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Intro to Revelation; Letters to the Churches Revelation 1:1-3

It reads like a story book. In the beginning all was peaceful in the kingdom. Peace and tranquillity, calmness, order and unity reigned. The kingdom was perfect, exactly as the king had planned and designed it. The king could communicate freely with His people and they with them. Evil was unknown, no anger, no pain, no hurt feelings, no jealous rage, no destructive behaviors, no murders, no robbery, no selfishness, ...only good and peace. Then the dark and evil one subtly snakes it's way into this perfect kingdom. He incites rebellion and disobedience against the King. The king is forced to be the perfect judge, a curse is imposed...death enters the kingdom, evil brings hurt and pain and damage. For years and years the kingdom is covered in weeds of helplessness. The dark and evil warlord continues to seduce and woo people away from the allegiance to the good and perfect king. The evil one spreads dissension and a rebels heart wherever he can, complacency and lethargy where most suited. He blinds people from the truth. He distorts and perverts and twists all the good gifts the True King desires to give the people. The evil nemesis resorts to any trick possible to harass the Good King and his people. He has tried for years to hold captive, the bride intended to one day marry the crown prince longs to one day be married in the great castle. The evil one whispers into her ear that the good prince really doesn't love her. The evil one whispers into her ear to look around and see all the evil and destruction in the land. If the good King were truly good, if the good king were truly powerful then surely He would do something and act swiftly and strongly at squelching such evil. He whispers until she begins to believe His lies..she begins to even question that He exists. She mulls over in her mind, I guess I haven't ever really seen Him. Why doesn't He seem to do anything about such pain and sadness? The evil one continues to whisper in the brides ear. Psst...All that time spent waiting, saving yourself just for him, in doing service to the king...all those wasted years. They could be better used for

so many other things; make a little more, live more comfortably, live a little, have some fun. Why stick so rigidly to those commands of the King. He just wants to control you and rob all your fun. He is a killjoy. A glory hound. He doesn't want what really best for you. He is in this all for Himself.

Years and years of doubt are whispered in the ear of the bride. Will her prince ever come riding in on His white horse and take her to His castle? Then in a time of great confusion and evil the King moves decisively. The king's best option now is to send his very own son, the crown prince down into the village. Disguised as a common villager, He tells the good news from the king. He tells the plans that the good King has to save the people from the talon grip of the evil one. However, few villagers are willing to accept and even believe that the one who looks so much like them, a common villager, is indeed the crown prince. Rejected and scorned by many, the prince proves His position to some. His gift of healing, his wisdom in teaching, his love for people is attractive. His authority however is very threatening to those in power. The evil one causes the village leaders to foam with anger and hatred toward the crown prince of the King. Eventually they kill this prince...and think its all done with. Then in an incredibly stroke of brilliance, the crown prince comes back to life, shinning in all the glory and power of His true kingship. As he leaves to return to his father the king, he clearly states that he will return for all those who are loyal to the good King. He will immediately begin preparing a new and perfect kingdom for all those who love the king to live in.

The evil ones defeat seems imminent...but still years and years pass by. The evil one steps up his deception knowing that time is short. The good king wishing that all people have the opportunity to join the good side and affirm their allegiance to the king waits patiently. Then quickly and decisively it comes. The prince carries away the bride to his castle and returns to kill the evil dragon and all those from the evil side, banished from the good kingdom forever. At the castle the bride is joined in marriage to the crown prince and they live happily ever after.

From Genesis to Revelation. The Bible from beginning to end in story book form. In Genesis the first rebellion. Revelation to the final rebellion. In Genesis sin enters the world. In Revelation sin exits the

world. Genesis the curse is imposed. Revelation the curse is banished. In Genesis, death begins. In Revelation, death itself is cast into the lake of fire. In Genesis man is sent out of the perfect garden of Eden. In Revelation, redeemed man is returned to the restful and perfect garden of God. In Genesis we read of the first creation and in Revelation we see the new creation. In Genesis sorrow and pain come into the world. In Revelation sorrow is no more. In Genesis we read of the dawn of Satan and his activities while in Revelation we read of his end, defeat and doom. The triumph of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Triumph of the Prince of peace. The ultimate victory of the very Son of the king of the universe.

It is the overriding theme of the book of Revelation. The victorious return of Jesus Christ to defeat in finality all of His enemies and establish his righteous rule and kingdom. The age long conflict and struggle of good and evil comes to a cataclysmic head with all the power and might of hell against Christ. It describes the last attempt by the forces of darkness to try and take over Christ's throne. Their attempt will not succeed. It will end in utter defeat for the forces of darkness and incredible victory by Jesus Christ and righteous ones.

Revelation is the only book in the New Testament written in the prophetic style. There are many other prophecies mentioned all throughout the New Testament, but only here is almost the entire book devoted to the things which will be. The book is appropriately placed in the Bible's book order as the last one. It tells the ending. If you want to find out how life on this world as we know it turns out. If you are one to know who wins in the end. Revelation is the place to flip to.

I find it very interesting that the first three chapters of this prophetic book of Revelation, deal with preparation of the Bride. Getting the bride of Christ, the church, getting us clean and beautiful, ready at any moment for when the Prince of Peace will come and rescue us and take us home to His castle in heaven. That will be the focus for our series in the first three chapters of Revelation. Getting the bride, the church, ready for the return of the prince Jesus. The prince could return at any moment..are you ready?

Turn with me in your Bible all the way to the back of your Bible to the book of Revelation. Some of us may have to blow some dust off of the pages. Betty Jane has recently led a group through Revelation and

several years ago the youth group went through the book, but it probably been awhile for some of the rest of us. It has been a book many approach with fear and confusion at the prophetic language described. But, the reason for the Apostle John in writing this book was not to conceal truth but to convey truth. Not to hide or mystify but the help and clarify. Revelation was written for our encouragement and challenge that by reading and responding well to the truths within we might be blessed as we look forward to the appearing of our Savior Jesus Christ.

The book itself is entitled the Apocalypse. Apocalupsis is the Greek word that simply means; revelation, revealing, unveiling, uncovering. Jesus Christ reveals his final victory, his final appearance, his final judgment. Jesus Christ returns to set all wrongs right, to restore the world to His perfect and righteous rule. The Word Apocalypse or unveiling is something we who are believers look forward to in its fulfillment. We long for the moment when Christ returns, and all earth's wrongs are made right as He sets up His perfect kingdom. But...if you are not a part of God's kingdom, the word Apocalypse is a terrifying word. Apocalypse means terror for those who do not know and love Christ...because of the judgment, the wrongs that will be exposed when Christ returns. That is why the word apocalypse finds it's way into horror sci-fi movies and book titles, to infer the cataclysmic destruction of the world. For some Christ's appearing, Christ's ultimate unveiling of Himself, Christ's apocalypse will be fearsome, for other's it will mean triumphant victory.

This unveiling of what is to come, is not directly from the mind of the Apostle John as some translations have titled it the Revelation of John, but it is a revelation directly from Jesus Christ. A better title for the book would be the very first sentence. The Revelation of Jesus Christ. Christ reveals to mankind a glimpse of the final plan, the final victory over sin and death itself. Read with me the first three verses on Revelation 1 as a note of introduction to our study in Revelation, the letters to the churches. (READ)

This is a revelation, a unveiling of truth from Jesus Christ. Given to the son from the Father. Given to John the Apostle via an angelic messenger so that John could write it down for all of God's servants, all of his many doulos on the earth.

The purpose of the book is to show or reveal the thing which must shortly take place. The word phrase shortly is "en taXeи" in the Greek. We derive our English word Tachometer from it. But here it does not mean to count the revolutions of engine speed. Here shortly or soon does not necessarily mean these things will happen immediately. It means that when the unveiling of events come, they will come suddenly, in rapid succession.

This revealing message whose events will occur in rapid succession was all communicated to the Apostle John. John wrote several other books in the Bible including the gospel of John and the letters. I, II and III John. John was one of the sons of Zebedee who were nicknamed the sons of thunder. He was probably a follower of John the baptizer prior to Christ's ministry on earth. John became one of the inner circle of three very close to Jesus. He was referred to as the one loved by Jesus. There was a tender and close relationship there.

We read in v. 9 that John has been exiled to the Island of Patmos by the Roman Emperor Domitian. Patmos is an island about 4 miles long and 3 miles wide, 40 miles off the coast of modern day Turkey in the Aegean Sea. This was a common place for the Roman government to exile the hard core criminals and political prisoners. The early church leader Irenaeus tells us that John spent 1-1/2 years on the island and was released in 96AD after the emperor Domitian was replaced by Nerva. So the book of Revelation was probably the last book of the Bible written. Penned by John or his secretary sometime during his exile in AD 95-96.

The Roman emperor Domitian was a terrible persecutor of the church as he saw it, and Jesus Christ, to be a great threat to his power. While previous Emperor's largely opposed Christianity as a political threat, Domitian blatantly opposed the Jesus behind Christianity. Domitian was the first Emperor to demand worship of himself while he was still living. Above his throne in Rome he had inscribed all the attributes given previously only to God Almighty. The largest self proclaimed Title above his throne stated "Kings of Kings and Lord of Lord." John in exile, writing inspired scripture in the book of Revelation, went after that sucker with a vengeance. He affirmed the deity of Jesus Christ and that there is only One who is worthy to bear the holy title, "King of Kings and Lord of Lords."

Verse 2. John was a witness. The Greek *Martoreo*. We get the English word *Martyr*. One who sacrifices and witnesses the truth of Jesus Christ. All that he saw...he passed on the living testimony he saw with his very eyes and recorded in John's gospel account. The Gospels instituted Christ's ministry. The Epistles interpreted and applied Christ's ministry and here in Revelation is the consummation of Christ's ministry. Verse 3 in Revelation chapter 1. Blessed is he who reads this book. This is the only book in the Bible that specifically pronounces a blessing to those who read it. Coupled with that blessing is a curse in the final chapter for all who would distort or detract from its message. Revelation is so prone to distortion. There is a blessing for those who read it. Hear it and heed the words of prophesy. Why? Read the final line in verse 3. FOR...the time is near.

I think what prophesy can do for us is regain an eternal perspective on Christ's overall plan and eventual victory. I need to read the final pages. Sometimes I just need that encouragement that even though it looks like evil is increasing and continuing to overrun our world...we can know who wins in the end. We know the rest of the story. The central idea of this book is "In the end..Christ and His people will win. He is coming and will make things right." There is no guarantee when the events described will take place. But there are signs of the times that point us to say. We are getting close. The Bible likens it to a woman in labor, the time when the pains get increasingly intense, most painful..is the time just before the appearing of the child, the blessing...which makes all that pain worthwhile. Everyday brings us just that much closer to the end, the rapture and home going of His bride the church.

We the church need to be ready..for the time is near. The book of Revelation includes its own outline in the 19th verse of chapter one. Section one; The things which you have seen in chapter one. Section two; Things which are in chapters 2 and 3. And the things which will be in chapters 4-22. We will be studying the first two sections of Revelations. The things which you have seen. and the Things which are. There is a great practical message to us, part of the church, the bride of Christ who desires to be prepared for his imminent, soon return.

After an unusual prologue in verses 1-3 prior to the usual salutation of a letter. John paints in vivid word pictures the glory of Jesus Christ and the unveiling of His victorious plan. Then John write to the bride of Christ found in seven different churches in Asia Minor, or modern day Turkey. They are listed in chapters 2 and 3 in geographically clockwise order. They were real churches struggling with real problems and enduring real persecution, at the time John wrote this book. The vision revealed to John regarding these churches have great relevance for the church today. Each vision contains a command, a commendation or condemnation. A correction and a challenge. These words were written to better prepare Christ believers so that they be the overcomers that would honor God. These first few verses are really a manual overcoming in victory. Postionally all believers in Christ are overcomers, but practically we can overcome in living a victorious life right now. We can be better, more prepared brides of Christ. Because we can be assured of Christ's ultimate triumph believers are called to persevere strong to the very end, even in the face of dark times. These letters are a challenge to complacent churches to stop compromising with the world. It gives us a spiritual perspective on end time events that will have relevance to all Christians.

A day will be coming soon when all hell itself will break loose in battle against God's people and Jesus Christ Himself. We can be victorious, in Christ..but if we want to get in on that victory we must be aligned with the Prince of Peace. Revelation 12:11 is a key verse to understanding the book. READ. "They overcame him because of the blood of the Lamb" the word of their testimony and they did not love their life even to death." First, if you desire to be an overcomer, you must first join the right side. That joining only comes by the blood of the lamb. You must be born again into Christ and new spiritual life through the blood of Christ, the lamb. Belief that the death Christ died on the cross actually did something for me, paid my sin debt and set me free. That is the first step for the overcomer. Secondly, by the word of your testimony. Paul said to Timothy, "I am not ashamed of the gospel for it is the power of God to salvation." Are you willing to stand up victorious for Christ no matter the cost? The overcomer loves Christ even more than his own life. Very few of us will probably called to die for Christ because we boldly

proclaim the name of Jesus, next month, next year. But we may sometime in the future. The gunman of Columbine High School was aiming for Christians. Several witnesses recalled them asking known Christians if they love Jesus and when they said yes, they blew them away. What would you have said in that library? Could you state boldly. I love Jesus. I want to follow Him no matter what and you should too? Sometimes we struggle with that don't we. Not in the big things, but in the little things we just love our lives too much. It is the little sacrifices everyday that we stumble over. Are you ready? Have you joined God's team? Have you put your faith in Jesus Christ. Now is always the right time to say yes to God. If we truly believe Christ is coming back to take His bride home...it ought to change the way we live. Apocalypse...now? Is that a word of terror or triumph..for you.