

A VISION OF JESUS — HIS VIEW OF THE CHURCH

1. John, Jesus, Grace and Peace

Revelation 1:1-4a

Let's turn in our Bibles to the book of Revelation.

This morning we're launching into a series based on **the vision of Jesus** in **Revelation 1** and **His view** of seven specific churches in **Revelation 2-3**.

Revelation 1:1–4 (ESV) ¹The **revelation of Jesus Christ**, which God gave him to show to his servants the things that must soon take place. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John, ²who bore witness to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw. ³Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear, and who keep what is written in it, for the time is near. ⁴John 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,**

We'll begin with some background on John because it's crucial to our understanding of the heart of Jesus toward His servants.

John and his brother James were sons of Zebedee and Salome, who, some have said was the sister of Mary, the mother of Jesus. It is entirely possible, then, that John was Jesus' first cousin.

Zebedee's family operated a prosperous fishing business in Capernaum on the Sea of Galilee. Simon Peter and his brother, Andrew, fished the Galilee alongside of John and James. These four were the first disciples directly chosen by Jesus, and He promised that He would make them become "fishers of men" ([Mark 1:17](#)).

John was the youngest of the disciples. We know that Jesus was around thirty when he called John into ministry. John could have been anywhere in his late teens to early twenties when he walked away from his family and

their successful fishing business to follow Jesus — not knowing where Jesus was going to lead them or what Jesus was going to have them do.

John along with his brother James and Peter were chosen by Jesus to accompany Him on three important occasions: They entered the house of Jairus with Jesus when Jesus raised the daughter of Jairus from the dead ([Mark 5](#) and [Luke 8](#)); They were allowed to witness the glory of the deity of Jesus shine through the veil of His humanity on the sides of Mount Hermon ([Mark 9](#)); They were chosen to support Him and witness His agony in the garden of Gethsemane the night before Jesus would be nailed to a Roman cross ([Matthew 26](#); [Mark 14](#)).

As a young man John earned the nickname, *“son of thunder”* for his passionate temperament — which also earned the rebuke of Jesus on one occasion ([Luke 9:54](#)). Despite that, it seems that John was closer to Jesus than any of the other disciples — in other words, closer than anyone in the world! In John’s Gospel he is referred to as *“the disciple whom Jesus loved.”* Evidence of the place John occupied in the heart and mind of Jesus is seen in two specific places. At the last supper, it was John who laid his head on the chest of Jesus! The other is the words of Jesus spoken from the cross. Out of all of the apostles, it was John who was at the foot of the cross on which Jesus hung! Standing next to John was Mary, the mother of Jesus. In the midst of the excruciating agony of crucifixion Jesus looked at Mary, and He looked at John, and He said, “John, take care of my mom.” That’s how close John was to Jesus. Jesus trusted John more than anyone when He told John to “adopt” Mary as his own mother, and told His mom to treat John like her own son ([John 19:26](#)).

John was there for the life, death, burial, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus. John lived the rest of his life being hated and persecuted. He suffered. Everyone that he loved got murdered, including his brother James who was the first apostle to die in 45 AD. Yet for decades John continued to testify about how Jesus healed the sick — made the lame to walk and the blind to see — delivered people from demonic possession and oppression — fed multitudes. He continued to testify how Jesus claimed to be God, died for our sins, rose from the grave and ascended into heaven. He continued to testify that Jesus is the one and only Savior of the world! He

had no motivation in all of that other than His love for Jesus and love for the truth of the Gospel.

John himself was arrested during the reign of Emperor Domitian and sentenced to be boiled in oil. How much do you have to hate a messenger and the message he's proclaiming to throw him into boiling oil? They hated John for proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus! They threw him into boiling oil but God miraculously preserved John.

They thought the only way they could keep John from preaching, writing or planting churches was to put him in utter isolation. So around 73 AD John was banished to the island of Patmos.

Patmos is nothing more than a rock in the middle of the open ocean; no vegetation and subject to fierce winds coming in off the ocean.

John was all about Jesus! After John had endured horrendous pain and suffering for the sake of Jesus, we find John in a very harsh, very cold, very isolated place because he was all about Jesus. When the average person thinks about following Jesus, *THAT* is not the way they see things rolling out. There are a lot of people who see following Jesus as the path to the life they've always dreamed about. The night I gave my life to Jesus I did think about the possibility that I would lose all my friends — but I never considered boiling oil and banishment on a rock in the middle of the ocean. But the first Christians understood that following Jesus could cost them everything — including their life.

DON'T MISS THIS! This is so radical — it is right there and right then that Jesus met with John; spoke to John to encourage him and to reveal to him what is the final book of the Bible — the book of **Revelation**. That is the story of John. That is the story of the love of Jesus for His friend and servant. That is the love of Jesus for the church in giving us the book of **Revelation**.

Please remember this! When you're alone; when your body is hurting; when you're suffering because of your witness for Jesus; when you're old and literally alone — and as far as you can tell, your church might as well be

on the other side of the galaxy — **that** is **when** and **where** Jesus meets His friends! **That** is our Jesus!

With that background, here we go.

The book opens with the words: ¹ **The revelation of Jesus Christ.**

There are MANY who believe that the book of **Revelation** is a *book of mysteries*, filled with surreal images and cryptic words. They claim that it is a book beyond understanding. I'll never forget my first Good Friday as a Christian. I was sitting towards the front in a Catholic church long before anyone else arrived for the noon service. I had my "Living Bible" and I was reading the book of Revelation. The head priest walked by me and saw what I was reading and said, *"WHY on earth are you reading THAT book of the Bible. No one can understand the Book of Revelation. It is nothing but ecstatic visions that have no real meaning. John didn't even know what he was writing about!"*

HERE'S THE DEAL — The book of **Revelation** does mean something because the opening words of the book tell us that God the Father gave it to Jesus so Jesus could *show His servants* something. It has a promise of blessing, not a promise of confusion.

In fact, God so much wants us to open this book of the Bible that He has promised to bless those who would read it, hear it and hold on to what's written (**Revelation 1:3**) because it is the completion of the revelation of God to man.

The Bible hangs on two hooks: **Genesis** and **Revelation**. **Genesis** and **Revelation** are the "bookends" of the Bible.

Genesis is the book of **beginnings** — **Revelation** is the book of **last things**

Genesis is the book of **creation** — **Revelation** is the book of **consummation**

Genesis starts in the earthly **garden** — **Revelation** ends in the heavenly **city**

Genesis gives us the **Heaven and the Earth** — **Revelation** gives us **the New Heaven and the New Earth**

Genesis has the **first man and his wife** set over all creation — in **Revelation** we have the **Second Man and His Bride** ruling together over redeemed creation

Genesis shows us the **entry point of sin** and the **fall** of humanity— **Revelation** brings the **end of sin** and the ultimate **redemption** of humanity

In **Genesis** the **new creation is broken** — in **Revelation** **broken creation is made new**

In **Genesis** paradise is **lost** — in **Revelation** paradise is **restored**

In **Genesis** humanity is **separated** from God — in **Revelation** the dwelling place of God is **with us**.

***Revelation 21:3 (ESV)** ³And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God.*

Genesis reveals a broken **past** — **Revelation** unveils for us a great and glorious **future (prophecy)**

Genesis shows us how **sorrow, death, pain and tears** entered the human story — **Revelation** brings us the day where there will be **no more** death, no more mourning, no more sorrow, no more pain and God Himself wipes away every tear

God wants us to read and understand the book of **Revelation** because it is the Book of LAST THINGS. It is the UNVEILING of future events.

BUT MORE THAN ANYTHING God wants us to read and understand the book of **Revelation** because it's all about Jesus!

DON'T MISS THIS — The title is not “Revelations,” plural. It is “Revelation,” singular, because in this book Jesus is revealed to us.

Revelation is translated from the Greek word, *apokalypsis*. We get our English word *apocalypse* from it. That word is most commonly used as a synonym for chaos and catastrophe (“Apocalypse Now” — the slew of “Apocalyptic” and “Post Apocalyptic” genre movies, ie. The Book of Eli, Walking Dead, World War Z). The verb literally means the action of *uncovering, disclosing, revealing*.¹

This word **revelation** is a really important word. Man-made religion is built on **speculation**. Fallen, finite man, speculating on the existence of God, the nature and attributes of God, how man can get to God; the finite trying to know the infinite. Impossible! Revelation is God making Himself known to us. (Get resources from our CREDO series titled “Revelation.”) The Bible is God revealing Himself to us.

This is the critical difference between Christianity and other religions. We don't believe in speculation. We believe in revelation. We believe that everything man needs to know about God has been made known in Jesus Christ. We believe it is impossible for man to know God apart from Jesus.

In this book, the Holy Spirit pulls back the curtain and gives us the privilege of seeing the glorified Jesus in heaven and the fulfillment of His sovereign purposes in the world.

THIS IS SO IMPORTANT — This book is **not primarily** the revelation of future events — it is **primarily** what the title says it is: The revelation of Jesus Christ. Whenever we read the book of Revelation, we need to be very careful to not divorce the Person from the prophetic elements within the book because without the Person there could be no fulfillment of the prophecy.

¹ Friberg, T., Friberg, B., & Miller, N. F. (2000). *Analytical lexicon of the Greek New Testament*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books.

Dr. Merrill Tenney — *“He is not incidental to its action, He is its chief Subject.”*

Over the next couple of months we are going to focus our attention on Revelation **1-3** because in those chapters we see Jesus revealed as the exalted Redeemer King — and we see Him ministering to the churches; we see how Jesus viewed them.

But the rest of the book is every bit as much about Jesus. In **Revelation 4-5**, we see Jesus in heaven as the glorified Lamb of God, reigning on the throne. In **Revelation 6-18** Jesus is revealed as the righteous judge of all the earth. In **Revelation 19** Jesus is revealed as the conquering King of kings and Lord of lords returning to earth. The book closes with Jesus revealed as the heavenly Bridegroom ushering His bride, the church, into the glorious heavenly city.

He made it (the revelation of Jesus) known by sending his angel to his servant John, ²who bore witness to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw.

***1 John 1:1-3** That which was from the beginning, which we have **heard**, which we have **seen** with our eyes, which we **looked upon** and have **touched** with our hands, concerning the word of life— ²the life was **made manifest**, and we have **seen** it, and **testify** to it and **proclaim** to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was **made manifest** to us— ³that which we have **seen** and **heard** we **proclaim** also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ.*

In other words, John is saying: *When I’m telling you what Jesus did, I’m telling you what I heard with my own ears, saw with my own eyes and touched with my own hands! Did Jesus really live? Did Jesus really die? Did Jesus really rise? Yes! I saw and heard it all! I hugged him and embraced him with my own hands.*” There’s no more credible witness to Jesus than this dear friend of Jesus, John.

By the way — though you and I can never know Jesus like John did — we can know Him personally and intimately

1 Peter 1:8 (ESV) ⁸Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory,

Those who are close to Jesus speak most about Him — speak best about Him. When they mention His name, they say it like people speak about their closest, dearest and best friend!

³Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear, and who keep what is written in it, for the time is near.

FIRST — There are promised blessings concerning this book.

There's a blessing for **"those who hear."** As we've seen in our study of the Bible, this is more than an auditory exercise. It means listening attentively. It's listening carefully.

This is why we want you to take notes — on the pages of your Bible or paper — or on your phone or iPad. Your method or media isn't important. What **is** important is to engage, lean in, be an attentive listener. Be a real listener! At the end of each of the letters Jesus sends to the seven churches He says, *He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches*. It's so important that we come with our hearts prepared to hear what He is saying. It's so important that we come with a heart that's ready to hear Him say: *Write that one down. Think about that. Pray about that. Memorize that verse.*

There's a blessing for "those who hear and **keep what is written** — That's why we close our times gathered like this with a time to respond. What thing or things is the Spirit saying to you? For some it will be, *"Give your life to Jesus!"* You need to respond! For believers there should always be the voice of the Spirit saying, *We need to talk about that*. If you have nothing at the end of the study to respond to either you aren't listening, or the Spirit

isn't speaking! I don't think it's the latter. At the least the Spirit will say, *That's for you to encourage your spouse with — that's for your kids, your neighbor, your class mate, your co-worker — the person you meet when you get a cup of coffee after worship. Pray for them. Love them. Serve them. Share the Word of God with them.*

SECOND — This book wasn't for people who were prophecy buffs to satisfy their curiosity about the future. John received it and sent it to 1st century Christians who were going through intense persecution and needed encouragement.

I think that very fact is so relevant to 21st century Western Christianity. We need to get our heads and our hearts around the fact that the people of God have always been in the minority and have always been the object of relentless opposition and hostility — and have lived in a world that is corrupted.

***Psalms 11:2 (ESV)** ²for behold, the wicked bend the bow; they have fitted their arrow to the string to shoot in the dark at the upright in heart;*

***Psalms 12:8 (ESV)** ⁸On every side the wicked prowl, as vilest is exalted among the children of man.*

***Acts 4:24–26; 29–30 (ESV)** ²⁴And when they heard it, they lifted their voices together to God and said, “Sovereign Lord, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in them, ²⁵who through the mouth of our father David, your servant, said by the Holy Spirit, “ ‘Why did the Gentiles rage, and the peoples plot in vain? ²⁶The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers were gathered together, against the Lord and against his Anointed’—....*

²⁹And now, Lord, look upon their threats and grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness, ³⁰while you stretch out your hand to heal, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of your holy servant Jesus.”

Here's why I spent time giving the backstory of John's life! We know something about who he is, where he is and why he's there. He is not only

really old; he's really alone! His body is hurting. He's suffering because of his witness for Jesus.

DON'T MISS THIS — Jesus goes to His old, lonely, suffering, friend. It's amazing what Jesus doesn't say to John. Jesus doesn't ask John how he's feeling. Jesus doesn't ask John how He can help him. Jesus doesn't say, *John, let's get off this rock and get you to a happy place surrounded by friends.* That is not the conversation. I believe it's crucial for us to see Jesus here, because Western Christianity has reduced Jesus to a motivational speaker/life-coach, a personal therapist who is going to affirm you, make you feel really good about yourself, deliver to you the "American dream"! That's not who Jesus is! John is suffering, and John is hurting. Jesus loves John. But Jesus essentially says, *"John, get your eyes on Me.*

The Revelation of Jesus and the fulfillment of His sovereign purposes in the world would give the 1st century believers — and believers up through the 21st century strength and hope — and help them examine their own lives in light of who Jesus is and the certainty of His coming and His forever glorious Kingdom. *How we need a revelation of Jesus!*

Charles Spurgeon — *"The great fault of many professors is that Christ is to them a character upon paper; certainly more than a myth, but yet a person of the dim past, an historical personage who lived many years ago, and did most admirable deeds, by the which we are saved, but who is far from being a living, present, bright reality."*

So, we are going to study the first chapter of this book so that:

We can have a clear vision of Jesus — know Jesus as He is revealed in Chapter 1 (as opposed to what we imagine Him to be) so that Jesus will be made great in our hearts — so we will love Jesus more than ever — causing our lives to be transformed — causing our witness for Jesus in the world to be more faithful and fruitful than ever before.

We're going to study chapters 2-3 of this book so that:

We would understand how Jesus views the church (as opposed to how we view it). I need to remember that there are three of me: The “me” I think I am; the “me” others think I am, and there is the “me” Jesus *knows* I am. We need to remember that there are three Metros: There’s the Metro we think we are; the Metro others think we are, and there’s the Metro Jesus *knows* us to be. Jesus loves His church so much; loves the local church so much; loves you and me so much, that He encourages us, tells us the truth about what’s broken in us and then tells us His remedy for what’s broken.

We should have a clear view of those who need to know the love, the grace, the mercy and life changing power of Jesus; have a clear view of those who are hurting and suffering and how can we love Jesus by loving them, serving them and helping them to [grow in grace and in the knowledge of Jesus](#).

[4....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,](#)

GRACE — Jesus begins His address to the churches with the word **grace** because Jesus is **“full of grace”**!

QUOTE: John Stott — *“Grace is love that cares, stops, and rescues.”*

It all begins right here. It's no coincidence that we see Paul introducing his letters with the very same words — **“Grace and Peace.”** Grace always precedes peace. This wasn't for literary form. It is theological truth.

There is no other starting place between man and God. He is the loving, kind creator; we utterly betrayed him, we're rebels in His universe. He's the only true God, worthy to be worshipped and served. We took the place of God and made our existence all about our kingdom and our glory. We were nothing but “glory thieves!” We substituted God with created things. Rather than worship and serve our loving creator we worship and serve things He created. We deserve nothing from God! The only thing we've earned is hell; eternal separation from God (Romans 6:23).

The only way we can come to God is by Him doing for us that which we don't deserve.

QUOTE: Martyn Lloyd-Jones — *Do what you like, you will never save yourself.*²

God came and stood in our place on the cross because we decided to stand in His place! God came and died for His enemies so we could be His friends. God came near to the world that is so far from Him so He could bring us near. God came not to crush the rebels, but to rescue them from their dark and doomed *Kingdoms of One* and reconcile them to Himself; make them citizens and servants in His everlasting Kingdom of life and light!

QUOTE: Paul Tripp — *The Prince of Glory died an inglorious death so glory thieves could live in the light of his glory forever. We fall short of God's glory; Jesus came and revealed his glory. Glory failed meets glory revealed — GRACE.*

Without the **grace** of God, we can never have **peace** with God. That's why the Holy Spirit is very careful to place **grace** before **peace**.

In Jesus we have grace and peace!

Romans 5:2 (ESV) ²*Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God.*

God loves you. God cares for you. Grace tells us that God isn't through with us when we fail. Most of these seven churches are really tweaked! But Jesus isn't through with them. Because of Grace He writes to them, He warns them, and prescribes the remedy.

You and Me loving Jesus begins with grace! God loved us first! Grace is God initiating. Loving Jesus is our response to grace. Loving God in an effort to

² Lloyd-Jones, Martyn. *Walking with God Day by Day: 365 Daily Devotional Selections* (p. 102). GoodNewsPublishers

earn God's love is unsustainable! Every day is marked by our failure to love God. The outcome is fear and condemnation. It is God's perfect love expressed in grace that casts out all fear and frees us from condemnation. Without grace we begin to see every hardship as punishment and we have no peace. It is God's grace that leads to peace! God's grace tells us that He is good in every way all of the time. God's grace tells you that God loves you; God cares for you; God is not done with you.

The same is true about serving Jesus. Serving Jesus begins with grace. Serving Jesus is responding to grace. When serving Jesus is born out of a sense of religious obligation, guilt, or fear, it is utterly unsustainable. Our bodies and minds can and will get tired from the energy exerted in serving, but because of grace we never grow weary of serving Him.

God never forces us to serve Him. He never says that we need to serve Him to earn His love, earn His forgiveness, and earn our way to heaven. Grace invites redeemed, rescued and reconciled rebels to be on mission with Him — to see lives changed, see people get saved, to see people grow in Jesus and be faithful and fruitful in the mission of God. That's what got John out of bed every day for eighty years of his life. The grace of God wrapped up in Jesus is the only thing that will keep you motivated and keep you loving Jesus and serving the church.

CLOSE — God has grace and peace for us in Jesus!

For the unbeliever — this is where it begins. There **IS** a way for you to know God. There **IS** a way to be forgiven. There **IS** a way to go from being the enemy of God to being the friend of God. There **IS** a way to have peace with God. There **IS** a way to heaven — GRACE! In Jesus God did for you everything you don't deserve — everything you could never earn.

For the Christian — Grace is not a one-time thing! It's not just something to experience in the moment of salvation. We get to live in God's grace. There's not a limited supply of grace and peace because it comes from *him who is and who was and who is to come*. There's more of God's grace to be had; more of God's peace to experience! There's Grace to love Jesus and love others for Jesus. There's Grace to serve Jesus by serving others.

NEXT WEEK — We will see the revelation of Jesus unfold!

WITHOUT GRACE we could have no peace when we see who Jesus is. But because of grace we find our peace in the infinite majesty of Jesus.