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“THE UNVEILING” Part 2

Revelation 1:4-8

INTRODUCTION

In 1995 *Left Behind* the best-selling end times fiction series was released. By January of 2002 the series sold its 50 millionth copy.

It is known as the fastest selling adult series and the all time best selling Christian novels.

In fact, some of the volumes debuted in the number 1 position on the best seller lists of the New York Times, Wall Street Journal, USA Today and Publisher’s Weekly.

This series tells the riveting stories of people who, after the rapture of the church are “left behind” to experience the tribulation and other events prior to Christ’s return to Earth.

It was so immensely popular that the authors have now written two prequels to the 12-volume Left Behind Series.

This dynamic apocalyptic fiction has captured the imaginations of millions and it is based off the book of Revelation.

Needless to say many of you have probably read at least one volume of this series. I have read at least nine of the twelve original volumes.

I agree that it is dynamic, riveting, and fascinating. But, the book of Revelation is the real thriller.

Anyone who loves books filled with adventure, excitement, drama, suspense, mystery, passion, and horror will certainly love the book of Revelation.

It speaks of unprecedented economic collapse, the ultimate war of human history, natural disasters beyond our imagination and of unrivaled intensity, and political intrigues that lead to the most evil and powerful world dictator ever known.

This is the book that we will once again look into this week. Turn in your Bibles to **Revelation 1:1-8** and let’s read.

As you remember we began to look at this introduction to the book of Revelation last week in order to clear up any confusion that may exist due to the mysterious content and the figurative language of the book.

Remember by way of introduction, John provides 5 characteristics, which are essential for us to know in order to accurately understand this marvelous book.

We covered the first three last week:

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Characteristic #1—We must understand the Subject of Revelation.

Remember that the subject of the book is provided for us in verse 1.

Verse 1 says, *“The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show to His bond-servants, the things which must soon take place...”*

What is the subject of Revelation? An unveiling by Jesus Christ of imminent end-times events, particularly those recorded for us in Revelation 4-22 regarding the Tribulation period and the Second Coming of Christ.

Characteristic #2—We must understand the Scribe of Revelation.

Remember the Scribe is initially identified for us in verses 1 and 2.

It says in **Revelation 1:1-2**, *“The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show to His bond-servants, the things which must soon take place; and He sent and communicated it by His angel to His bond-servant John, (2) who testified to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw.”*

Who wrote the book of Revelation? Who is the Scribe of Revelation?

Remember that it originated with God the Father, was given to Jesus Christ, Who communicated it by His angel to His bond servant John, who in turn penned the book of Revelation in order to show Christ’s bond-servants what must soon take place.

John was the human author, but he simply recorded what was revealed to him by Christ.

Characteristic #3—We must understand the Special Blessing of Revelation.

Remember that this special blessing is recorded for us in verse 3.

Revelation 1:3 says, *“Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy, and heed the things which are written in it; for the time is near.”*

What is the special blessing of Revelation? It is often referred to as the beatitude of Bible Study along with **James 1:25**, encouraging us to be effectual doers of the Word rather than forgetful hearers because the events recorded in the book of Revelation are imminent.

Now we move to the last two characteristics of the introduction to Revelation:

Characteristic #4—We must understand the Salutation of Revelation.

Revelation 1:4 and the first part of verse 5 says, *“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...”*

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Today when we write a letter, we immediately identify the recipient, then we give some kind of greeting, followed by the main content of the letter and an identification of the author at the end.

But in New Testament times, the salutation is placed at the beginning of the letter and includes the author, recipients, and a greeting.

It is more like what we do in an e-mail. When you write an e-mail it immediately identifies the author/sender, the recipient and the subject of the e-mail. Then usually at the beginning of the e-mail there is a greeting of some kind.

The salutation at the beginning of the book of Revelation is a standard New Testament style salutation. There are four features included in this salutation.

A. First notice, that this salutation includes the Author of Revelation

The author is identified for us with the first word of verse 4, “*John*.” As I mentioned last week, the Apostle John, is the human author of the book of Revelation.

His authorship is the direct statement of verses 1, 4 and 9 here in chapter one; and is in fact attested to by the early church fathers.

After the destruction of Jerusalem, John had moved to Ephesus and was serving as an elder at the Church of Ephesus from which he wrote his gospel about AD 85 and his letters about AD 90.

But when Domitian became Emperor of Rome, he persecuted Christians and thus exiled the Apostle John on the Island of Patmos some 40 miles southwest of Ephesus in the Aegean sea.

This is briefly mentioned by John in **verse 9**, “*I, John, your brother and fellow partaker in the tribulation and kingdom and perseverance which are In Jesus, was on the Island called Patmos because of the Word of God and the testimony of Jesus.*”

John was exiled on the Island of Patmos because of the Word of God and the testimony of Jesus. This apostle was faithfully teaching and preaching the Word of God and testifying of Christ.

The evidence of his teaching and testimony weighed in against him and this last remaining disciple of Jesus was sentenced to the Island of Patmos, where he endured much persecution.

The island of Patmos was a penal colony where prisoners were forced to work in the mines under the watchful eye and ready whip of a Roman overseer.

Such conditions were deplorable as there would be insufficient food and clothing. In addition the prisoners would be forced to sleep on the bare rocky ground.

These conditions certainly would have taken their toll on a 90 year-old man.

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This was the situation of John as he received this revelation from Christ and wrote the book of Revelation about AD 95.

What is your situation? John's situation should be an encouragement to us that we can persevere through times of suffering remaining faithful to Christ.

B. Second notice that this salutation includes the Recipients of the book of Revelation.

The recipients are also identified for us in **verse 4**, "*to the seven churches that are in Asia.*"

The direct recipients of the book of Revelation are seven literal churches in Asia. The Asia mentioned here in verse 4 is Asia Minor, known to us today as the nation of Turkey.

The specific churches that received this letter are mentioned by name in verse 11 as, "Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea.

But, why are these seven churches the recipients of Revelation?

- These seven churches indicate the circular route the messenger would take in delivering the letter.
- These seven churches were in strategic locations as centers of communication. In fact they were in the seven postal districts of Asia minor, which made them well suited for publicizing the message further.
- These seven churches were well known to the Apostle John during his ministry at Ephesus.
- These seven churches offered a good representation of the church as a whole since they represented seven different spiritual situations.

These were seven literal churches, who needed to hear the message of the book of Revelation and heed the things written in it!

Ultimately, this book as part of God's inerrant Word was meant for all believers. We too need to hear the message of this book and heed the things written in it.

C. Third notice that this salutation includes a Greeting for the book of Revelation.

The greeting is noted by the next phrase in **verse 4**, "*Grace to you and peace.*"

This is the common epistolary greeting that came into use among Christians of the early church. It is used frequently by Paul in his letters and by Peter in both of his letters.

This greeting includes two elements:

- (1) The first element of the greeting is that of Grace.

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Grace is a Christianized form of the secular greeting of the time. It was transformed by Paul, to reflect the distinctive spiritual benefit that belongs to believers.

It emphasizes the unmerited favor of God bestowed upon us as believers even though we deserve the opposite.

(2) The second element of the greeting is that of Peace.

“Peace” was a commonly used greeting among Jews. It was a wish of well being to the other party.

The New Testament term goes beyond the Jewish usage because of Christ’s death. A person can experience and know true peace with God through Jesus Christ (cf. Romans 5:1).

D. Fourth notice that this salutation includes the Source of the Greeting of Revelation.

The source of this greeting is mentioned in the rest of verse 4 and the first phrase of verse 5, “*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.*”

Notice that three prepositional phrases, which are grammatically related supply the three-fold source of the greeting of grace and peace.

- The first phrase, “*from Him who is, and who was and who is to come*” is often viewed as a title or proper name and refers to God the Father.

The use of this phrase emphasizes the continual existence or eternal nature of God. He has no beginning and no end. He always has been and He always will be. God is eternal!

God the Father is the source of this greeting of grace and peace.

- The second phrase, “*and from the seven spirits who are before His throne,*” is taken to be a reference to the Holy Spirit.

It does not refer to seven angels before the throne of God because it does not use the normal Greek term for angels and because only God is the true source of grace and peace.

But, why would the Holy Spirit be spoken of as seven spirits?

(1) It is possible as some have suggested that John has in mind a seven-fold ministry of the Holy Spirit as taken from the Septuagint translation of **Isaiah 11:2**, “The Spirit of Godliness, Wisdom, Understanding, Counsel, Might, Knowledge, and the Fear of the Lord.”

(2) It is possible as others have suggested that John has the specific audience in mind, the seven churches of Asia Minor. Here he would be depicting the Holy Spirit ministering within those seven churches as seven spirits.

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(3) It is possible that John is using the imagery of **Zechariah 4:1-10**, which describes the Spirit as seven lamps (cf. Zechariah 4:2b; 6) and seven eyes (Zechariah 4:10b) of the Lord.

This likely could be the case since John picks up this imagery again in **Revelation 4:5** where he speaks of the Spirit as seven lamps of fire and in **Revelation 5:6** where he speaks of the Lamb as having seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God.

Whatever the case, it seems evident that John is identifying the Holy Spirit as the second source of the greeting of grace and peace.

- The third phrase clearly identifies the third source of this greeting as Jesus Christ.

But, why is Jesus mentioned last? He normally is mentioned second in the listings of the Trinity.

The primary purpose for Christ being mentioned last is that of emphasis. In the Greek language, whenever you want to emphasize something or someone, you move it either forward to the front of the sentence or back to the end.

John likely chooses to emphasize Christ by moving Him to the third position because he is going to go into much greater detail about His person and work.

And it is this detail about Christ that leads us to our fifth and last characteristic of this introduction.

Characteristic #5—We must understand the Savior in Revelation!

This characteristic is highlighted in verses 5-8. READ!

Notice that as John speaks in greater detail about Jesus Christ, he highlights three facets of Christ's Character.

A. First of all notice the Appellations of Christ highlighted in verse 5.

1-First Christ is called, "*the faithful witness.*"

A faithful witness is one who always speaks and represents the truth. And certainly we know this to be true of Christ. In fact He claims to be the truth in **John 14:6**.

And when He stood before Pilate in **John 18:37** He says, "*For this I have been born, and for this I have come into the world, to testify to the truth.*"

There are at least two other places in the book of Revelation where similar statements are made about Christ.

1) He is referred to as, "*The Amen, the Faithful Witness*" in **Revelation 3:14**.

2) He is also called, "*The Faithful*" in **Revelation 19:11**.

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Jesus Christ is indeed the faithful witness and His testimony is true!
But did you know that we are called to be faithful witnesses too?

According to **Acts 1:8** the early followers of Christ were commanded to be Christ's witnesses when they received the Holy Spirit.

Likewise all believers are to be Christ's witnesses. We are to testify of Christ: who He is and what He has done. Hopefully we will be faithful and true in our testimony.

2-Christ is called, "*the first-born of the dead.*"

"*First-born*" here does not mean first chronologically. It is not speaking of time sequence. Especially, since, there are records of resurrections in both the Old and New Testaments.

It is true, however, that He is the first to be raised from the dead, never to die again.

"*First-born*" here carries the same sense as it does in **Colossians 1:18**, meaning first in preeminence. Of all those who have been raised, Christ is the preeminent one. His resurrection is superior.

This title finds its source in **Psalms 89:27** where God promises to make David's seed, His "first-born," "the highest of the kings of the earth."

3-Christ is called, "*the ruler of the kings of the earth.*"

John is once again drawing off the imagery of **Psalms 89** where the psalmist notes God's promise to make David's seed "the highest of the kings of the earth."

The idea of Christ ruling over the earth is a repeated theme throughout Scripture.

From the prophecy of the Old Testament such as **Jeremiah 23:5** which says, "*Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, When I will raise up for David a righteous branch; and He will reign as king...*"

To the ultimate fulfillment when Christ literally reigns over all the earth as described in **Revelation 20**.

Truly Jesus Christ is ruler of the kings of the earth. He is King of kings and Lord of lords. He is absolutely sovereign over the affairs of this world.

Truly these titles give us insight into Christ's character as One, Who is faithful, truthful, preeminent and powerful.

But, John doesn't end his description of the savior there.

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B. Second of all notice the Activity of Christ highlighted in verses 5-7.

The rest of verse 5 and 6 is really a doxology, a hymn of praise, which emphasizes the work of Christ.

1-First, notice that Christ is glorified because He loves us. It says in verse 5, “*to Him who loves us.*”

Certainly the apostle John had witnessed the love of Christ in action and likely remembered Christ’s words to His disciples on the eve before His crucifixion recorded in **John 15:13**.

Jesus said, “*Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends.*”

Christ laid down His own life on the cross because He loved us. In fact this is a repeated theme throughout the New Testament. The laying down of Christ’s life demonstrated His love for us.

Certainly most of you are familiar with Christ’s words in **John 3:16**, “*For God so loved the World that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.*”

And many of you are familiar with Paul’s statement in **Romans 5:8**, “*But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.*”

But how about John’s statement in **1 John 4:9-10**, “*By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.*”

The fact that this statement in **Revelation 1:5** is in the present tense indicates the continual self-sacrificing, abiding love that Christ has towards us.

Certainly Christ should be praised and glorified for His great love for us.

2-Second, notice that Christ is glorified because He saved us. As the verse continues on, it says, “*to Him who loves us and released us from our sins by His blood.*”

The term *released* [LUSANTI] literally means “to loose or to set free.”

Here is the heart of the gospel. Sinners are forgiven by God. They are set free from sin, death, and hell by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross.

God made Him our substitute, allowing Him to die for our sins, so that the penalty of sin was fully paid for us.

God’s justice was satisfied and God was able then to grant righteousness to repentant sinners for whom Christ died.

Certainly Christ should be praised and glorified because of His great sacrifice for us.

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3-Third, notice that Christ is glorified because He has prepared us.

John says in verse 6, “*and He has made us to be a kingdom, priests to His God and Father.*”

By loving us and saving us, Christ has prepared us to be a kingdom, priests to our God. Corporately, believers are a kingdom, but individually we are priests.

The idea of believers as a kingdom looks forward to the millennial reign of Christ.

According to **Revelation 5:10**, believers as a kingdom of priests will reign upon the earth.

According to **Revelation 20:6** this is ultimately fulfilled during the Millennial Kingdom when believers will reign with Christ for 1,000 years.

But as believers we are also priests to our God. According to **1 Peter 2:5**, believers in the church are “*being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God.*”

What kind of spiritual sacrifices are we to offer up to God?

According to **Romans 12:1**, “*we are to present our bodies as a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God.*”

According to **Hebrews 13:15**, “*we should continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name.*”

And According to **Hebrews 13:16**, “*we should not neglect doing good and sharing*” because God is pleased with such sacrifices.

Certainly Christ should be praised and glorified for preparing us corporately as a kingdom and individually as priests to our God.

It is at this point in verse 6, where John is so overcome that he breaks into praise saying, “*to Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen.*”

This is a fitting doxology when one considers the work of Christ! He is worthy of all our praise!

But John isn't finished yet. He has one more work or activity of Christ to highlight.

4-Fourth, notice that Christ is coming again!

In **verse 7**, John describes the future activity of Christ's Second Coming. He says, “*Behold, He is coming with the clouds and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him; and all the tribes of the earth will mourn over Him. So it is to be. Amen.*”

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“Behold!” is an arresting exclamation to call attention to or arouse the mind to consider what follows.

This future coming of Christ is detailed for us **in Revelation 19:11-21**. (READ?)

This is not a new truth in the pages of Scripture because more than 500 verses refer to the return of Christ.

Matthew 24:20 gives a good parallel description of this event. It says, “*And then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the Sky with power and great glory.*”

The entire human race will witness the return of Christ to the earth. The unbelieving sinful world, both Jew and Gentile alike, will mourn and despair over the coming of Christ. Not because they are repentant, but because of their impending doom.

This is the activity of Christ. He loves us, has saved us, is preparing us for the kingdom and will come again.

Certainly we can take time to remember what He has done and give Him the glory due Him/His name.

John is not quite done with his introduction to this book.

C. Third of all notice the Attributes of Christ highlighted in verse 8.

John concludes this introduction by providing a statement of affirmation made by Christ. In this statement three attributes of Christ are highlighted.

1-Christ affirms His Omniscience! He says, “*I am the Alpha and the Omega.*”

Christ repeats this statement in **Revelation 21:6** and **22:13**.

Alpha is the first letter of the Greek alphabet and Omega is the last.

Since all knowledge is conveyed through the letters of the alphabet, most commentators believe that this is a reference to Christ’s Omniscience.

Just as **Colossians 2:3** affirms, “*in Him is hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.*”

2-Christ also affirms His Eternality! He goes on to say in verse 8, “*who is and who was and who is to come.*”

This expression used by Christ here emphasizes His eternal nature. He is infinite in relation to time. He is not bound by time.

John used this same phrase to refer to God the Father earlier in the passage. Like God the Father, God the Son is eternal.

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3-Lastly, Christ affirms His Omnipotence! Christ goes on to refer to Himself as “the Almighty.”

This term literally means, “All Powerful.” The emphasis is upon His sovereign power as God.

Just as He Himself states in the Great Commission of **Matthew 28:18**, “*All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.*”

Jesus Christ is in Sovereign control of the affairs of the earth. He is has all authority! He is all-powerful! He is the Almighty!

In a few short verses John has adequately introduced us to the book of Revelation and reinforced our view of Christ.

In so doing, he has emphasized the imminency of the events of Revelation in particular the return of Christ.

He is God very God! He loves us! He saved us! He is omniscient! He is eternal! He is omnipotent! & He is coming again in great glory!

One of the most stirring pages in English history tells of the conquests and crusades of Richard I, the Lionhearted.

While Richard was away his kingdom fell on bad times. His sly graceless brother, John, usurped the throne and misruled the realm.

The people of England suffered, longing for the return of their king, praying it might be soon. Then one day Richard came.

He landed in England and marched straight for his throne. Around that glittering coming, many tales are told and woven into the legends of England.

Great Richard laid claim to his throne, and none dared stand in his path. The people shouted their delight. They rang peal after peal on the bells.

The Lion was back! Long live the King!

One day a King greater than Richard will lay claim to a realm greater than England. Those who have abused this earth, seized His domains, and mismanaged His world will be swept aside.

Only those who have loved Christ’s appearing (2 Timothy 4:8), who love Him and acknowledge Him as the rightful King will enjoy the blessings of His return and reign.