

The Apocalypse

A Series of Special Lectures on the Revelation of Jesus Christ

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Lecture First

THE SPIRIT IN WHICH THE SUBJECT IS TAKEN UP--THE PREFACE--THE SCOPE AND CONTENTS OF THE BOOK--WHAT THE REVELATION OF CHRIST IS--JOHN IN THE DAY OF THE LORD--THE DERIVATION OF THE APOCALYPSE--THE VALUE AND PRECIOUSNESS OF THIS BOOK--OUR SPECIAL STUDY DEMANDED

Rev. Chap. 1:1-3 (Revised Text):

The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, to show unto his servants that which must come to pass speedily; and he signified [it] sending by his angel to his servant John; who attested the word of God, and the testimony of Jesus Christ, what things soever he saw. Blessed he who reads, and those who hear the words of the prophecy, and observe the things which are written in it; for the time [is] near.

It has been upon my mind and in my heart for a long time to deliver a series of special discourses upon this remarkable portion of the Holy Scriptures. This is not from a conceit of superior wisdom or spiritual gifts, nor with the vain ambition of making all mysteries plain, nor yet out of mere curious desire to pry into the things of the future. But it is out of solemn reverence for all that God has caused to be written for our learning, with a view conscientiously to declare the whole counsel of God, and with an earnest desire to secure for myself and those who hear me that special benediction which is pronounced upon them who read, hear, and keep what is written in this prophecy.

I have delayed the commencement of this work till now partly on account of the bodily infirmities under which I have labored for the past two years, and partly because I desired first to qualify myself better by ampler investigation and by a more thorough mastery of the difficulties which have hindered the success of other attempts to explain this book. And for the same reasons I am unable, even now, to promise the continuation of these discourses except at irregular intervals. So far, however, as God shall give me strength, I shall pursue them to their end.

I am also very sure, as God has promised his Spirit to them who ask him and directed those who lack wisdom to seek for it at his hands and pronounced all inspired writings to be "for our learning" and comfort, that it will be profitable for all of us, in humble dependence upon Divine grace and guidance, carefully to review what this book was meant to teach.

And may I not ask you to give me your attention as I proceed with these expositions, and to unite with me in earnestly invoking God's helpful illuminations, that we may rightly understand his solemn message to his people.

The words which I have announced for our present consideration give us the Divine Preface or superscription to this book. They are meant to advise the reader as to that with which he is about to deal, and to prepare him to appreciate what is to follow. They relate to three leading points:

I. THE SUBJECT AND CONTENTS OF THE BOOK
II. ITS DERIVATION AND AUTHORSHIP
III. ITS VALUE AND PRECIOUSNESS

Let us look briefly at these several particulars.

I. *The subject and contents of the book.*

What concerns the subject and contents of this book I find for the most part in the name which it gives itself. It is the common rule with Scripture names to express the substance of the things to which they are applied. The name of God expresses what God is; so the names of the Lord Jesus Christ and all the leading names found in the Bible. Even those which the Church has given are often wonderfully expressive and significant. *Genesis* is the generation of things; *Exodus*, the going forth from bondage; *The Gospel*, the very heart and substance of all God's gracious communications--the good news. And when God himself designates this book *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, we may rest assured that it is the very substance and kernel of the book that is expressed in this title.

What, then, are we to understand by "*The Apocalypse of Jesus Christ?*" There are certain books (adopted and held sacred by the Church of Rome, which we, however, receive only as human productions), which have a name somewhat similar to this in sound. You find them in some Bibles between the Old and New Testaments, bearing the name of *Apocrypha*. But *Apocrypha* is just the opposite of *Apocalypse*. *Apocrypha* means something that is concealed, not set forth, not authentic. *Apocalypse* means something revealed, disclosed, manifested, shown. The verb ἀποχάλυπτω means *to reveal, to make manifest, to uncover to view*. The noun ἀποχάλυψις means *a revelation, a disclosure, an appearing, a making manifest*. The Apocalypse, or Revelation of Jesus Christ, must therefore be the revealment, manifestation, appearing of Jesus Christ.

Some accept the words as if they were meant to express the revealment of the Revelation. This I take to be a mistake, and a vital mistake, as regards any right interpretation of this book. It is not the Apocalypse which is the subject of the disclosure. This book is not the Apocalypse of the Apocalypse, but the THE APOCALYPSE OF JESUS CHRIST.

And this is the key to the whole book. It is a book of which Christ is the great subject and center, particularly in that period of his administrations and glory designated as the day of his uncovering, the day of his appearing. It is not a mere prediction of divine judgments upon the wicked and of the final triumph of the righteous made known *by* Christ, but a book of the revelation *of* Christ in his own person, offices, and future administrations when he shall be *seen* coming from heaven, as he was once seen going into heaven. If "*The Revelation of Jesus Christ*" meant nothing more than certain communications made known by Christ, I can see no significance or propriety in affixing this title to this book any more than to any other books of holy Scripture. Are they not all alike the revelation of Jesus Christ in this sense? Does not Peter say of the inspired writers in general that they were moved by the Spirit of Christ which was in them? Why then single out this particular book as "*The Revelation of Jesus Christ*" when it is no more the gift of Jesus than any other inspired book? Besides, it would be particularly strange that this book should be so specially designated "*The Revelation of Jesus Christ*" in the sense of revelation *by* Christ when the book itself declares that it was not received from Christ but from *an angel* or messenger of Christ.

These considerations alone ought to satisfy us that there is something more distinctive and characteristic in this title than is embraced in its ordinary acceptation. For my own part I am perfectly convinced, from a review of the places in which the word occurs in the New Testament as well as from all the contents of this particular part of it, that *The Apocalypse*, or Revelation of Jesus Christ, means Jesus Christ *revealed* and uncovered to mortal view, and not merely Jesus Christ *revealing* and making known hidden things to be recorded for our learning. Let me refer to a few passages bearing upon the case.

Paul, in his first letter to the Corinthians (1:7), speaks of them as enriched in every spiritual gift, confirmed in the testimony of Christ, and "waiting for *the Apocalypse* (την αποχάλυψιν) *the coming* of our Lord Jesus Christ." The original word here is exactly the same as that in the text, the structure of the sentence is also much the same, but no one mistakes its meaning for a moment. All agree that it refers to Christ in his revelation from heaven, when he shall come in the clouds with power and great glory. And if such is its unmistakable meaning here, why not take it in the same sense in the text? So in Thessalonians (1:6-10) he refers his readers to a time of rest, "when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven (εν τη αποχάλυψει του Κυριου, literally, *at the Apocalypse of the Lord*), with his mighty angels, in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them who know not God;--*when he shall come* to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them who believe." No one misunderstands what *The Apocalypse of the Lord Jesus* is in this passage. Paul himself explains it to be His *coming*, in just such administrations as were shown John in this book.

So again in 1 Peter 1:7, where that apostle speaks of his brethren as "in heaviness through manifold temptations," that the trial of their faith, "being much more precious than of gold that perishes, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honor and glory *at the Apocalypse* (εν αποχάλυψει), *appearing* of Jesus Christ." Also in verse 13, where he exhorts his readers to "be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto them *at the Apocalypse* (εν αποχάλυψει), *the revelation* of Jesus Christ."

All understand the reference in these passages to be to the coming of Christ in the glory of his second advent, when "every eye shall see him, and they who pierced him." We all feel that it would be a willful perversion of the word of God to make *the Apocalypse of Christ* in these passages mean anything else than his *personal appearing*. And the same is the fixed meaning of this phrase in every other passage in which it is used.

Even in that from Galatians (1:12), which might seem to assign it a different signification, the idea is not simply that of a revealer, but of one revealed by personal manifestation. Paul there avers that the gospel he preached was not of man: "for," says he, "I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by *the Apocalypse* (δι αποχάλυψεως) *through the revelation* of Jesus Christ;" that is, by Christ's *personal appearance* to him, as the succeeding verses show, for he straightway proceeds to narrate that marvelous affair on the way to Damascus.

What that *Apocalypse* was, he on various occasions described. Before Agrippa he said: "As I went to Damascus with authority and commission from the chief priests, at midday, O King, I saw in the way a light from heaven, above the brightness of the sun, shining round about me and them who journeyed with me. And when we were all fallen to the earth, I heard a voice speaking unto me, and saying in a Hebrew tongue, Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me? And I said, Who art thou, Lord? And he said, I am Jesus whom you persecute, but rise, and stand upon your feet; for I have *appeared unto you* for this purpose, to make you a minister and a witness both of these

things which you *have seen*, and of those things in which *I will appear unto you.*" Hence his appeal in vindication of his apostleship. "Am I not an apostle? Have I not *seen Jesus Christ* our Lord?" (1 Cor. 9:1.) All this shows, as conclusively as may be, that the Apocalypse of Christ, through which he obtained at once his office and his text, was a *personal appearance*, as every real Apocalypse predicated of a person must be.

With the meaning of this word thus established, what can that book be, of which it is descriptive, but an account of the revelation of Christ in his personal forthcoming from his present invisible estate to receive his Bride, judge the wicked, and set up his eternal kingdom on the earth.

With this also agrees the statement of John as to the circumstances under which he came to the knowledge of the things which he narrates. He says he "*was in Spirit in the Lord's day*," in which he beheld what he afterwards wrote. What is meant by this *Lord's day*? Some answer, *Sunday*--the first day of the week; but I am not satisfied with this explanation. Sunday belongs indeed to the Lord, but the Scriptures nowhere call it "*the Lord's day.*" None of the Christian writings for 100 years after Christ ever call it "*the Lord's day.*"

But there is a "*Day of the Lord*" largely treated of by prophets, apostles, and fathers, the meaning of which is abundantly clear and settled. It is that day in which, Isaiah says, men shall hide in the rocks for fear of the Lord, and for the glory of his majesty; the day which Joel describes as the day of destruction from the Almighty when the Lord shall roar out of Zion and utter his voice from Jerusalem, and the heavens and the earth shall shake. It is the day to which the closing chapter of Malachi refers as the day that shall burn as an oven, and in which the Sun of Righteousness shall arise with healing in his wings; the day which Paul proclaimed from Mars' Hill as that in which God will judge the world, concerning which he so earnestly exhorted the Thessalonians, and which was not to come until after a great apostasy from the faith and the ripening of the wicked for destruction. It is the day in which Peter says the heavens shall be changed, the elements melt, the earth burn, and all present orders of things give way to new heavens and a new earth; even "*the day for which all others days were made.*" And in that day, I understand John to say, he in some sense was. In the mysteries of prophetic rapport, which the Scriptures describe as "*in Spirit*," (and which Paul declared inexplicable), John was caught out of himself and out of his proper place and time, and stationed amid the stupendous scenes of the great day of God, and made to see the actors in them, and to look upon them transpiring before his eyes that he might write what he saw and give it to the Churches.

This is what I understand by his being "*in Spirit in the Lord's day.*"¹ I can see no essential difference between ἡ Κυριαχὴ ἡμέρα --*the Lord's day*--and ἡ ἡμέρα Κυρίου --*the day of the Lord*. They are simply the two forms for signifying the same relations of the same things.² And if John was thus mystically down among the scenes of the last day and has written only what he says he has written, that is "*things that he saw*," it cannot be otherwise but that in dealing with the contents of this book we are dealing with what relates preeminently to the great Apocalypse

1 And so Wetstein, Züllig, Dr. S.R. Maitland, Dr. Todd, and B.S. Newton.

2 Our English Translators have frequently used both these modes of expressing the genitive case of the same noun, both in Hebrew and Greek. Compare Gen. 28:17 and Gen. 28:22, where "House of God" and "God's house" mean precisely the same. So "Lord's law," Ex. 13:9, and "Law of the Lord," 2 Chr. 12:1; "The Lord's people," 1 Sam. 2:24, and "People of the Lord," Judg. 5:11. In all these instances the Septuagint presents the same forms as the original. So in the New Testament we have the same variety of expression to signify exactly the same relations. In 1 Cor. 10:21, for the same grammatical form in Greek, we have "Lord's table" and "Table of devils;" in 2 Cor. 2:12, "Christ's Gospel" for "Gospel of Christ;" in 2 Pet. 4:18, "Christ's sufferings," and in 1 Pet. 5:1, "Sufferings of Christ." The same may be seen in Rev. 11:15 where the kingdoms of the world become our *Lord's* and his *Christ's* kingdoms.

and Epiphany of our Lord, when he comes to judge the world in righteousness.

And when we come to consider the actual contents of this book, we find them harmonizing exactly with this understanding of its title. It takes as its chief and unmistakable themes what other portions of the Scriptures assign to the great day of the Lord. It is nothing but Apocalypse from beginning to end.

First, we have the Apocalypse of Christ in his relation to the earthly Churches, and his judgment of them. **Second**, the Apocalypse of his relation to the glorified Church, and the marshaling of them for his forthcoming to judge the world. **Third**, the Apocalypse of his relation to the scenes of the judgment as they are manifested on earth under the opening of the seal, the prophesying of the witnesses, and the fall of Babylon. **Fourth**, the Apocalypse of his actual manifestation to the world in the battle of the great day of God Almighty, the establishment of his kingdom, and the investiture of the saints in their future sovereignties. **Fifth**, and finally, the Apocalypse of his relation to the final act of judgment, the destruction of death and the grave, and the introduction of the final estate of a perfected Redemption.

What, indeed, is all this but just what was foretold by all the prophets, by Christ himself, and by all his apostles, as pertaining to THE DAY OF THE LORD? Truly, this book is but the rehearsal, in another and ampler manner, of what all the Scriptures tell us about the last day and the eternal judgment. It is preeminently The Apocalypse and Epiphany of Jesus Christ.³

II. Notice now *its derivation and authorship*.

The text represents it as the gift of God to Christ. It is called "The Apocalypse of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him." Some understand this gift in the sense of *signified, made known to*, and so put themselves under the necessity of explaining how this could be without compromising our Lord's Divinity. This is the first difficulty engendered by the departure from the proper scriptural meaning of the word Apocalypse. People take it as denoting a piece of information, and so represent Christ in a state of ignorance respecting the sublimest results of his mediatorship until after his ascension into heaven. The incongruities of such an acceptance should teach men better. The Apocalypse of Christ is the future reappearance of Christ, clothed with the honors and crowned with the triumphs which are to characterize that forthcoming, and not the mere knowledge or description of these things. And it is that Apocalypse, with all its glorious concomitants and results, that God in covenant has given to Christ; given to him as the crowning reward of his mediatorial work, as the Scriptures everywhere teach.

The promise of the victory of the woman's seed involved this gift. Hannah's song speaks of it as strength and exaltation which the Lord bestows upon his anointed. God's promise to David of a son whose kingdom is to be established forever embraces it. It is the great theme of the second Psalm, where God says to his son, "I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession--thou shalt break them with a rod of iron; thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel." It is in Isaiah's pictures of Messiah, in Jeremiah's prophecies, in the words of the annunciation to Mary, in Christ's own parables, and in

3 "This divine book, let others call it what they please, is an admirable prophecy directed wholly to the times immediate upon the coming of the Lord, in which are announced all the principal matters which shall immediately precede; in which is announced in a manner most magnificent the very coming of the Lord in glory and majesty; in which are announced the admirable and stupendous events which shall accompany that coming and which shall follow it. The title of the book shows well to what it is all directed, what is its argument, and what its determinate end: *The Apocalypse--Revelation of Jesus Christ*." Emmanuel Lacunza, "*Coming of Messiah*," p. 200.

all the writings of the Apostles.

Because Christ "made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men, and humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross, God has highly exalted him and given him a name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." We are told that there was joy set before Christ as the reward of his sufferings and death, and that it was "for the joy that was set before him, he endured the cross, despising the shame." And whatever else may be included in that exaltation or that joy, highest and greatest of all is a future Apocalypse, when "the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, and he shall sit upon the throne of his glory." This, then, is what God "gave to Jesus Christ" in promise when he commenced his work, in its earnest when he raised him from the dead and received him into glory, and *thus gave* what constitutes the substance of this book.

But as the full manifestation of this endowment of Christ is still future (and it is important for his followers to be well informed concerning it), the blessed Savior, after his ascension, took measures to have the facts becomingly communicated to his servants on earth. "And he sent and signified [the same] by his angel." In stating who this angel was, I do not venture to be specific. His own account of himself to John was, "I am your fellow-servant and of your brethren the prophets, and of them who keep the sayings of this book" (Rev. 22:9). From this it has been thought that he was one of the old prophets, or someone standing in a closer relation to Christ and the Church than can be affirmed of angels proper. It is also somewhat confirmative of this view that while the angels are called "ministering spirits" (Heb. 1:14), they are not called "God's servants" nor fellows of the prophets and apostles, as in the case before us. Let it suffice, however, for us to know that it was some heavenly messenger, commissioned by the Lord Jesus in glory, to come and make known these apocalyptic wonders.

Some have found difficulty in tracing the agency of this angel in the book itself. "It is remarkable," says one, "that this angel does not appear as the impartor of the visions until chapter seventeen." This would imply that what God here says about the derivation of this book is only true with respect to a very small fraction of it.

I cannot agree thus to stint and stultify the words of the Almighty. The proper explanation of the office of the angel is to be found in the words *signified* and *saw*. The word rendered *signified*, taken in connection with the fact that the things signified were matters of contemplation by means of the eyes, can denote nothing else than an actual picturing of those scenes--a making of them pass before the view as if they were really transpiring. The office of the angel, then, as I take it, was to form the connection between John's senses or imagination and the things which he was to describe, making to pass in review before him what was only afterwards to take place in fact.

How this was done, I cannot say. But as the devil could take Jesus to a high mountain and show him at one view "all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them," I am sure that it falls sufficiently within the sphere of angelic natures thus to picture things to man; and that when commissioned of the Lord for the purpose, no good angel is lacking in ability to be the instrument in making John *see* whatever visions he describes in this book. And when God himself tells me that what is here set forth *was* thus signified to John, I will persist in referring every one of the

visions, with all that he says he saw and heard, to the intervention of this angelic agent, and believe that in all sacred things we are vastly more dependent upon angelic ministrations than we know or can understand. *"Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?"* (Heb. 1:14).

But there is still another link in the chain of agencies through which the great things of this book have been made known to men. Given of God, sent by Christ, signified by an angel, they were finally recorded by John and by him communicated to the Churches.

Nor need we be in doubt as to which John this is. The text describes him as that "John, who attested the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ." And who is it that the Churches from the beginning have known as the attestor of the *Logos*, or Word of God, and of the testimony which Christ gave, but John the Apostle, the beloved disciple? Turn to the Gospel by John and see whether it be not wholly taken up with exactly these things. The first chapter gives the only full account which the Scriptures contain respecting the pre-existence of the *Logos*, or Word, in the Godhead, and the sameness of that Word with him who was born of Mary, tabernacled in the flesh, and was called Jesus of Nazareth. Was not this bearing "record of the Word of God?"

Do we not find another summary of the same testimony in the first chapter of his first epistle? What else does he mean by the account which he gives of his testimony when he says, "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled of the Word of life, declare we unto you?" Are not both his first and second epistles but arguments, against various evil spirits which were gone abroad, that Jesus is the Word of God, the only Christ, the Son of God, and that all who deny this are liars and Antichrist? And in reference to the great body of his Gospel, does he not himself say, "These things are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing ye might have life through his name?" Does not all this make out for John a particular distinction as the apostle "who attested the Word of God, and the testimony of Jesus Christ?"

Some say that it was not John the Apostle who wrote this book, but another John contemporaneous with the apostle. But it is not yet conclusively proven that there was such a John other than the apostle; and, if there even was, there is not the first tittle of evidence that he had ever distinguished himself for his record concerning the *Logos*, or concerning the testimonies which he himself saw, by which Christ announced himself as the Messiah and the Son of God. I conclude, therefore, upon the solid basis of God's own identification of the author of this book, that it was the Apostle John who wrote it.

Such also has been the conviction of the best portions of the Church from the beginning. For the first two centuries the universal Christian testimony ascribed the Apocalypse to the pen of "that disciple whom Jesus loved." In the third century, out of a desire to get rid of its authority for certain unpalatable doctrines, there were some who ascribed it to Cerinthus, a reputed heretic of the first century. But, "if the common consent of all antiquity is to overturn the heady rashness of well-meaning but inconsiderate men of evil name, then we have the most satisfactory evidence that this book was written by John the Apostle and believed by the Church to be most fully inspired. Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Tertullian, Clemens Alexandrinus, Origen, Jerome, Augustine, and a continued stream of Orthodox authority to our day, from the age next to that in which it was written, concur in the reception, the admiration, and the observance of this book."⁴

4 Irving *in loc.* Some have sought to make a great deal of certain alleged discrepancies between the style and modes of

Such, then, is the exalted source and derivation of this wonderful production. It takes its origin in God's covenant gift to Jesus Christ as the reward of triumph and glory for his humiliation and obedience unto death. It was sent by the loving Savior from heaven, in the charge of an angelic messenger, to be shown to John. And by the hands of "that disciple whom Jesus loved," thus visited in his lonely exile--emblem of that consolation in distress with which this book has ever irradiated the dark and gloomy days of the Church--was traced out in the language of mortals, and delivered over as Christ's last message to his people on earth.

III. A word or two now as to the value and preciousness of this book.

A gift which the Great God thinks a befitting honor and compensation to Christ for all his great deeds of love and condescension, and a thing which the blessed Lord in heaven esteemed of sufficient moment to be made known by a special embassy--which holy angels considered an honor to be permitted to signify and which the tenderness of the disciple of love so conscientiously recorded for the comfort and admonition of the people of God in every age--certainly is not a thing of trifling significance. If we are interested in the story of the manger and the cross,--if we can draw strength for our prayers and hopes by invoking Christ by the mystery of his incarnation, fasting, temptation, agony, and bloody sweat,--if we find it such a precious treasure to our souls to come into undoubting sympathy with the scenes of his humiliation and grief,--what should be our appreciation of this book which treats of the fruits of those sufferings and tells only of that wronged Savior's glory and triumphs, and shows us our Lord enthroned in majesty, riding prosperously, and scattering to his ransomed ones the crowns and regencies of empire which shall never perish and celestial blessings without number and above all thought!

"All Scripture," indeed, "is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction and instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be thoroughly furnished unto all good works." But there are some portions more especially significant and precious, and proper attention to them is filled

expression used in the Apocalypse and those contained in John's Gospel and Epistles. But Alford has very well observed that "there are at the same time striking notes of similarity in expression and cast of thought," and that "we are not in a position to take into account the effect of a totally different subject and totally different circumstances upon one, who though knowing and speaking Greek, was yet a Hebrew by birth."--*Greek Test. Prol. Rev.*

And one of our ablest linguists and critics, "after an examination successively renewed through many years," says, "I have never been able to satisfy myself that what has been the common belief of the Churches in all ages respecting the authorship of the Apocalypse is not sustained by more and better grounds than any other opinion."--*Stuart on Apoc.*, I, 285.

"There is scarcely a book in the whole Bible whose genuineness and inspiration were more strongly attested on its first appearance than the Apocalypse. No doubts whatever seem to have been entertained on these points. Suffice it now to say, that Papias, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Melito--that is, eminent teachers in the Church in the next age to that in which it was written--proclaim that its writer was St. John, the beloved disciple of Christ. Such as *then* the voice of the Church."--*Wordsworth on Apoc.*, p. 22.

"So ends our Catena of testimonies to the genuineness and divine inspiration of the Apocalypse traced through the three half centuries that followed after its publication. Alike from East and West, North and South--from the Churches of the Asiatic province and the Syrian, of Italy and of Gaul, of Egypt and of Africa--we have heard an unbroken and all but uniform voice of testimony in its favor. And on the whole, and in conclusion, it does appear to me that Augustine and the Latin Council had good reason for their solemn verdict; and that we may safely and unhesitatingly direct our inquiries into the meaning of the Apocalypse, as into that of a prophecy of the future, revealed to the beloved disciple, by none other than Christ's own divine, eternal, omniscient Spirit."--*Elliott's Horoe Apoc.*, Prel. Essay.

with particular advantages. Of this sort is this book of the Revelation of Jesus Christ.

What says the text? "Blessed is he who reads, and they who hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein." The same is repeated in chapter 22:7: "Blessed is he who keeps the sayings of the prophecy of this book." Of course, the more we learn and know of Christ, the better it will be for us, if the spirit of faith and obedience be in our hearts. And this book is preeminently the Revelation of Christ. It sets out our blessed Lord and draws away the veil which hangs between us and him, and lifts us up into the sublimest things of heaven. It shows us how the Son of man has been rewarded by the Father and what works and offices are assigned unto that meek Lamb. It shows us the history of our Savior's person, all-glorious and exalted, and his great ministrations in the Church and in the universe until his coming again from the throne and in the power of the Father, with all the armies of heaven with him. Above all does it dwell upon that great Apocalypse--the condition in which it will find the world, what it will bring to his prepared and waiting saints, what it will inflict upon lukewarm believers, infidels, and evildoers, and what will be the character and issues of that great day of God Almighty. It tells what the Church will be till Christ comes, what it will be in that period of dreadful trial, what Satan and his children will attempt, and how the Lord Jesus shall trample them down under the glory of his power, raise the dead, renew the world, and set up forever his blessed reign in it. It shows us what will be the final triumphs and rewards of the saints for their present griefs and toils, what will be the future of our world, how it is to be renewed, cleansed, beautified, and invested with heavenly excellencies. And it tells us how the light and knowledge and glory of God is to become its eternal possession.

It is always important for us to be forewarned with regard to the future. It is our nature to be forecasting, and it is one of the necessities of our well-being to be able to anticipate with accuracy, at least, with regard to the leading things that shall concern us. He who does not shape the conduct of today with reference to some end foreseen or calculated on for some other day is a mere fool and madman, whether it be in the things of God or in the things of the world. And in this book we are certified beforehand of what God has determined concerning the future--what the devout may hope for, what the indifferent and unbelieving have to fear, wherein the true safety and consolation of man is to be found, what tribulations are to come upon the world, and what birth pains are yet to be passed through to reach that Golden Age of which prophets and poets of all nations and times have spoken.⁵

There is also a peculiar efficacy and power in the doctrine of Christ's speedy return. Like a magnet it lifts the heart of the believer out of the world, and out of his low self, and enables him to stand with Moses on the mount. It transfigures him with the rays of blessed hope and promise which stream upon him in those sublime heights. It is the most animating and most sanctifying subject in the Bible. It is the soul's serenest light amid the darkness and trials of earth. And the great end and aim of this book is to set forth this doctrine. The things of which it treats are things touching the Apocalypse of Jesus Christ, and which it describes as "things which must shortly come to pass."

The impending Advent is the theme which pervades it from its commencement to its close. And just in proportion as he is awake to the great truth of the Savior's speedy coming and is engaged in waiting and preparing himself accordingly, he is a better man and in a safer condition--and really more happy--than the half-christian and the lukewarm. In that same proportion is he who

5 "The Apocalypse *completes* the Canon of Scripture; and with reverence be it said, the sacred Canon would be imperfect without it."--*Wordsworth*.

reads, hears, and keeps the words of this prophecy blessed beyond all other people.

This book, at least its subject matter, thus becomes to him an instrument of security and attainment to save him from surprise when his Lord comes, and from the tribulations which shall try the indifferent. It is also a passport to admit him to the marriage supper of the Lamb and to the highest awards of eternity. Precious book! And happy they who study it!

I cannot close without remarking how all this plucks up and crushes to atoms those erroneous and mischievous notions entertained by many--that there is nothing useful in prophetic studies. Moreover, to say nothing of the duty of giving heed to what God has thought important to record, or of the folly of seeing only peril in trying to understand what the Spirit of God has inspired for our learning and consolation, what man is he who in the face of this text and its outspoken benediction will venture to denounce investigation into sacred prophecy? What if it is often dark and mysterious? The darker and more difficult, the greater the reason for earnest examination. Be the obscurity and mystery what it may, God says, "Blessed is he who reads, and they who hear and words and keep those things which are written." What if this book of Revelation is the fullest of all of dark things and perplexing mysteries? It is then a book which above all needs our most solemn and studious attention. Nay, it is concerning this book especially that God pronounces this blessing upon the devout and obedient inquirer.

Some tell us that what is yet future ought not to be examined until after it has come to pass. I can hardly believe that this is seriously meant. Yet I have had it argued to me even in Jerusalem itself. Do such persons not perceive that they thus judge God, Christ, the sent angel of Christ, and John the beloved disciple of Christ, and take issue with the God of truth as to the correctness of his utterances?

I find also that those who so argue are prone to insist that the day of death is the same as Christ's coming. Do they then mean that a man is only to study the predictions of that coming after he is dead? Out with such doctrine as this! Away with such presumptuous deprivation of the Church of the precious legacy left her by her ascended Lord! I will not for a moment regard that as wrong and dangerous which the Lord himself has pronounced *blessed*.

Jesus knew what he was about when he sent this book to be shown to his servants. He understood his own words when he said and repeated, "Blessed is who reads and he who keeps what is in this book." And I will insist that it is to be studied. As Christ said to the writer of it, so he says to all his ministers and all his people in all time: "SEAL NOT THE SAYINGS OF THE PROPHECY OF THIS BOOK." It is an open book and meant to be ever kept open to the view of the Church from that time forward to the end.

Woe, then, to the man who undertakes to draw away God's people from it, or to warn them against looking into it! He takes from the Church, which has now been these 2000 years among the dashing waves, the chart by which above all Christ meant she should be guided, and wherein she may best see where she is going, what are her perils, and where her course of safety lies. He undertakes to seal what God has said should not be sealed. He not only "takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy," (of whom "God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book,") but seeks to take away the book itself!

And the more dangerous and reprehensible is such a course now that "the time is near." Nearly

two thousand years ago it was said of the things herein written, that they must speedily come to pass. These records were from the first pressed upon the study of the Church by the solemn consideration that the period of their fulfillment was rapidly approaching. But if this argument was of force then, how much more now?

Standing, then, as we do upon the very margin of the great Apocalypse--by all the solemnities with which it is to be accompanied--I not only invite and recommend but earnestly charge all Christians, as they hope to be present at the marriage supper of the Lamb, not to put this precious book from them or forgo the faithful study of its contents.

The Lord open our hearts to its teaching and make us partakers of the blessings it foretells!