

CHAPTER 1

"Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written in it; for the time is near" (1:3).

Chapter 1 of the Book of Revelation begins with the words, "*The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show His servants--things which must shortly take place. And He sent and signified it by His angel to His servant John.*" This revelation is not merely a communicated message. Rather, it is the "coming, appearing, manifestation, uncovering, presentation" of Jesus Christ in person. Turning to Seiss, we read,

There is every reason for the conclusion that the great theme and subject of this Book is the Coming of Christ, the Apocalypse of Himself, His own personal manifestation and unveiling in the scenes and administrations of the great Day of the Lord. When men speak of "the *death* of Jesus Christ," their language inevitably conveys the idea that it is Christ who experiences the death affirmed; and so when the Holy Ghost speaks of "*The Apocalypse* of Jesus Christ," by the same necessity of language the only admissible idea is that it is Christ who experiences or undergoes the Apocalypse affirmed. . . . A tremendous Revelation is therefore brought before men in this Book. And if anyone would fully profit by it, let him bear with him this one vital and all-conditioning thought, that he is here dealing with Christ's own infallible foreshowings of the style, manner, and succession of events in which the Apocalypse awarded to Him by the Father is to take place. He who fails in this misses the kernel of the Book, and must fail of the blessing of those who read, hear, and observe the things which are written in it.¹

Henry Frost agrees:

The first and chief purpose of the Book of the Revelation is to reveal Jesus Christ, particularly as the One who was, who is and who is to come. This is stated in the divinely given title (1:1), in the two declarations made by John and Christ (1:4, 8) and in the explanation concerning prophecy given to John (19:10). To miss, in studying the book, this chief purpose, however much one may gain otherwise, is to lose that which is essential; not to miss it, is to make the great discovery and to secure the supreme blessing (1:1-3; 22:6-9).²

One more quote, this from James Buswell:

John's title to the book is *The Apocalypse of Jesus Christ*. The book is not to be understood primarily as a revelation *about* Jesus Christ, but it refers to a future time in which Christ will appear, unveiled to human gaze. John explains this in verse 7 of Chapter 1, "See, He is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him; and all the tribes of the land will mourn because of Him. Amen." The apocalypse, as a time in which every eye will see Him, is referred to consistently by other New Testament writers. See I Corinthians

1 Seiss, *Lectures*, Vol. II, pp. vi-vii.

2 Henry W. Frost, *Matthew Twenty-Four and the Revelation*, pg. 138.

1:7; II Thessalonians 1:7; I Peter 1:7,13. It is clear that John intended the title of his book to be understood as signifying the visible glorious Second Coming of Jesus Christ to this earth.³

John Cumming gives more detail on these verses quoted above (by Buswell) in his *Apocalyptic Sketches*.⁴

Holding the position that the church will go through the tribulation (more on this in chapter 4), it would seem likely that we should find the following groups in the Book of Revelation: (1) present-day saints (why else would there be a special blessing for reading it?), (2) dead saints (who are awaiting the redemption of their bodies), (3) elect Jews (since Paul tells us of a believing remnant), (4) unbelieving Jews (with whom Antichrist fosters peace), and (5) unbelieving Gentiles (since the earth, naturally, is still populated).

Verse 7 states, "*Behold, He is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see Him, even they who pierced Him. And all the tribes of the earth will mourn because of Him.*" Quoting Samuel Tregelles, "No supposition that the Church is found in resurrection glory prior to such a coming can be admitted as capable of reconciliation with this opening expectation."⁵

Our Lord, in His discourse on the Mount of Olives, in speaking of what should be "immediately after the tribulation of those days," specifies the darkening of the sun and moon, etc.: "*And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven, and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory*" (Matt. 24:30). This, then, was the expectation of the Church declared by the Lord Himself before He suffered, of which the apostles were again reminded when He had been taken up from them into heaven. When our Lord stood before the High Priest, and when he said to Him "I adjure thee, by the living God, that You tell us whether You are the Christ the Son of God, Jesus said to him, You have said. Nevertheless, I say to you, hereafter you shall see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven" (Matt. 26:64). Who is there that cannot see how plain is the reference to the manifestation of the glory of Christ?⁶

When John spoke of Jesus coming again in the clouds, we have every reason to believe that he meant exactly that--Jesus would be coming again only once more in that manner. Until that time, he is seated at the right hand of the Father: "*But to which of the angels has He ever said: 'Sit at My right hand, till I make Your enemies Your footstool?'*" (Ps. 110:1; Heb. 1:13).

Christ is now at the right hand of the Majesty on high, appearing in the presence of God as our interceding high priest, ever living to make intercession for us. There he will remain, *in the same mediatorial office, until the finishing up of the mediatorial dispensation*; for the heavens must receive him UNTIL THE TIMES OF RESTITUTION OF ALL THINGS WHICH GOD HATH SPOKEN BY THE MOUTH OF ALL HIS

3 James Oliver Buswell, *A Systematic Theology of the Christian Religion*, vol. 2, pg. 427.

4 John Cumming, *Apocalyptic Sketches, Lectures on the Book of Revelation*, pp. 14,15.

5 Samuel P. Tregelles, *The Hope of Christ's Second Coming*, pg. 69.

6 *Ibid.*, pp. 15-16.

Tenney calls verse seven of Revelation the motto or keynote:

This verse makes the return of Christ the theme of Revelation and asserts its universality because it shall be witnessed by all men without regard to time or space. "Every eye" transcends geographical limitations; "they that pierced him" carries back in time to the day of crucifixion; "all the tribes of the earth" means that no race or people is excluded. The one great universal event that will focus all places, times, races, and expectation is the return of the Lord . . .

The intention of Revelation is to concentrate in its visions the heart of the prophetic teaching of the Old Testament and to bring it to its climax in Christ.⁸

Before proceeding to chapter 2, let all those reading, especially unbelievers, take these words of Manton Eastburn to heart:

You perceive, my hearers, that to this ascended Mediator it is said that every creature shall be subjected; and shall acknowledge, either willingly or by constraint, his authority and power. It appears, then, that, in this kingdom which the Lord Jesus Christ governs, there are two descriptions of subjects. In the one class are unbelievers--and worldly men--and the impenitent spirits of darkness; and these, when the dispensation of grace shall have terminated, will be consigned to a state where they shall be compelled to submit, and, as they bow the knee, shall tremble. In the other class are those rejoicing and happy persons, who, feeling the resistless claims upon their obedience possessed by this once lowly, but now exalted Redeemer, freely yield him their hearts; adore, love, and serve him, as their divine Saviour from the guilt of sin; and, conscious that they are "not their own," but are "bought with a price," take Christ Jesus as the delight of their souls, and their portion forever.

And now, my beloved brethren, permit me to inquire, In which of these two ranks of subjects to the Prince of peace, are you, at this present moment, to be found? What is the spirit in which you are living, in reference to that blessed Being, who, when the fulness of time was come, submitted to the penalty of transgression; and then rose to that seat of glory, where he now reigns as the Sovereign of all? Are you among those heartless and impenitent spirits, who are in no other sense the subjects of Christ, than as being enemies, who, in the appointed hour of retribution, must be eternally "put under his feet?" Are you passing your days in thankless forgetfulness of all that he has done, and all that he has suffered? Are you refusing to admit his just authority over your hearts and lives; drowning the remembrance of redeeming love amidst the vanities of the world; and proclaiming aloud, in every part of your career of practical infidelity, "We will not have this man to reign over us?"

⁷ D. D. Buck, *An Original Harmony and Exposition of the Twenty-Fourth Chapter of Matthew, and the Parallel Passages in Mark and Luke*, pg. 426.

⁸ Tenney, *Interpreting Revelation*, pg. 48.

Oh, rash and thoughtless spirits! Carry forward your reflections to that day, when this once crucified, but now ascended Jesus, shall appear in the glory of the Father, with his holy angels, to execute summary "vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ." It is then that this exaltation of the Saviour to his throne of power, which you have been now considering, shall be disclosed in all its grandeur; but, at the same time, shall be full of horror and bitterness for you. How shall you feel within yourselves, in that desolate hour, to be among those for whom is reserved, not the welcoming smile of the Redeemer in his judicial character, but his frown of righteous indignation?

Now, then, in the season of grace, pardon, and mercy, yield up your hearts to the Author of your redemption, in a free and willing obedience: and defer not the moment of submission until that final scene, when they that have not voluntarily accepted his love, shall be constrained to acknowledge him amidst "chains of darkness." Seated upon his station of authority, he shall cast his eye upon those, who, while life and opportunity lasted, refused to be his obedient disciples, and to conform themselves to his will: and, with a voice, at whose terrors they will call upon the rocks to fall upon them, and the mountains to cover them, he shall utter forth the command; "Those mine enemies, which would not that I should reign over them, bring them hither, and slay them before me."⁹

9 Manton Eastburn, *Lectures, Explanatory and Practical, on the Epistle of St. Paul to the Philippians*, pp. 95-97.