

The Great Ending—

“how knowing the end of the story makes all the difference in the messy middle”

Jan 6-7, 2018

Big Idea: when we know the end of the story we can honor Christ in the middle of the story by trusting Him when it's hard and following him when we are tempted to compromise, always ready and longing for His return.

Aim: to have a view of Christ's glory that strengthens - to not give up when we suffer and not give in when we are tempted to compromise.

Hook: what are you going through today that you wish you knew how it's going to end?

- Is it a relationship?
- A health issue—your health, a child's, your mom or dad's?
- A job search?
- A financial rough spot?
- This habit-that is hard to get under control and quickly ruining your life?

Have you ever watched a big game that you recorded and before you hit play on your recorder someone told you the final score? Have you ever watched a movie a second time—it's really different isn't it? The things that might cause us to begin to pace or yell at the TV in that game aren't as big as a deal because we know how the game is going to end—so too the intense parts of the movie we know where it's all going and how the story ends.

What if you knew your particular situation has a happy ending, a good one - would it change how you feel, think and respond and if so, how? I think we would all agree things internally would change even if our circumstances aren't yet changing.

As we finish out the storyline series of the Bible by finishing up with the last book of the Bible-Revelation, it graciously gives us the end of the story, and that makes all the difference in our lives today. Here's what we are going to learn - when we know the end of the story we can honor Christ in the middle of the story by trusting Him when it's hard and following Him when we are tempted to compromise, always ready and longing for His return.

SLIDE - Revelation 1 Read 1:1-4a

Author/Audience: Verse 1 makes it clear that Jesus is the author and that He passed it on to an angel who gave it to John the Apostle - Jesus' close friend - the beloved apostle who was called to pass it on to the 7 churches - real people. He is called their brother, a fellow sufferer - he's exiled on the island of Patmos. **READ v 9-11**



- **Implications** - it has a historical setting
 - Likely late first century-church tradition (Justin Martyr, Melito of Sardis, Irenaeus)
 - Not written to us but them—it's for us but we are best going to understand what it says today by not focusing on the current events that we think Revelation is talking about but to remember the first hearers, their context, their struggles to not give into the hero worship of the roman emperor and of compromise and of giving up due to persecution.
 - This book was written to encourage the Christ followers to endure the sufferings daily trusting Christ. READ 2:10 and it was written to awaken the church which was falling into temptation and growing complacent as they compromised their faith under the pressures of the day.

What kind of a book has John written? How best to read revelation!

1. A Revelation - Something that previously was hidden - it's not a secret code to help us understand the timeline and events surrounding the "end of the world"- it's not meant to

frighten us and certainly not meant to divide the church—it's to help us see something—a person—Jesus Christ, and it pulls back the curtain and shows us what is now as well as what is to come—but our future glimpse is always anchored to Jesus' life death and resurrection. (Helm, Primer on Revelation)

Common Features and Characteristics - this kind of literature -

1. It presents a dualistic world view that clearly divides good and evil - the protagonist or main character is Jesus and the antagonist is the Devil and his minions.
2. It has an abundance of cataclysmic events that signal the end of the world-stars falling from heaven, the moon turned to blood, the earth burned up
3. It has action that leads to a final judgment and the ushering in a new world.
4. It's visionary in nature - highly symbolic, with an abundance of metaphors and Simile's (I counted 66)
5. **Animals, colors and numbers are all part of the symbolism**, with the number 7 doing double duty- we just read about the 7 spirits (4x's in Rev) yet 14x's the HS is referenced singularly and the immediate context here is talking about the Trinity (1 God who exists in 3 persons, all equally God). 7 spirits=the perfect Holy Spirit!

The Seven-fold pattern in Revelation—between the introduction of chpt 1 and the epilogue in chpt 22 we have:

- The 7 letters to the 7 churches chpts 2-3
- Worship in heaven 4
- 7 seals 5-8:1
- 7 trumpets 8:2-11:19
- 7 signs - the cosmic battle 12-14
- 7 bowls of wrath 15-16
- 7 last events 17-22:5

(Leaning on Ryken p 633 and Helm's - Primer on Revelation)

6. **Time frame-**

- a. understand that we have two perspectives - the now (present) and the not yet (the future). 1:1 talk about a revelation of what must soon take place, 1:19 talks about what is now and what will take place later
 - i. Some has happened
 - ii. Some is happening back in John's day and maybe in our day and
 - iii. Some will happen in the future
- b. **remember it's likely not written chronologically**, so that what happens in a later chapter happens after the earlier ones—this style of writing circles back over themes - the idea here is repetition for perspective and emphasis—Ex-visions of 7- seals, trumpets all describing God's Judgment cf 6:17 the great day of their wrath has come

2. Prophecy - cf Revelation 1:3 Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy - the prophets **foretold** and they also "**forth told**"—they predicted things about the future but they also preached—mainly to return to God—Revelation is not just talking about the future, it's written to real people in real places with real temptations, calling

them to love God with all their heart and love their neighbor as themselves - it was not just informational, it has an ethical call to live lives in honor of Christ even when suffering.

Like the prophets John calls the people to return to God - READ 3:20 - Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me.

3. Letter - written to the 7 churches scattered across what is now Turkey - to Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea."

How best to read revelation!

1. Keep the spotlight or focus on Jesus!

- a. First and foremost remember this is a revelation from Christ about Christ- John says he testified to everything he saw—that is the word of God (John's description of Jesus in Jn 1:1) and the testimony of Jesus Christ cf Rev 1:2
- b. READ - Revelation 1:5-8**

1:5-7 points out that Jesus is

- i. The faithful witness - even unto death
- ii. The firstborn from the dead - through his witness/suffering he conquered death
- iii. The Ruler or King of all the Kings (Ceasar too) who rules in glory and power forever
- iv. He is our loving redeemer who freed us from the power/penalty of our sins
- v. He is our creator a second time - making us into His servants who like priests, serve God and others
- vi. He is coming on the clouds - Daniel 7:13 has divine authority - this Son of Man

READ 12-18

- vii. Like a Son of Man - human and divine cf Daniel 7:13
- viii. Dressed in a robe with a golden sash - priestly image
- ix. Hair like white wool - white as snow—purity
- x. Eyes like a blazing fire - holiness
- xi. Feet like burning bronze - victory
- xii. Voice like Niagra's roar - his word a double edged sword
- xiii. Face like the sun shining in all its brilliance
- xiv. Fear not, I am the First and the Last - everlasting One - was dead now alive for ever
- xv. I have the keys - authority over death and Hades - the place of the dead

He is at the center of this book, of human history, the goal of history. He is the one who brought victory through his sufferings defeating the Devil, sin and death, but He is the one who will return to judge, righting all wrongs, and restoring all creation and all things to it's rightful place - the judge of all, is also the redeemer of God's people, the center of heaven's worship, the light of the new heaven and earth we are to see Him in all his awesome power and live for his honor as we endure to the end,

longing for his any day return.

2. **Read it figuratively looking for the spiritual truth(s) it's pointing to** — understand the genre of Revelation.

SLIDE- “skull and crossbones”

Apocalyptic writings are characterized by the use of symbols and highly figurative language. Among writers of this type of literature...an empire was symbolized by a wild beast...; men were spoken of under the figure of animals...Symbolic writing...does not paint pictures. It is not pictographic but ideographic...**The skull and crossbones on the bottle of medicine is a symbol of poison, not a picture**...The fish, the lamb, and the lion are all symbols of Christ, but never to be taken as pictures of him...The book of Revelation has very few pictures, but it is full of symbols... Donald W. Richardson, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ: An Interpretation*

I ran across this humorous line, **“We instinctively know that a sentence that begins: “the stars will fall from heaven, the sun will cease from its shining and the moon will drip blood” will not end “and the rest of the country will be partly cloudy with scattered showers.”** (From David Helm’s *Primer on Revelation*, John Barton, *Reading the Old Testament: Method in Biblical Study*, (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1984), 17, as quoted in Iain Duguid, *Daniel*, Reformed Expository Commentary (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2008):106-107.

Side note: taking the Bible literally doesn’t just mean we have a world view that believes in the supernatural, of a God who can bring His Son into this world through a virgin, or delivers His people through the Red Sea, or Jonah from the whale, it also means we understand and follow the rules of language. We are to read the Bible as we would read any other work of literature.

When Jesus says I am the bread of heaven or the door, or the vine - we understand he is using symbolic language to show us spiritual truth. **In other words, our goal is to read the Scriptures according to the intent of its authors - we should not read poetry the same way we read historical narrative or the apocalyptic language of Revelation, Daniel and Ezekiel like a Proverb etc., ...** “Interpreting the Bible Literally,” RC Sproul, <https://www.ligonier.org/learn/devotionals/interpreting-bible-literally/>

Look for the explanation of the symbol in context - first the immediate context, from the chpt in Rev to all of Rev, to John’s other writing, to the NT all the way back to the OT—(The Plagues, Visions from Daniel, Ezekiel and Zechariah) Revelation contains more than 350 references to the OT

Don’t be surprised to find the symbol explained in the immediate context e.g. chpt 1:20—The mystery of the seven stars that you saw in my right hand and of the seven golden lampstands is this: The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches. Rev 1:20

Develop and have available in your thinking a catalogue of themes (repetitive) for this book—e.g Images of

- a. Heaven and worship
- b. God's glory/Christ's glory - that's what we have been seeing in chpt 1
- c. Judgment and punishment
- d. Redemption
- e. Evil and of battle
- f. New heaven and earth

*these categories will help us move from the "physical" symbol given in the text to the spiritual reality it's pointing to—so the question to ask is what theological fact (our salvation) or what event (Christ's return to judge) does this passage seem to be pointing to. (Obviously here in chpt one the category has to do with God's/Christ's glory) Ryken Dictionary of Biblical Imagery p 714-15

3. Remember Revelation gives us the end of the story even as Genesis, the beginning and connects back to it and the other key promises of God.

- a. **The promise that Satan will be crushed and with that the curse removed - Gen 3:15 in Revelation 20:10** And the devil, is thrown into the lake of burning sulfur,
Revelation 22:3 No longer will there be any curse.
Revelation 21:4 He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."
- b. **The promise to bless all the families of the earth Gen 12, making Abraham's descendants into a great nation Gen 12**
Revelation 7:9 After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands.
- c. **The promise of land is fulfilled - new heaven and new earth Gen 12, Rev 21:1**
- d. **The promise of an Eternal king and an eternal kingdom - 2 Sam 7:12-14**
Revelation 4:9b the twenty-four elders fall down before him who sits on the throne, and worship him who lives for ever and ever.
- e. **God's promise in Exodus "to be their God"**
Revelation 21:3 And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God.

4. Use Christ's teaching in Matthew 24-25 to serve as a healthy framework on the "end times" to aid your understanding of Revelation.

SLIDE - Christ's teaching about the end in Matthew 24-25 (include 1-5 below on slide)

- 1. Wars and rumors of war
- 2. Natural disasters—famines and earthquakes, the sun and moon darkened, etc
- 3. Persecution and tribulation for their faith in Christ
- 4. False teachers and false christs
- 5. Final judgment—some to eternal punishment and others to eternal life

6. No one knows the day or hour of Christ's return

Application-

1. **Are our eyes wide open to the vision of Jesus and our triune God in Rev 1?**
 - a. **He calls us friends but make no mistake**
 - b. **We don't belong in His presence apart from His grace and He is so glorious, so magnificent that we, like John, will topple over**

2. **Do you have clarity on where all history is going and do you see—that** when we know the end of the story we can honor Christ in the middle of the story by trusting Him when it's hard and following him when we are tempted to compromise, always ready and longing for his return.

3. **How have you approached this book**
 - a. If it's always been about connecting Revelation to today's current events, it's time to move beyond the secret code approach and understand its purpose to help us live rightly in the middle of the story. Heed the warning *I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this scroll: If anyone adds anything to them, God will add to that person the plagues described in this scroll.*¹⁹ *And if anyone takes words away from this scroll of prophecy, God will take away from that person any share in the tree of life and in the Holy City, which are described in this scroll.*²⁰ *He who testifies to these things says, "Yes, I am coming soon." Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.*²¹ *The grace of the Lord Jesus be with God's people. Amen.* **READ 22:18-21**
 - b. Simply stayed away—too confusing, too hot to handle, too many people going overboard, people getting into "end times" spats—take the Revelation challenge!

Revelation challenge - take God at His word—1:3 blessed are those who read it aloud and in hearing it take it to heart - read through the book, check out the 2 videos on thebibleproject.com, and review the notes—find them on the Rooted resource page under Messages tab!

4. **What's your challenge today?** Giving up or giving in-or both—throwing in the towel because it's too hard or is it compromise—"Revelation reminds us that we don't not belong to this world and must not be seduced by what it values. John's Revelation calls for persecuted churches to remain vigilant (2:10; 3:11) and other churches to resist compromise with the spirit of their age (2:16, 25, 3:3, 18-20)." (Craig Keener, NIV Application Commentary p 43)

May you find God's blessing and your happiness colliding as you connect the great ending to your story today—believing that when we know the end of the story we can honor Christ in the middle of the story by trusting Him when it's hard and following him when we are tempted to compromise, always ready and longing for His return.

This is an unedited "manuscript" prepared by Pastor Marc Maillefer and is not a transcription of the weekend's message © Marc Maillefer