

Lesson #1: See Who Is Among You!

Seven Lessons of Revelation

Revelation 1:9-20

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Have you ever walked at night through a park with a naturalist? Diane, Joe and I did that a few years ago in Arkansas. As we listened to the park ranger, our ears and eyes opened to the world that surrounded us. We had not heard. We had not seen. We were oblivious to so much life and movement.

Like that naturalist, God gave John a vision to open our ears and eyes. As we open the book of Revelation together and spend seven Sundays pondering seven lessons of Revelation, God will help you see and hear your world differently. Your heart will be refreshed, and you will walk in this world differently.

The book begins:

The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place. (Revelation 1:1, NIV)

In the book of Revelation, God gives servants of Jesus Christ two pictures. The first is a picture of Jesus himself. The second is vision of what must happen. The word *must* means that nothing will prevent what is disclosed from coming to pass. No prayer will prevent what's been revealed. Instead, we are being equipped to respond. Just listen to verse three.

Blessed is the one who reads the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it, because the time is near.
(Revelation 1:3, NIV)

People are blessed in hearing and heeding Revelation because the time is near. Since almost 2000 years have passed, you might wonder, how could the time be near. The word we translate time is *kairos*.

The New Testament uses two Greek words for time, *kairos* and *chronos*. *Kairos* speaks of the quality of time and *chronos* addresses the duration of time. We have so much *chronos* before Mom gets home. Farmers check their *chronos* calendars, but they won't start harvesting until they see signs that it is the *kairos*, the right time, the season.

The Apostle John was not saying that only a short duration of time will expire before these things in Revelation take place. No, he was saying that the season is at hand. It is time now for these things to unfold. We are now in the season when what John saw is unfolding. Through his writing, he is taking our hand as a naturalist and walking us through this new season..

As we read Revelation and draw seven memorable lessons from this book, we'll understand the time we are in. Events won't throw us. We'll have courage, and we'll also have counsel to live and make a difference. The Spirit of God moved in having John see and share this. That same Spirit is now directing our attention so that you will prevail.

For those of you using our Bible-reading guide, I would recommend that you read the entire first chapter of Revelation today. Then next week, read chapter two on Saturday and chapter three on Sunday. That is all you need to do until August.

The first lesson of Revelation is so vital and foundational. In fact, it is uplifting. Even as I introduced us to the book of Revelation, let me set the table for this amazing lesson. Actually, John does that himself. He points to the book of Daniel..

Daniel lived in captivity. He served the Persian Empire. One night as he slept, he had a dream and visions passed through his mind. In Daniel 7, we read:

As I looked, “thrones were set in place, and the Ancient of Days took his seat. His clothing was as white as snow; the hair of his head was white like wool. His throne was flaming with fire, and its wheels were all ablaze. A river of fire was flowing, coming out from before him. Thousands upon thousands attended him; ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him... (Daniel 7:9-10, NIV)

Does it look like a wimp is in control of the world? God is awesome in power. Daniel continued to write:

...and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all peoples, nations and men of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed. (Daniel 7: 13-14, NIV)

Daniel gives us a picture of our Lord Jesus coming with the clouds of heaven, receiving authority, glory and ruling power. He dreams this hundreds of years before Jesus is born.

John knows this vision; and before he reports his awesome vision, he writes:

Grace and peace to you... from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth.... Look, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him... Revelation 1:4-5, 7 NIV)

John sees and knows the son of man that Daniel saw, the son of man who rules the kings of the earth, who every government must answer to, who comes with the clouds of heaven and judges the nations! If you confine your vision of Jesus Christ to the weak, inactive caricature of him in our culture, you're badly misled.

Now while John sings, prays and worships, he begins to lose sense of his surroundings. He hears a voice and turns to face it. There are seven golden lamp stands and among them a person. He looks like this.

A robe reaches down to his feet. Gold sash is around his chest. His head and hair are white like wool and as bright as snow. He looks a lot like the Ancient of Days in Daniel 7. His eyes are blazing fire. His feet glow like bronze in a furnace. His voice carries the power of

cascading waters, and his face shines with the brilliance of the sun. He holds in his hands seven stars, and as he opens his mouth to speak, a sharp, double-edged sword comes out.

When John sees this man, he falls at his feet as if he were dead. There was no power in any limb or muscle. He couldn't move. He just lay there limp. When John was with Jesus at the last supper, he rested his head on the Lord (John 21:20).

Jesus somehow puts his right hand on his old disciple John, and Jesus speaks:

Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades. (Revelation 1:17-18, NIV)

John who as a youth walked with Jesus throughout Galilee, who at the last supper rested his head on the Lord (John 21:20), who from the cross was given the assignment to care for Jesus' mother, now as an elderly man sees his friend as the reigning Lord of heaven and earth.

Wow!

John is not the same either. Once a youthful disciple, he now is an elderly, exiled apostle leading the Asian churches. He discovered that Lord's Day, Jesus as reigning Lord, was walking among those churches. He discovered that the churches were emitting light. The churches were lamp stands for their communities. They were light and hope for those peoples. Have you ever wondered about your role with the many who don't assemble with the followers of Jesus Christ? Where is their light? Where is their hope? It burns and fires with you as Christ's assembly. John learned, despite all the problems, difficulties, challenges and suffering, Jesus walked among the churches as a determined ruler. He discovered there were angels over those churches. They lived in Jesus' hand, to perform his will.

He discovered more. He need not fear the kings of the earth, or any opponent. He need not fear for his life or future. His Lord calls the shots.

What got me in John's vision was Jesus' eyes. Eyes show us a lot. Sometimes, eyes are lifeless and glazed. Some dance with humor. Some weep, some glow, some glower. Eyes that blaze are different. They show determination and zeal. In a contest, they are winner's eyes. Now they remind me of a promise of God, "***The zeal of the Lord Almighty will accomplish this***" (2 Kings 19:31, Isaiah 9:7, 37:32). Daniel saw a throne of fire and John saw the eyes of Jesus ablaze..

As many of you know, I was sick this past week including two visits to St. Mary's Hospital. I had intense bouts with pain. It was ugly and it was hard for my family to see. However, my pain was short and could be stopped. I remember visiting a woman whose body was giving her terrific pain, my heart broke. She said to me, "*I frequently call to Jesus. I frequently ask him during the day to help me.*" I remembered those blazing eyes of Jesus, and suddenly I knew what made them fiery. Her cry made those eyes blaze. Daniel's cries to God and John's cries to God have that effect as well. Do you realize why God's throne is on fire? God is love. His life burns with passion for what and who he made. The flames are for you. Jesus standing in God's presence is affected by that fire. His eyes blaze with that passion. His bronzed feet glow from standing in that fire at the throne. He moves in passion for you and his world.

The first lesson from the book of Revelation is to see who is among you. Gaze into this vision and see who stands among you. Do you suffer? Watch his eyes blaze. Are you alone? See his feet glow. Your redemption is near. Be assured. Are you burnt out and discouraged? Are you exhausted and depressed? Then get closer to the throne. You'll catch fire! Nothing can separate you from the love of God in Christ Jesus. Draw close and you'll break again into flames!