

Part 8: Jesus in the End—God and his People Finally and Forever

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Have you ever seen or heard one of those posts which attempts to explain a plot line poorly? Often on social media you'll see someone describe the plot of a famous story in such a way that it seems too stupid to be true.

For instance: "Talking frog convinces son to kill his dad," speaking of Star Wars the Empire Strikes Back, or hearing the Lord of the Rings Trilogy described like this, "Group spends nine hours returning jewelry." The irony of these posts is that the description sounds dreadfully odd and boring, but they belong to two of the most beloved stories of all time. Why is that?

Because the basic narrative of the plot is made beautiful, real and true on account of the story we already know to be progressing. To hear of a painfully long return of a ring sounds boring and out of place, but to understand that it's Frodo's quest to destroy the ring and bring peace to the Shire, it makes wonderful sense.

Today we conclude our series designed to walk through the whole of the Bible and we do so by landing in the book of Revelation. This book, just like those movies, gets its beauty not by the simplicity or raw nature of its plotline, but only when you see it in light of the story we've been tracking the whole time. The narratives, the symbolism, the language of Revelation is odd, jarring, and sometimes confusing. But when we place it in the world-shaping story of God's plan to redeem a broken people through the work of Jesus Christ—when we see how Revelation is the final chapter where God restores all that was lost in Eden by bringing his people into his place to dwell in his presence—the whole book shines with radiant glory, weight and immediate relevance to our life.

This is what we are going to endeavor to discover today as we place the book of Revelation in context with the story of scripture, which in turns places it in context in our daily lives.

As we have done, so we will do today, we will first **Survey the Story**, then we will **Study the Story**, and lastly we will **Savor the Savior of the Story**.

As we do this today we will see our main point this morning: **Jesus in the End: God and His People Finally and Forever**.

Now before we move, on the nature of the book of Revelation is one where many interpretations exist inside of historic orthodox evangelical Christianity. For instance John Calvin, John Bunyan, Jonathan Edwards, John Piper and John MacArthur would all have differing views of the interpretation and timelines of this book. In order to teach this book even as an overview, I too need to pick a lane, so as you listen you might find points you potentially differ with, but as long as one's goal is to remain submitted to scripture by the help of the Holy Spirit, and in a humble awareness of one's own limitations, we can have charity even amidst diversity here.

I heard one pastor say that if you ask any members of your church what book they want to hear preached, it would be the book of Revelation. But if you asked any pastor what book they least want to

preach, it would often be Revelation because of the unique humility and uncertainty the imagery in the book provides. Some people have an unhealthy obsession with this book, and many of us have an unhealthy fear of this book. But it is God's word, it is understandable to the degree God designed, and it is good for us to study it together today.

To begin, let's **Survey the Story** of the book of Revelation.

In many ways, what the book of Deuteronomy is to the Old Testament, Revelation is to the New Testament. In Deuteronomy, the people of God having been redeemed out of slavery in Egypt, stand at the threshold of the Promised Land and Moses warns them of the dangers and encourages them with the hope that stands between them and the ultimate end.

The book of Revelation is this for the church: having been given salvation through the atonement of Jesus on the cross, John warns us of the dangers and encourages us with the hope that stands between us and glory. We are warned to not become complacent, to not forget God, to not intermix your worship with the worship of idols, to not take up relationships that pull our hearts away from God.

It calls for optimistic endurance in the face of real trials. This book is not meant to disorient and confuse you, but to bring the Christian hope in the plan and purpose of God for all things.

Look at how John opens the book in **Revelation 1:1-3**. This book ties together the past work of Christ, and the future work of Christ for the sake of today's Christian. To understand the future of this book means nothing if it doesn't change the present life of the believer.

The content of this book is a series of visions God gives to the apostle John, and the theatre of all these visions is the throne room of the Triune God. From this throne room John is given seven series of visions depicting what is happening and will still happen in God's plan to redeem the world.

What you'll notice as you read these visions, is that they aren't presented in a linear chronology which is part of the reason why our western minds often wrestle with this book. As you read you'll notice that John doesn't claim that one vision happens after one another in consecutive history, but instead he simply gives the orders in which he has the visions.

So instead of a line, think of the visions as a spiral. Each time we circle around and we pick up a little more, from a little bit different of a perspective. But what is clear from these visions is this: God will judge the world, and God will save his church and it's often in the midst of God's judgement that the church is saved and vindicated.

Just to help frame our thoughts before we move on here, I'll give a brief outline of the book of Revelation in six headings. First, John receives a letter from Jesus to be delivered to the seven churches in Asia that John has fellowship with.

Moving on from there, John's visions continue with a vision of 7 seals which are opened in the throne room. The imagery of sealing and unsealing here communicates that what has happened and what will happen only happens as Jesus himself unseals and progresses history. Jesus is in control of each stage left to come.

Third, we see a vision of 7 trumpets, and the idea of trumpets communicates God's warning and alert to all who would listen and understand the events which are to come.

Fourth, there is a brief narrative type prophecy that depicts a battle between the seed of the woman and the seed of the devil.

Fifth, John sees a vision of 7 bowls full of 7 plagues which represent God's comprehensive and final judgment poured out on the world.

And sixth, and finally, we see a comparison between the city of Babylon and the New Jerusalem. Babylon represents the hope of the world, and the New Jerusalem represents the hope of the church. Where Babylon and the world end in destruction the church of Jesus ends in a new world in radiant glory.

In summary what we see in the book is a story of the trial and triumph of the church through the blood of Jesus Christ, the Lamb who was slain.

With that framing our mind, let's begin to **Study the Story**.

To help us with this, I'm going to do three things in this portion. First we will examine, **How We Read** the book of Revelation and other apocalyptic literature and then we will discuss **What We Need** to read the book of Revelation and other apocalyptic literature, and finally we will discuss the ways in which Revelation **Progresses the 3 P's** of the Bible's story line.

So first **How** do **We Read** the book of Revelation and other apocalyptic literature. The word apocalyptic has an ominous tone to it, but it's the first word in the book of Revelation: "Apokalypsis Iesou Christou" - the apocalypse (revelation) of Jesus Christ.

Apocalyptic literature is merely revelatory literature. It's God revealing his truth, Jesus Christ, in a way distinct from how God otherwise communicates. In our study we have encountered this kind of literature in the prophets specifically Daniel and Ezekiel, and Jesus actually taught in similar language in the gospels when he spoke of the days to come as well.

The principle for interpreting this kind of literature is that we focus not so much on the strict definition of each word, but instead we focus on the holistic effect of the vision. To apply the same style of interpretation to the symbols of this book as you do to the narrative in the histories will be just as frustrating as thinking you learn from an art museum in the same way you learn from a history book.

God didn't get sloppy with his communication, instead he intentionally communicates through powerful pictures where we take away the effect and general teaching verses an overly analytical reading of it. One commentator said the book of Revelation is not God's puzzle book, it's God's picture book.

That means we can't read it exclusively in a literal sense. Unless, we think Jesus will forever have horns on his head. But we also can't read it as if it were only a fairy tale. It's not mere imagery, its imagery representative of real events.

Now sometimes, God wants us to know in detail what these images and visions represent. But when he does, he actually tells us. In these instances an angels often tells us specifically how to interpret these pictures.

One small piece of information that helps us in our interpretation is the significance of certain numbers in Hebrew literature. Stemming from God's creation of the world in seven days, often times the number seven is more than just a number. In apocalyptic literature it often signifies a sense of completeness, perfection and fullness.

This is why most commentators think the seven spirits in the throne room represent the Holy Spirit himself. There are 7 seals depicting the fullness of history, 7 trumpets communicating a complete warning, and 7 bowls of total and final judgement.

This helps us understand some other numbers in the book. For instance there are three antagonists in the book: The Devil who is the Great Serpent, the beast who is often called the anti-Christ, and the second beast who is often called the False Prophet. What you'll notice is that Satan is manifesting himself to the world and his servants not only as an anti-Christ, but as an anti-Trinity! Pay attention to the way these are described in Revelation 13 and notice how they play roles similar to the Trinity, but are entirely counterfeit.

This helps us understand the number of the Beast, the number 666. If the fullness of the Trinity would be three sevens, then Satan desires to masquerade as something so close, and yet so far away. He wants the world to see him as just as able to save as the Lord, but in the end all who hope in him are destroyed and fall short of God's full salvation in Jesus.

However, in Hebrew numerology 666 also corresponds with the value of Nero Caesar who does many of the things to the Christians that are described in this book. So which is it? I'm not sure, and it could even be both. But this is why we engage in the study of this book with humility and charity to the end that John's main emphasis is clear: hope and help is for those who are saved by the Lamb.

Secondly, **What** do **We Need** to read the book of Revelation.

I grew up watching a guy who claimed to predict the date and events of the book of Revelation by looking out at the current events of the day. He was wrong. In fact just about every generation of church history has seen in their current events the actions of this book, and so far we have all been wrong.

But in order for us to understand this book fully, in order for us to be properly warned in such a way that we live distinctly, urgently and faithfully in our time, we don't need a newspaper in hand, we need a Bible in our hand.

John's source material for everything is the Bible. The more we read the Bible, the more we understand the effect and the intent of the book of Revelation.

Three quick examples here. First, notice John's greeting to the churches in light of this revelation in **Revelation 1:6**. Now do you remember how God spoke to Moses when he brought Israel out of Egypt in **Exodus 19:5-6**?

How is John rooting our understanding of this book? In the reality that Jesus has finally done it. Where God says in Exodus that if you keep this you will be a kingdom of priests to Israel, here in the multinational churches of Asia, Jesus has made his church into a kingdom of priests. We are to read all the events of the future through the lens of the events of the past. Jesus has done it, he has made us through faith God's covenant people.

We see this fully when the New Heavens and the New Earth are presented with 12 gates and 12 foundations. The twelve gates are labeled with the name of a tribe of Israel and each foundation the name of an apostle. In Jesus the whole story comes together for Jews and Gentiles in the same promise made to Abraham.

Second, John pulls often from the other prophets and this too helps us locate ourselves. Do you remember the vision Nebuchadnezzar had that Daniel interpreted for him? There was a vision of a statue made of six different materials which represented the course of kings and dynasties which were to follow. But a rock would come, cut by the hand of God and it would strike the feet of this statue and cause it to fall. Do you remember what the feet were made out of in this vision? **Daniel 2:32-33.**

Feet partly of clay and that was the weakness. But look at how John introduces Jesus: **Revelation 1:12-15.** Not only is here the Son of Man from Daniel 10, but here is the king with bronze feet. The kingdom that will not be shaken, the mountain of God who will cut through all the other nations that rise against him. Here is hope in the midst of history.

Third, notice this language in **Revelation 12:1-6.** Does this ring any bells to you? Here is a woman, who has a child, who will be King, who is opposed by a dragon serpent? Do you remember what God said to Eve in that wonderful, weighty and redemptive promise after Satan deceived her and caused death to enter into the world: **Genesis 3:15.**

Here we see the birth of the seed of the woman and the battle between him and the serpent. Just as Jesus was taken up from heaven after his work, so too was this child, and what is left is the church in the wilderness for a season while it is afflicted by the serpent. But guess what? The child-king comes back in Revelation and he casts that serpent and his minions into the pit of hell. This book outlines the battle of the church with the devil until Jesus comes back to put everything in its place.

We see the plagues of Egypt show up again in the book. We see Isaiah's cup of wrath held out by lady Babylon. Just as Israel was led by a pillar of fire and cloud, a messenger wrapped in cloud with legs of fire speaks to the church guiding her on her path. Ezekiel's future temple shows up in Revelation 21. This book only and rightly makes sense in light of the Bible. And yes we are to look wisely at our circumstances, but we are to look even more intently into God's word if we want to understand this book.

Now, how does the book of **Revelation Progress the 3 P's** of the Bible's storyline--that is God's people in God's place in God's presence. I want to touch on this very briefly here.

First it does show us **God's people**, but most importantly it shows us that God's people must be distinct in these last days.

What is really clear as you read the book is that God's people are pulled between two challenges. First there is always the appeal of Babylon which represents the sinful belonging to the world. But second it appears that anyone who resists the sinful, sensual and seductive pull of Babylon is persecuted by it.

But what's clear as we walk through these accounts of the end is that salvation is always promised to God's faithful and enduring church. Every time it seems judgement and persecution is about to consume the church, there's an affirmation of the security and safety of those who refuse to worship anyone other than the Lord and who have his name written on their heads, and their names written in his book.

What is clear in the book is that the days of being a Christian have great hope ahead, God is going to save more and more people than we can imagine from every tongue and tribe and nation. But it's also true that the world is going to become more and more hostile to the church. In the midst of it, we need to endure.

Look at **Revelation 14:12-13**. Endure, even unto death. If we are not prepared to trust in the promise of Jesus in the face of hardship, then the book of Revelation paints a bleak picture. Jesus holds us, yes, but those who Jesus holds the Holy Spirit empowers divine strength to endure.

This makes sense in the context of the Bible's ongoing story. Noah wasn't delivered by missing the flood, but through the flood. The Israelites weren't transported out of Egypt before the Passover, but they had to trust in the Lord's lamb in the midst of it. So too it would appear that Jesus equips us for this in **Matthew 13:29-30**. Until the moment of the final harvest where we are taken up to be with the Lord, we live amidst the weeds of a broken and dangerous world.

So what warning does Revelation give us? **Revelation 13:5-10**. We will talk about the beast in a moment. But what do we see here? The opposite of enduring is to be taken captive. Taken captive by the false hopes of the world, taken captive by the bling and bright of Babylon.

Sexual immorality in the book of Revelation is often representative of any idolatry. But one thing that comes up time and time again is how those who thought they were the Lord's saints were lured away into Babylon by her sexual immorality. This world will press us on this issue because it wants your blood. I dare you to read this book and come away thinking that God doesn't care about, and that Satan doesn't use sexual temptation for the end of destruction. Are you going to trust Jesus even in the midst of this? Will you see the cup of the Harlot as a distasteful brew of poison and instead hold out for the chalice of pure wine Jesus presents his church in the end?

We need this enduring warning as God's people because what Revelation shows us is that this is not **God's place**. Yes, God is here and he rules here. But this place is the place of Babylon. The hope of this world is in this world. When Babylon falls in Revelation 18 the whole world grieves because so many people put their hope in her luxury and her provision. They lived as if Babylon and her glory would last forever.

But God's warning to his people is that we are to live here, but we are not to make our hope belong here. To hope in this world is to hope in something which is going to come crashing down on its own head. But to hope in the Lord is to receive an untouchable joy in the New Jerusalem which God himself will bring down from heaven.

Lastly, we need this reminder because when it comes to the **presence of God**, he is here through his Holy Spirit and in his church, but Satan also has a unique presence here. Look back at what we just read in Revelation 13, the beast was given authority and allowed to exercise it. Now make no mistake, authority as you read in this book is always given. Satan, the beast, the prophet, the Harlot, the horsemen, none of them take authority. God gives it. God is in control.

But do not be deceived, the natural presence of this world is not one which leads you to Jesus. This world does not naturally bring us up, but seeks to bring us down. But praise God we have one who straddles the sea and the land who stand between trial and triumph and speaks to us out of fire and cloud giving us what we need to endure. And praise God that he is also the one who comes back to end it all.

This is where we turn our attention to our final point this morning: **Savor the Savior of the Story.**

Before John gets into these terrible visions, before the course of human history finds its closure he is comforted by a scene in the throne room. Would you go there with me? **Revelation 5:1-10a.**

Now consider how he shows up again, when he comes back a second time and the child taken up into heaven by God comes back to save the woman out of the wilderness: **Revelation 19:11-16.**

The lamb who was slain is the King who will reign. Therefore even when Jesus's witnesses die in chapter 11, even when the world rejoices because it thinks it has killed the church, what happens? Even Jesus's witnesses rise on the third day. Why? Because Jesus did.

Jesus makes it clear in Matthew 24, and again in Revelation 6 that the reason he has not come back yet is because there are more people yet to save, more people for whom he died and the church is given time through trial and suffering to take the message of salvation to them. And as we do it, we will be opposed. We will be persecuted. We will be killed. And as foreign as that sounds to us today it is the reality of many of our brothers and sisters around the globe.

But take heart. For we will conquer. Look at this promise, a promise for all who believe in Jesus in **Revelation 7:9-17.**

This is the hope of the church. To be washed by his blood is to have everything we need to endure. It's to have all the motivation to reach to the nations. This world is not our home, this presence though powerful is not yet perfect, and this people though many is not yet full.

But one day, by the work of the Lamb it will be. Do you remember how our story started in **Genesis 17:3-8?** Gods' people, in God's place, in God's presence.

Read with me the end of it all, for those who repent, for those who endure, for those who are washed: **Revelation 21:1-8, 22-27.**

Church, here it is. Here is the place, the New Jerusalem where nothing unclean will ever enter it again. No more serpents, no more beasts, not more liars, just saints and their king. We will be God's people, his people not in the process of sanctification but in the perfection of it, washed, cleansed, clothed in the righteous works of Jesus forever and ever. No just free from sin, but unable to sin, free to live life in perfect joy and obedience to our God who is present.

In this place, there are no more human under-shepherds, no more comfort of what will come, no more sun, no more night, no more temple. Because our God is there, and his Lamb is our light, and we cannot find shade nor spot without the presence of love, purchased by the stain of Jesus' blood. Near as breath, heavy as love, as eternal as our God.

The Spirit and the Bride say, "Come." And let the one who hears say, "Come." And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who desires take the water of life without price. Amen.