

## 02. The Book of Revelation—1:5

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(5/20/20)

For those of you who didn't join us last week—we started a study in the Book of Revelation.

The last time I taught in depth thru this book was back in 2007 and '08—and of course, as you know, a lot has happened in the world since then.

And so, I have purposed not to just 'regurgitate' the study from back then—but to update it with fresh information including current events that have taken place on the world scene since then.

But also, I want to draw from other biblical resources in an effort to make this study better than it was by incorporating fresh insights and perspectives from teachers I respect that I hope will make this new study in Revelation more of a blessing—“*Revelation 2.0 if you will!*”

Having said that, let me start with a quote from Donald Grey Barnhouse, who himself has written one of the best commentaries on Revelation you're ever going to find—here's what he said about the book:

*“We are living in the strangest days that man has ever known. The world has passed through terrible times before, but never has the whole earth been so bound together in its wild plunging through one catastrophe after another as today. There have been wars down through the ages, but never wars that have touched so many nations as the conflicts through which we have passed in this generation. There have been political crises—but not on a scale that touched all of the continents. Civilization has brought so many new means of communication that the matters which affect one nation affect all. Events that take place in Europe and Asia become news that vitally concerns the farmer in the Mississippi Valley. Thoughtful Bible students agree almost universally that we are living near the end of the age, and that at any moment the outline of prophetic events preserved for us in Scripture will begin its course of fulfillment. The world will then rush rapidly through all the scenes of history which God has written in advance. The Book of Revelation is the book for the present hour.”*

Last week, we finished the introduction to the book and got into chapter 1—but if you’ll indulge me for just a few minutes, I’d like to revisit the introduction and say a few more words that I believe will help you to properly interpret and better understand this incredible book going forward in our studies.

The book begins with the words—“**The Revelation of Jesus Christ...**”

The word “**revelation**” comes from the Greek word “apokalupsis” which means “*to uncover, to reveal, or to make manifest.*”

I bring this up again because many Christians, including many pastors, have decided not to read or study this book because they believe that the book is ‘*beyond understanding.*’

Author and pastor Mark Hitchcock best summed up this thinking when he said—

*“The Book of Revelation may be the most neglected book in the Bible. There are undoubtedly many reasons for this, one is that there are people who either claim or assume that no one can really understand what it means. They view Revelation the same way that Winston Churchill once described the Soviet Union: as “**a riddle wrapped up in a mystery inside an enigma.**” With all the mystifying symbols and striking images that appear throughout the book, many people despair of ever understanding the book. Even many pastors never preach on Revelation—or if they do, they preach only from the first three chapters.*

*This neglect of the capstone of God's revelation for man is tragic...Revelation gives us the end of the story just as Genesis gives us the beginning. To not take the time to understand Revelation would be like reading a mesmerizing novel but not finishing it to see how the story ends.”*

Mark Hitchcock, in his book on Revelation, said that—the key to understanding The Book of Revelation is to correctly interpret the symbols in the book.

However, unless a person approaches the symbols in the book with some basic guidelines—it often leads to 2 main traps that most people fall into:

1) They let the imagery and symbolism overwhelm them into thinking that—the presence of so many symbols means the book cannot be understood at all.

They say that we are able to discern that the book talks about a cosmic struggle between ‘good and evil’—but that none of the specific details can be understood—therefore the book is essentially a sealed book.

But that concept is in direct conflict with the very title of the book—“**The Unveiling of Jesus Christ.**”

Far from being a sealed book that God never intended anyone to understand, something that is hidden from us—this book is something that God is opening to our understanding—even to the point of pronouncing a blessing upon those who “**hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written in it**” (1:3).

Hitchcock says,

*“The...key to unlocking the meaning of Revelation is to realize that most of what is in the book is not new information. There's an old saying that Revelation is the Grand Central Station of the Bible because it's where—all the ‘trains of thought throughout the whole Bible’ come in. While it is certainly true that Revelation looks ahead and reveals the future—it also looks back and brings together all the threads running through the first 65 books of the Bible. Revelation contains 404 verses and 278 of them allude back to the Old Testament. Revelation has no direct quotations from the Old Testament, but it contains a total of 550 allusions or references (which appear in 278 verses) back to the Old Testament...”*

This, I believe, is part of the blessing God promised upon those who read and study this book—it will take you on a journey thru practically every book in the Old Testament and act as a key unlocking the symbolisms in those books.

2) The other extreme, says Hitchcock, is unchecked speculation and sensationalism that manipulates all the symbols—so they represent certain people or events of our time.

In other words, this reader approaches Revelation and the symbols in the book with the idea that—they have license from God to interpret the text and symbols however the Spirit “leads them”.

The problem is that those who approach the book with this kind of ‘hyper-subjectivity’ often if not always will come away with some very strange if not dangerous interpretations.

He said, “When properly interpreting a symbol in Revelation [the reader must] recognize that all the symbols in the book are explained either in Revelation itself or in other parts of the Bible—**WE CANNOT MAKE THEM MEAN WHATEVER WE WANT THEM TO MEAN.** When symbols are employed—they refer to something that is literal. Symbols are not just symbols of nothing. They aren’t meaningless. They aren’t just symbols of symbols. They refer to something that is literal. No interpreter has the freedom to make a symbol mean whatever he wants. Scripture sets the parameters for our interpretation of symbols. The infallible guide to the meaning of these symbols is—God’s Word!”

One of the main reasons that people don’t read and study this book is not because they have difficulty *understanding* what it is saying—but because they have a hard time *accepting* what it is saying.

It’s like Mark Twain once said, “*It’s not the parts of the Bible that I don’t understand that trouble me—it’s the parts I do understand that trouble me!*”

**Revelation 1:1-2 (NKJV)**

**<sup>1</sup> The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show His servants--things which must shortly take place. And He sent and signified *it* by His angel to His servant John, <sup>2</sup> who bore witness to the word of God, and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, to all things that he saw. <sup>3</sup> 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. (Comment)**

In the introduction last week, I mentioned the 4 main views of the Book of Revelation:

1. *Preterist View*
2. *Historical View*
3. *Idealist View*
4. *Futurist View*

I’d like to single out the Preterist View for a minute and briefly comment on it since it has gained popularity in recent years since church leaders like R.C. Sproul and Hank Hanegraaff have embraced one branch of it—‘*partial preterism*’.

Mark Hitchcock in speaking on the preterist view (past) had this to say—

“This view holds that Revelation is primarily a prophecy of events surrounding the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70. There are two main branches of preterism: **partial** (moderate) and **full** (extreme or radical).

R.C. Sproul, a partial preterist, defines the preterist approach: “*An eschatological viewpoint that places many or all eschatological events in the past, especially during the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70.*”

Preterists believe that Christ returned in AD 70 during the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans. Sproul says, “*Preterists argue not only that the kingdom is a present reality, but also that in a real historical event the Parousia (Christ’s coming) has already occurred.*”

They believe that Nero was the Beast of Revelation 13; that the seal, trumpet, and bowl judgments were judgments on unfaithful Israel; that ‘Babylon in Revelation 17-18 was Jerusalem; and that Revelation 19 describes the coming of Jesus in AD 70 to destroy Jerusalem.

The primary distinction between partial and full preterists is that—partial preterists, while maintaining that most of Revelation was fulfilled in the past, still believe in a future 2nd Coming of Christ. Full preterists believe that all prophecies—including those pertaining to the second coming and the resurrection of believers—are past events. They view the resurrection as spiritual. According to this view, we are beyond the Millennium and are presently in the new heaven and new earth...By rejecting orthodox biblical truths about the second coming of Christ, the bodily resurrection, and the final judgment—full preterists are outside the pale of orthodox Christianity.”

#### **Revelation 1:4-5a (NKJV)**

**<sup>4</sup> John, to the seven churches which are in Asia [Asia Minor—Turkey]: 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, <sup>5</sup> and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness...**

Jesus is the ‘**faithful witness**’—a witness testifies to what they have seen.

#### **John 1:18 (NKJV)**

<sup>18</sup> No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him.

No one has seen God in all of His fullness and glory—primarily because, no one can look upon God in that way and live! (Exodus 33:20)

Besides God is *invisible* and therefore cannot be seen with our human, physical eyes.

And yet Paul the apostle said of Jesus, in Colossians 1:15 that “*He is the image of the invisible God...*”

The word ‘image’ was used of an image made by impression as when Caesar’s image was stamped on a coin.

Paul is telling us that God the Father “*stamped*” His image on human flesh in the Person of Jesus Christ—which means that Jesus was the exact manifestation of God in human form.

This allowed man to see what God was like—God is Spirit and is therefore invisible but through the incarnation the invisible God became a visible flesh and blood man.

**John 14:9 (NKJV)**

<sup>9</sup> Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you so long, and yet you have not known Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father..."

The word translated “**declared**” (John 1:18) gives us our English word *exegesis*—which means “*to explain*” or “*to unfold*”—

Remember, we’re talking about Jesus being a ‘**faithful witness**’ (**Rev.1:5**), that He testified of the Father by declaring Him faithfully to this world during His earthly ministry.

We see Jesus affirm this in His High Priestly prayer in John 17:4: “*I have glorified You on the earth. I have finished the work which You have given Me to do.*”

This was the fulfillment of John 1:18—“**No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him**”; and Revelation 1:5—“**Jesus Christ, the faithful witness**”.

Jesus Christ has revealed the invisible God to mankind in a way we could have never come to understand or know Him thru our *human* logic and reason.

Christianity claims to be a *revealed* truth—a revelation is something that is made known to us by God.

It is something that would be impossible for us to know through our own human logic or intelligence or normal thought processes—it is knowledge that comes through divine input.

Job asked the question—“*Can a man by searching find God?*” → The answer of course is no!

The Bible says that God is Spirit who lives in the spirit realm—spirits can interact with those in the physical realm—but man, being physical, is trapped in the physical realm.

And because man is physical and God is Spirit there is no way a physical human being trapped in a box we call the “4 dimensional physical universe”, can, through the use of techniques like: visualization or Transcendental Meditation—‘poke a hole in the box’, climb out and find God!

No matter how sincere a person is and how hard he tries, he is incapable of reaching beyond the boundaries of the physical, *natural* realm he finds himself trapped in and therefore is incapable of knowing or understanding anything about the *supernatural* God.

One pastor has said,

*“We can’t expect the bug in the bottle to understand the little boy that put it there anymore than we can expect the natural man with his natural capacities to understand the supernatural God—unless that God chose to condescend and reveal Himself to man.”*

And of course, God did this by giving to us ‘special revelation’ (the Bible) which essentially is God invading the “box” (the natural realm) to communicate to us something about Himself or His will of our lives.

Some of the ways God has revealed divine truth to us in the past include, prophets, angels, dreams, and visions—but by far the greatest *revelation* was the incarnation—exactly what we are told in Hebrews 1:1-2: “*God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son...”*

And what did Jesus tell us?—He revealed the Father to us and the Way to heaven to live with Him (and the whole Trinity) forever. (John 14:6)

**Revelation 1:5 (NKJV)**

<sup>5</sup> and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, **the firstborn from the dead...**

This doesn't mean that Jesus was the first one *ever* to be raised from the dead—the O.T. records several that were raised from the dead and the N.T. records 3 that were resurrected before Jesus was raised from the dead.

The Greek word for “**firstborn**” is *prototokos* a word that can mean “first in chronological order” as in—“*Mary brought forth her firstborn son...*”

But this Greek word can also mean “*first in rank*” or first in the sense of “*superior position.*”

In Jeremiah 31:9 God calls Ephraim His firstborn—but was Ephraim really the firstborn son of Joseph?

No, Manasseh was Joseph's literal firstborn—but although Ephraim was technically the second born son of Joseph—God calls Ephraim His firstborn, because Ephraim had prominence over his brother in spiritual matters.

We refer to Melania Trump as the *First* Lady of our country—does this mean she's the first lady who ever lived?

No, of course not—the term “First Lady” refers to her position—that of all the ‘ladies’ in our nation, she has prominence over them as the president's wife.

So when John says that Jesus was the ‘**firstborn**’ from the dead it means that of all that had been resurrected before Him or would be after Him—

His resurrection was ranked the highest or was of a superior nature because His resurrection paved the way for all believers in Him to be raised from the dead never to die again—He said, “*Because I live, you will live also.*” (John 14:19)

**Revelation 1:5 (NKJV)**

<sup>5</sup> and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, **and the ruler over the kings of the earth.**

This speaks of His ultimate position during the Millennium—He came the first time to die, He’ll come the second time to reign.

**Psalms 2:6-8 (NKJV)**

<sup>6</sup> “Yet I have set My King On My holy hill of Zion.” <sup>7</sup> “I will declare the decree: The LORD has said to Me, ‘You *are* My Son, Today I have begotten You.’ <sup>8</sup> Ask of Me, and I will give *You* The nations *for* Your inheritance, And the ends of the earth *for* Your possession.

**Jeremiah 23:5 (NKJV)**

<sup>5</sup> “Behold, *the* days are coming,” says the LORD, “That I will raise to David a Branch of righteousness; A King shall reign and prosper, And execute judgment and righteousness in the earth.

**Zechariah 9:9 (NKJV)**

<sup>9</sup> “Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your King is coming to you; He *is* just and having salvation, Lowly and riding on a donkey, A colt, the foal of a donkey.

**Philippians 2:9-11 (NKJV)**

<sup>9</sup> Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, <sup>10</sup> that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, <sup>11</sup> and *that* every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ *is* Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

**Revelation 1:5 (NKJV)**

<sup>5</sup> and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler over the kings of the earth. **To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood,**

The last part of verse 5 should be translated, “*To Him who loves us and washed us from our sins in His own blood...*”

It was God's love that came first (1John 4:19) and motivated Him to send His only begotten Son to pay our sins on Calvary's cross and die in our place—

**Jeremiah 31:3 (NKJV)**

<sup>3</sup> The LORD has appeared of old to me, *saying*: "Yes, I have loved you with an everlasting love; Therefore, with lovingkindness I have drawn you.

**John 3:16 (NKJV)**

<sup>16</sup> For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

The Greek word translated "**washed**" in Rev.1:5 is *louo* and in this context means—"to be bathed all over."

→ **John 13:1-11**

The word translated "**wash**" in John 13:5–6, 8, 12, and 14 is *nipto* and means "to wash a part of the body"—but the word translated "**washed**" in John 13:10 is *louo* and means "to bathe all over."

In that culture, people usually took a full bath in the morning and were cleansed completely—they called it '*louo*.'

But then as they walked on dirt paths with open sandals throughout the day, their feet would become dirty and would need to be washed as they entered someone's home to eat and fellowship with them—this washing of their feet was referred to as '*nipto*' (a partial cleansing).

What John is telling us in verse 5 of Revelation 1 is that—when a sinner trusts in Jesus, they are "*bathed all over*" (*louo*)—completely cleansed from their sins by the blood of Christ.

However, as the believer walks in this world, it is easy to become defiled.

When that happens, he or she doesn't need to be bathed all over (saved again)—no, they simply need to confess those sins so *that* defilement is cleansed away and their fellowship with the Lord is restored—*"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."* (1John 1:9)

In other words, it's important that we "*keep our feet clean*" (keep our walk undefiled)—because we cannot have communion with our Lord if we don't.

**John 13:8 (NKJV)**

<sup>8</sup> Peter said to Him, "You shall never wash my feet!" Jesus answered him, "If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me."

The word translated "**part**" is *meros*, and it carries the meaning here of "*participation, having a share in someone or something.*"

When God "bathes us all over" in salvation, He brings about our union with Christ; and that is a settled relationship that cannot change.

(The verb *bathed* in John 13:10 is in the perfect tense—something that took place in the past but the effects of which are ongoing—in other words our salvation is settled once and for all.)

However, our daily communion with Christ depends on our keeping ourselves "*unspotted from the world*" (James 1:27).

If we permit unconfessed sin in our lives, our walk with the Lord is hindered because our fellowship with Him, on a practical level, is broken—and that is when we need to have our '*feet washed.*'

Someone has said, the Christian life consists of one "bath" but many "foot-washings".

The word 'louo' can also be translated "*loosed*"—

**Luke 19:33 (NKJV)**

<sup>33</sup> But as they were loosing [‘louo’] the colt, the owners of it said to them, "Why are you loosing [‘louo’] the colt?"

Note the change of tense in Rev.1:5—Christ loosed us once for all from our sins—but loves us continually, always.

The blood of Christ is very important—it is not just a symbol—it is literal!

In the Old Testament, God taught His people that the “... *life of the flesh is in the blood* ...” (Lev. 17:11).

In this verse God goes on to say, “*I have given it to you upon the altar to make an atonement for your souls ....*”

**Hebrews 9:22 (NKJV)**

<sup>22</sup> And according to the law almost all things are purified with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no remission.

**“There Is a Fountain”**

*There is a fountain filled with blood  
Drawn from Immanuel’s veins;  
And sinners, plunged beneath that flood,  
Lose all their guilty stains.*

—William Cowper

That’s it for now—I promise you we won’t be going this slow for the rest of our study in Revelation.

It’s just that the first few chapters have a lot to say to us who are members of the Church—the Body of Christ—so let’s drink it in and not rush thru it!!