



river west church

Start Here

Revelation 1:4-8

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11.7.2010

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The problem is that we are tempted to rush ahead in the Book of Revelation. The grand vision of God's throne and the lamb in Chapters 4-5 are so compelling, we want to turn to that part right away. Then, in chapter 6 we see the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse, and the cosmic conflict starts to unfold. Of course we want to go to that chapter and the ones that follow and try to sort out what it all means.

But don't rush ahead! The first chapter of Revelation sets the stage for everything. It gives us the essential perspective that we must hold throughout our study of the rest of the book. Chapters 2-3 contain the letters to the churches. These letters are crucial to our understanding of the rest of the book as well. They show us that this book isn't just a preview of things to come, it is actually Christ's living word to us right here, right now. Jesus wants to speak to His church, so that we will walk with Him, love Him, serve Him, and shine as lights in our world. If we rush past the first few chapters, we will miss all of this and in doing so miss the point of the whole book. So, where to start?

Get Clear About God

John writes the Book of Revelation in the form of a letter. He writes to the seven churches that are in Asia (modern day Turkey). In the opening greeting of the "letter" he starts with one of the most beautiful descriptions of the reality of God ever written. The language is deep and meaningful. It is language taken from some of the most famous passages in the Old Testament (Exodus 3:14; Exodus 19:6; Zechariah 4). The description of God is a clearly "Trinitarian." Here we find God the Father (who is, who was, and who is to come), God the Holy Spirit (the seven spirits before the throne of God) and God the Son (Jesus Christ).

John's introduction is more than a nice review of Christian theology. John is starting this "letter" by calling us to get clear in our view of God from the outset. We need to remember that there were many competing views of God in the ancient world, just as there are today. In Revelation, John reminds us that living a life of Christian faith in this world is going to be a challenge for a lot of reasons. To face that challenge, our view of God is all important. So John lays it out right at the start.

Put Jesus and the Gospel at the Center

In John's description of God, he gives the most attention to Jesus. Jesus and the Gospel get the focus (1:5-7). This is intentional. John puts Jesus at the center because that is exactly what we need to do in our faith. Jesus is described in terms of who He is, what He has done, and what He will do. Here we see Jesus in His life, sacrificial death, resurrection and eternal reign as triumphant king.

There is a huge lesson here. In the Book of Revelation Jesus and the Gospel are at the center. And in our faith, life, and mission/witness in this world, Jesus and the Gospel need to always be at the center too. Yet is amazing how often we let others things take that central place. Don't let that happen!

Embrace your Christian Identity and Mission

Jesus has made us to be a “kingdom of priests to God” (1:6). This is a direct quote from Exodus 19:6. This is a crucial theme that tells us about our Christian identity and our mission in this world. It’s important to remember that a priest is someone who “represents” people before God and also God before people. This was the role that Israel was supposed to have in the Old Testament. This was their new identity and their divine purpose as a result of their redemption. And now, all of that is applied to you and I as believers in Christ. We have been redeemed to a new identity and to a real mission in our world.

Too many people read the Book of Revelation as though its real purpose is to give us clues to watch for so we can know when we are finally going to get out of this place. But hang on. Did you know that God has a reason for you to be here each and every day, even as we watch for the return of Christ? The question is, how do we live out our Christian identity and mission in this messed up world? This is a question we need to ask continuously as believers. Much of our study in Revelation will focus on this question.