our study, what we are reading is Scripture, and it's meant to change us and lead us to Jesus, not simply be studied.

Our text this morning has both elements in it. It contains both small details and the Big Picture. It contains context as well as the One Purpose of the Bible. John starts by introducing himself and the churches he is writing to, but then he quickly shifts to the giant, big picture and purpose of the book in the very same verses! So we'll start by learning a bit about the author and audience first, and then will shift to see the authority behind the book and then finally the ultimate goal of Revelation.

John the Author

“John to the seven churches that are in Asia” (vs. 4)

“I, John, your brother and partner...was on the island called Patmos on account of the Word of God and the testimony of Jesus (vs. 9)

Who is this man?

- John the apostle of Jesus
 - there are always disputes about who wrote various books of the Bible, but church history, and many good scholars believe this was John the apostle of Jesus. He was the beloved apostle, and wrote 5 books in the New Testament: the gospel of John, 1, 2, 3rd John, and Revelation
 - church history has some fun traditions about John,
 - An early church father named Tertullian, 160-225AD, wrote a book where he relates much of the earliest church history. It's really an incredible passage to read. He is addressing doubters and is telling them they can go visit the churches where they have the actual handwritten letters and works of the apostles. Then he goes on to mention how many of the apostles were killed,
 - “Since, moreover, you are close upon Italy, you have Rome, from which there comes even into our own hands the very authority of apostles themselves. How happy is its church, on which apostles poured forth all their doctrine along with their blood; where Peter endures a passion like his Lord's; where Paul wins his crown in a death like John's [the Baptist]; where the **Apostle John was first plunged, unhurt, into boiling oil, and thence remitted to his island-exile.**” (Tertullian, *On the Prescription of Heretics*)
- pretty crazy. So this is John the Apostle, having been banished to Patmos, a small island and he is writing to seven churches specifically

To the Seven Churches

“John to the seven churches that are in Asia” (vs. 4)

“Write what you see in a book and send it to the seven churches, to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamum and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea.” (vs. 11)

- These seven churches were located in Asia Minor which is modern day Turkey, and were in seven major city centers at the time [\(show map\)](#)
- The book of Revelation was designed to circulate all seven churches, and to be read aloud to the churches there and then passed on to the next church
- the churches are actually listed in order of how a messenger from John would have delivered Revelation from John.
 - a messenger would have arrived first in Ephesus, and then traveled to the other churches. The average the distance between the churches being about 30-45 miles
- And so it is written to the 7 churches
 - the number 7 is both literal and symbolic
 - it was written to a specifically named 7 churches, however it is also symbolic of all the churches, and would have been shared by many churches at that time
 - furthermore, God included the message to those 7 churches in Scripture, so it is for The Church, at all times

**Last note:*

- **it's clear the church was under direct persecution at that time**
- “I, John, your brother and partner in the tribulation...” (vs. 9)
- that is why he was banished, and he is writing then to a persecuted and threatened church

- we will get into much more detail about these seven churches in a few weeks, but it's enough to know it was given to a persecuted man, intended to strengthen a persecuted church

**and then John writes a greeting,*

From God the Father, Spirit, Son

“Grace to you and peace” (vs. 4)

- this is what God wants for us as we endeavor to read and understand and apply the book of Revelation
- **grace**: as we see Jesus more clearly and remember he is the lamb who was slain for our sins. God may even save some as we read this book!
- and **peace**: we've already addressed how this book can be intimidating & confusing...
- Yet God did not give us this book to bring us anxiety, or fear, or confusion
- he wants to bring to our church *peace* as we study this book!
- **We will know greater peace as we see more clearly who God is, and what he has done, His plan for the end of all things, the victory of Jesus and the saints, and the final hope that is to come**

“From him who is and who was and who is to come” (vs. 4)

- the eternal Father
- the Ancient of Days

“and from the seven spirits who are before his throne,” (vs. 4)

- this is referring to the Holy Spirit
- “7” is the Biblical symbol for perfection
 - this can seem confusing, because John often uses different symbols to refer to the Spirit: later we'll read of

- “The words of Him who has the seven spirits of God” (3:1),
- “...and before the throne were burning seven torches of fire, which are the seven spirits of God” (4:5)
- yet we still see in Revelation the Holy Spirit referred to as a singular person
- **“hear what the Spirit says” (2:7)**
- also, because of the context, it helps us know this John is referring to the Holy Spirit. He is writing a greeting from the Father, and next from Jesus, and so it helps us clarify that he here is talking about the Holy Spirit
- he is saying, “Grace and peace from the Father, the Spirit,” and next he writes,

“and from Jesus Christ the faithful witness” (vs. 5)

- **and we read that this Revelation, while penned by John, is actually from the entire Godhead. From the Trinity it is “from the Father, Spirit, Son”**
- and so as we endeavor to study this book together, we can be confident we will be **receiving grace and peace from God himself**

** STOP, SLOW DOWN, AND ASK: “But did you notice the reversal of the order of the Trinity? Father, Spirit, Son?”*

**why is that?*

while this book is from the Trinity, the **attention is on Jesus.*

**John, ends the list of the Trinity with Jesus last, because He wants to shift our eyes from the details, and to focus on the main point, the main goal of the book of Revelation. He wants us to look at Jesus.*

Jesus Time

“and from Jesus Christ” (vs. 5)

- the book of Revelation is all about Jesus
- “It’s about the things Jesus has accomplished, is accomplishing, and will accomplish soon”
- the book of Revelation is the revelation of Jesus Christ
 - and because this book is all about Jesus,

**in the next 3 verses John proceeds to give us what John Stott calls the entire “career” of Jesus, from his earthly ministry, his sacrificial death, his resurrection, his ascending to the throne in heaven, his working a kingdom of priests in the church, and his coming again.*

**he starts with referring to Jesus as,*

“the faithful witness” (vs. 5)

- as we are called to be faithful witnesses to the gospel of Jesus, there was only one perfect and truly faithful witness: Jesus
- Jesus went before us, and was **faithful**.
 - He perfectly obeyed the Father, and we as Christians rest and stand on His obedience, on His righteousness
 - *yet why a faithful witness?*
 - what did Jesus witness to? what was his witness?
 - first, we know that Jesus is the perfect image of God, and so his very life was a witness to who God was
 - As Jesus was standing on trial before Pilate, he said,
 - “...For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world - to bear witness to the truth” John 18:37
 - And Jesus didn’t back down from his witness to who God is, and who Jesus is, the Son of God. **Jesus remained a faithful witness**

to the truth about Himself. He had the opportunity to avoid his crucifixion yet he stood fast, faithful, and testified to the truth, namely that He was God

- in court, convictions can be overturned if more evidence is found. Listen to this stat: in cases where the conviction is overturned because of DNA evidence, 72% of the time it was due to **faulty witnesses**
- Jesus, is the only truly faithful witness.
 - this would have been extremely encouraging for a persecuted church, also called to be faithful witnesses to Christ, even when facing persecution and death.
 - with Jesus the faithful witness in view, the one who was faithful even unto death, the churches can take heart and be faithful witnesses as well

**John then moves on from Jesus' earthly ministry and brings our attention to Jesus victory over death.*

“the firstborn of the dead” (vs. 5)

- this is referring to Jesus resurrection. **Jesus was the first human to be raised from the dead, and to stay not dead.**
- Many have been raised from the dead. But the difference between them and Jesus is that they all eventually died again. But Jesus is the firstborn of the dead, the first to be raised and stay alive!
- **“The day Jesus rose from the dead, was the first day of an entirely new creation”**
- in Revelation, we see Jesus complete what he started in Genesis. Jesus is completing what he began.
 - this encouragement of Jesus defeating death would have also been extremely encouraging to a people literally facing death for bearing witness to the truth of Jesus
 - as Jesus died as the faithful witness, yet rose again, they could take heart that if they faced death, death would not have the final say

- We also, get to hold on to this hope. Has anyone dear to you died? We get to hold on to this: Jesus, defeated death, and is making all things new

“and the ruler of kings on earth” (vs. 5)

- having conquered death, he is seated at the throne next to the Father, and God has given him all authority
- Jesus is King of kings. He is in control of human affairs.
- No other ruler in history can claim this
- No other ruler has ever had a fraction of the authority Jesus has
- No other ruler is able to ruin Jesus’ plans
- **No king, no president, no terrorist leader, no army, not Satan, not the antichrist, not false prophets, no one can take Jesus off His throne**
 - the churches could take heart that even facing persecution at the hands of wicked rulers, Jesus was still somehow in charge and in control
 - we too live in a pretty hectic time in history, it’s crazy. Persecution, rebellion, wars and rumors of wars are constant
 - **Jesus is still on His throne**
- As we read through Revelation together, we will read of some traumatic and terrifying visions of the future and end of the world. Yet we as believers have comfort because Jesus is our King. And He is the King of Kings.

“To him who loves us” (vs. 5)

- let’s just pause for a moment, and let that sink in. God, the God of all the universe, loves us.
- Listen to these words God speaks over you, if you are his:
 - ***Isaiah 43:1-5a and read slowly**
- note: present tense.

- Jesus is alive and well, and is actively loving his people, his bride, this church, you.
- He is currently loving you. He is watching over you. He is with you.
 - this would have been so important to the church at that time!
 - they could be asking, “does Jesus still love us? why are we suffering?”
- John is writing to assure them, and us, that yes, in the midst of this crazy life, Jesus is still loving you

**and how does Jesus love you?*

“and has freed us from our sins by his blood” (vs. 5)

- this may be the greatest way Jesus has loved us
 - we were in bondage to sin, we were slaves, we deserved death
 - and Jesus came, fully God, and fully man. And he was crucified and God placed all the punishment that you and I deserved for our sins against him, and Jesus was punished in our place. And through his blood, the blood he shed for us we are forgiven of all our sin
 - Jesus loves us by dying for us, by taking our place, by shedding his blood for us
- Do you ever wonder if God really loves you?
 - this is how you know that God loves you. Look to the cross. Look to His Son. He gave His son for you. Because He loves you
 - And we are not merely forgiven of our sins by his blood, **John says we are also freed from our sins by his blood**
 - the chains, the shackles have been removed
 - its as if we were locked in prison, chained to the ground, and Jesus came in, took our chains upon himself, and freed us through his death

“and made us a kingdom” (vs. 6)

- Jesus is the King, and we are now a part of that kingdom
 - if Jesus is your king, then you are a part of His Kingdom
 - nothing can separate us from our king, we are secure in his kingdom.
 - a king fights for his kingdom, a king doesn't let his kingdom slip away,
 - nothing can separate us from the love and protection of our great king

**and our King has given us a role to play in His kingdom*

“priests to his God and Father” (vs. 6)

- as priests served in the OT to make offerings between the people and God. They would be a go between between them and God
- as Christians we are a part of the priesthood of all believers.
 - what does that mean?
 - because Jesus, the ultimate high priest offered the ultimate sacrifice, his blood, the veil is torn and we no longer need other people to mediate between us and God
 - we can now all freely enter into the presence of God, freely and with confidence because of the blood of Jesus
 - further, we don't need a pastor, or a priest, or a holy person to pray to God for us, God welcomes us all into His presence!
 - and yet because we are all priests, we can lead one another to Jesus, we can pray for one another and God will hear us

**and then John ends this amazing list about what Jesus has done by declaring in a phrase the entire purpose of the book of Revelation...*

“to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen” (vs. 6)

- it's all about Jesus. And it's all **for** Jesus. This church, the bible, the book of Revelation.

- it's all for His glory, and dominion and Kingdom
- if we read this book, and understand all mysteries and knowledge, but miss Jesus, we have missed the entire point.
- we must read this book for the glory of Jesus, and we must surrender everything to His dominion
- **"He and He alone is the entire goal and purpose and end of not just Revelation, but of all things!"**

**these amazing truths, as good as they are, are probably familiar to many of us. and like anything we are exposed to often, we can easily become numb to it. we can easily forget how good these truths are.*

**and so let me ask you...*

Who Else?

Faithful Witness

"Who else is the faithful witness?"

"Who else has remained completely faithful to you in your life?"

**let me ask you...*

Firstborn of the dead

"Who else has defeated death?"

"What other religion is built upon a leader who rose again?"

"Who else offers you eternal life?"

"Who else grants you the security and peace and assurance that you will not simply rot in your grave and be forgotten forever?"

“Who else grants purpose and weight to your life, because it will echo into eternity?”

“Your job? Fame? Even if your name was to be remembered in the history books, does that offer you immortality?”

**let me ask you...*

Ruler of the Kings on Earth

“Who else rules the world and its affairs?”

“What ruler or king or emperor has ever laid claim to total world authority and power?”

“Who else controls even the death of a sparrow and simultaneously rotates the galaxies billions of light years away?”

“Who else has written every day of your life in a book before any day came yet to be?”

“Who else guarantees you that every event and detail in your life will be perfectly worked out for your good?”

“Who else rules with justice and mercy like our Jesus?”

**let me ask you...*

Him who loves us

“Who else loves you like Jesus?”

“Who else has laid their life down for you?”

“Has anyone loved you from the moment of your birth to the day you breathe your last?”

“Who else loves you with an everlasting love?”

**let me ask you...*

Freed us from our sins by his blood

“Who else has offered you complete and total forgiveness?”

“Who else has rescued you from the pit of everlasting destruction?”

“Who else has freed you from your sins and vices?”

“What else has freed you from yourself?”

**let me ask you...*

Made us a Kingdom and Priests

“Who else includes you into their kingdom?”

“Who else gives you a purpose and a job in that kingdom?”

“Who else has fundamentally changed your identity?”

Only Jesus

**let me tell you...*

Jesus. Only Jesus.

Only Jesus is faithful to the end.

Only Jesus has conquered death, and will make all things new.

Only Jesus rules all the kings of the world. From the earliest kingdoms to the most powerful empires, only Jesus has been in control.

Jesus alone is the lover of your soul. Jesus alone will love you selflessly. Jesus alone has laid his life down for you.

Only Jesus offers you not just forgiveness for your sins, but freedom from the chains of sin! Only Jesus.

Only Jesus offers you a mission and an identity and a calling on your life that is worth living for.

Jesus. Only Jesus.

The Masterpiece: Our Lives for His Glory

Remember our friend, standing inches away from the masterpiece, engrossed in all the details? That is all too often a picture of us and our perspective on our life. All we see are the details. The problems, the responsibilities, our jobs, our dirty houses and youth rooms, our dysfunctional up or thriving relationships, **and we miss the Big Picture.**

We miss the masterpiece. We miss the One behind the masterpiece, who created it, and who it is really all for in the end.

We are busy trying to control and manage and fix all the details. We are the “experts” who think we have a handle on everything. Who think we know what’s best and what it’s really all about.

But the truth is, we all need to take a step back this morning, and really every morning, and recognize that there really is someone behind it all. There’s an overarching purpose we may be missing.

In Ephesians 2:10, Paul helps us to see the big picture. He says, “For we are **his workmanship**, created in Christ Jesus for good works...”

The truth is there is a masterpiece. But we are not the creator. We are not the artist. **Jesus is. And as He is the main goal of Revelation, He must**

be the main goal of your life. All the details exist for the glory of His great name!

We are often up close to the painting and we see the blemishes in our life. We see the pain and stress. Yet we know, that when we take a step back that God is working that pain to shape and refine us, making us into the image of His Son Jesus. We see chaos and confusion and stress, yet when we take a step back, we can remember that God is working all things together for our good, even the pain and confusion.

**Paul puts it this way in Colossians 1, and we'll end with this picture of Jesus*

Closing Verse

“Jesus, is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by Jesus all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities - all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross” Colossians 1:15-20

Closing Statement:

“This book, the book of Revelation written almost 2,000 years by a persecuted man to a persecuted church, was given by God to give them hope, to help them endure and look forward to the end, to hold on to Jesus.

There is no one like Him. He alone was their hope. He alone is our hope. Will YOU trust Him? Will YOU give Him the glory he deserves? Will YOU surrender your life, your hopes, your desires and needs to HIS dominion? Will you give him preeminence in your life? Will you fall at His feet, now?

****call to worship***

****communion***

****prayer***

****surrender your life to Jesus!***

****marriages, kids, relationships, jobs, everything***