



river west church

How to Read and Live the Book of Revelation

Revelation 1:1-3

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God's Final Word

It's unmistakable. When you come to the Book of Revelation you have come to the end. This is the end point of the Bible. This is the awesome climax of the biblical story, a story that has literally spanned the ages.

This is one reason why the Book of Revelation holds a special fascination for us. We know for certain that something monumental is being said in these pages (even if we get thoroughly turned around or confused along the way). Everything about this book says, "Listen carefully!" "Open your eyes, open your ears, open your heart." There is real a sense in which the Book of Revelation is "God's final word" to our lives and to our world. Are you listening?

But this is also why the Book of Revelation can be so frustrating. If the message of the Book of Revelation is so profound and so important, then why does it have to be so difficult? Why so intimidating? Why does it have so much bizarre imagery? Why have people throughout history obsessed over its details, treating it like a divine decoder ring, believing it revealed the secret meaning of current events for their times and showing that Jesus would return in their own lifetime? It's no wonder so many people have been discouraged before they even started trying to hear what God has saying in this book.

But there is a way forward, a way to make sense of it all. The first few verses of Chapter 1 show the way. It all starts with Jesus.

The Final Word on Jesus Christ

The Book of Revelation is first and foremost about Jesus Christ. Get that and you will get the message of Revelation. Verse 1 tells us that this is the "Revelation of Jesus Christ." Revelation begins and ends with Jesus (see 1:1 and 22:20-21). Jesus is in the middle too. In fact, Jesus is everywhere in this book.

So our quest in this study is to see Jesus. That is actually the highest purpose of the Book of Revelation. In Revelation we see Jesus as we have never seen Him before. We see Him in every aspect of who He truly is. We see Him in the glory of His Deity. We see Him in the lowliness of His humanity. We see Him in His suffering and death. We see Him in His risen life and power. We see Him as lamb, shepherd, lion, and conquering king. And with all of this, we see Him as truly present, right in our midst right, right now. When we see these things, believe these things, live from these things every day, we are starting to get the Book of Revelation.

God's Final Word on the Future

But this book isn't only about Jesus. It's also about the future. There are all sorts of interpretations on how to understand the future prophecy in Revelation. We will unpack much of this as our study unfolds. But regardless of the details of interpretation, it's pretty obvious that this book tells us the most profound things about the future. This is, in fact, God's final word on the future! The wonderful thing is that when Revelation ends, what we have come to isn't just the end of this fallen world, but the beginning of a whole new creation. It is a radical vision of hope that transcends the pain, evil, and conflict of our world. If you get this, you will get the Book of Revelation. But if you get bogged

down on trying to figure out how every detail matches what you see in the latest news feed on the Middle East, you will lose your way.

God's Final Word on Living Out Your Christian Faith - Right Here, Right Now

This is where things get practical. The Book of Revelation was given for Christ's servants (1:1-3). It promises a blessing for those who "hear and keep" what is written in it. Think about that for a minute. These words aren't given just so we can speculate on current events and how they match up with symbols or timelines in Revelation. These words are for us to hear and do.

This is all important. The Book of Revelation actually shows us how we are to live out our Christian faith right in the middle of our broken world – right here, right now! That is the ultimate aim. This is why such an awesome vision of Christ is given in this book. It's so we can live our lives each day by full faith in Christ. This is why the visions of the future are recorded for us as well. It's so that we can live our lives each and every day in light of the larger story, the end of the story.

Christians throughout history, from the first century until today, have struggled with how to live out their faith in the midst of our broken world. What do we do? Do we withdraw? Do we join in? Do we put on white robes and wait for Jesus? Do we oppose injustice and expose the powers of evil even if doing so puts us at risk? What are we supposed to do? How do we live NOW, while we follow Christ and hope for heaven?

Questions like this will be front and center as we pray, study, worship, and live our way through the pages of this awesome Revelation! Let's pray now that each of us will experience the blessing promised to those who "hear and keep" the words of this Book!