



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of Dan Duncan

Revelation 1 1-3

Fall 2025

"All Ends Well"

TRANSCRIPT

Thank you Seth, and it is very good to be back with all of you and to have this opportunity to begin, or continue this series on the Book of Revelation. We did begin it, what, two or three weeks ago, before I took off on a very nice vacation.

[By the way, thank you for the vacation, since you allowed me to leave and go over with my family to Germany. We retraced Luther's footsteps at a very appropriate time, during the month of October. I'm sure it's very crowded there now because of the 31st of October, when he posted the *Ninety-five Theses* in Wittenberg.]

We had a good time, but it's good to be back, and it's good to be in this glorious Book of Revelation. We, as I said, began the series with an overview of the Book of Daniel, and now we come to the first three verses of the Book of Revelation. I'll read it, and then we'll have a word of prayer.

1 The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show to His bond-servants, the things which must soon take place; and He sent and communicated *it* by His angel to His bond-servant John, ² who testified to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, *even* to all that he saw. ³ Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy, and heed the things which are written in it; for the time is near.

Revelation 1: 1-3

May the LORD bless this reading of His Word and bless our time of study in it.

Let's pray,

Father, it is a great privilege to be with Your people on this Sunday morning and to do what we are doing: We look into Your Word, we read it, and we have a special blessing promised to us from the reading and the hearing of this text in this great book, this final book of the Bible, this final statement of Revelation that You have given to the Church. And Father, we pray that we would be encouraged by it, and that we would understand the hope that You have given us.

We, of all people, have hope in this world. The world has no hope, and it is seen in the lives of the people of this world, and the perspective of the world. But we have hope, and this book gives us perspective on that, and gives us the promise of great hope.

Things are not pointless. Things are moving toward a glorious destination in which You will be magnified, and Your Son will be glorified, and He will rule and reign upon the earth—so, comfort us and encourage us with that great truth.

We live in troubled times. We always live in troubled times; the church has always been in troubled times ever since the beginning—since the fall of man the world has been, and time has been, 'out of joint', as it were. But Father, You are with us, and we have that great comfort of being in Christ, in His hand, and He in Your hand, and we are absolutely secure in it.

But we do pray for the encouragement that this book will give us, and not only for the future, but for the present. We are presently under Your guidance and Your control, and so LORD, I pray for the needs of our congregation; we have specific needs.

You have blessed this church with a new ministry, a new aspect to our ministry with the Hispanic ministry that has been given to us and we thank You for that. But some of our members are in some difficulty and trials, and I pray that You would bless them, and that You would remove them from the difficulties they are experiencing, and that You would bring them back to this assembly and to the service that they offer us.

So bless them, LORD. It's all of Your grace, so Father, we pray that You would impress that upon us as we study this great book this morning and begin our first three verses of it. Enlighten us, encourage us, and prepare us for our week to come.

We pray these things in Christ's name. Amen.

(Message) Well, He truly is the "Lord of history"*, and we are reminded of that, and will be reminded of that throughout these studies we will have in the Book of Revelation.

Winston Churchill famously described Russia as, "A riddle, wrapped in a mystery, inside an enigma." Many people would say that's an appropriate description of the Book of Revelation. It's an unusual book, and a puzzle to many. I like the description that Dr. Johnson found from the New Testament scholar A.M. Hunter, who called it, "A weird and fantastic book, full of angels, and trumpets, and earthquakes...beasts, and dragons, and demons of the pit."

Martin Luther didn't like it. He said he, "...held it in low esteem". Calvin never wrote a commentary on it, and Ulrich Zwingli said it wasn't a book of the Bible. Yet, it was widely accepted by the early church as a book of the Bible.

The book claims to be that for itself, and promises a blessing to those who read it; (and it's the only book in the Bible to do that). It begins and it ends with that blessing—so twice we are promised to have a blessing from the 'reading' and the 'hearing' of this book.

In fact, in the first three verses we are told the nature of the book and how it is to be interpreted. So, while it is an enigma to many, it shouldn't be, not to a careful reader.

(*From Songs of Praise hymnal; #2, *Beautiful Savior*, chorus)

The first word of the book is the Greek word *apokalupsis*...‘apocalypse’. In our vocabulary that word means *cataclysm, catastrophe, disaster*...‘the end of the world’; a meaning that is derived from this book and its descriptions of ‘earthly shakings’ and ‘judgments’ all through it.

But the word itself means, *unveiling, disclosure, or revelation*, so we translate the title of the book, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*. The kind of revelation it is, is given in verse 3; it is a “prophecy”. And that’s where it fits, with the prophetic books of the Bible; among Isaiah, and Ezekiel, and Daniel. So the Book of Revelation is a prophecy, and it doesn’t come out of, ‘the school of strange literature and fantastic imaginations’ common in the literature of the first century.

Like all books of the Bible, it is inspired by God. It was written when persecutions were occurring throughout the Roman Empire. Chapter 2, verse 13, tells us of Antipas, Christ’s “witness...who was killed”—so it was written in hard times to encourage the church by revealing God’s plan for the ages—and to give Christians perspective on the future, perspective on the present, and hope in the present during difficult times.

So, by the end of the first century the church needed that, it needed perspective, particularly in the Roman province of Asia where there was intense persecution for the faith. Years before, the Gospel had been preached throughout the region, and many people had believed and had become Christians. Great revival is recorded in the Book of Acts chapter 19, with Paul’s ministry in the city of Ephesus that spread throughout that region, (that province of Asia).

They had been taught that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, He had been rejected by His people and crucified...but that was God’s plan and means of saving people. The proof of that was Jesus has been raised from the dead, and not only that, He ascended into heaven. He has gone back to His place of origin—but He will return physically, and He will establish His glorious kingdom on the earth. That’s the promise, and that’s the hope. —Christians looked for Christ’s return, and they had that hope from the beginning.

But the years had gone by, and nothing had happened. The empire increased in its strength, emperor worship and idolatry flourished, and persecution of Christians began to occur such that many were questioning their faith.

By the end of the Apostolic Age, there was widespread apostasy, (the New Testament epistles of 2 Timothy, 2 Peter, and Jude speak of it). The last decades of the first century were discouraging times, 'times that tried men's souls'.

'Where was the promise of Christ coming?', that must have been the question that so many were asking. In fact 'the mockers', quoted in 2 Peter chapter 3, (vs4), seemed to have it right: 'All things continue as they were from the beginning of the world.' — 'Nothing was happening or would happen; things were just going to go on the way they always had.'

So, it was to a perplexed and distressed church that this book was written; and its main message, the theme, is given in chapter 1, verse 7, "Behold, He is coming in the clouds, and every eye will see Him..."

Leon Morris wrote, "We must not think of it, (*this book*), as a kind of intellectual puzzle sent to a relaxed church with time on its hands and an inclination for solving mysteries. It was sent to a little, persecuted, frustrated church—one which did not know what to make of the situation in which it found itself. John writes to meet the need of that church."

Well, that's the church today. In fact, Morris went on to state that, "This age is perhaps like no other age that needs the essential teaching of this book, the Book of Revelation." ... (And that's probably true.)

It is a book that deals with great powers on the earth, and its scope is worldwide. We live in an age that has the potential of unleashing annihilating powers and plagues on a global scale. Well, that's never been true until modern times, and when I say, 'modern times', I mean recent modern times, the last 80 years...so we live in a world that is 'apocalyptic'.

We live in an age of great anxiety and fear about the future. People are wondering where the world is headed. They're wondering, 'Who is in charge?' Or 'Is the world out of control, driven by fate, or by forces beyond anyone's control?' The Book of Revelation addresses all of that.

Yet, though there is no book more relevant for our age than the Book of Revelation, there are few books more neglected and misunderstood than this one is today. One reason is certainly the visions and symbols in it; they can be puzzling, and even daunting. But they're not arbitrary, and not left to the imagination to interpret; there is a system here. The visions in the book give revelation of literal persons, literal places and events, but given in *figurative*, or *symbolic* form.

When Jesus appears in chapter 1, (*vs14*), with hair 'white like snow', 'eyes on fire', and 'feet like hot bronze', He literally appeared to John on the Isle of Patmos, but in such a way that communicated His attributes of *holiness, justice, and power*.

In chapter 19, when He is seen, 'Coming on a white horse with a sword from His mouth', it is prophesying His literal, future coming, but in figures that communicate the purpose of that coming—which is *judgment*. Both are visions that communicate, in non-literal *symbols*, proof about Christ and actual events...Christ is literally coming again.

In chapter 2, (*vs1*), Christ is described as walking, "among the seven golden lampstands." The readers would not have taken that literally, they understood that the "lampstands" were not literal, but *symbols* of, "the seven churches", (*Rev 1:4*), which are 'Light bearers', 'Truth givers'. (And generally, the message of the prophecy is communicated through symbols, or visions...but have literal meanings unless indicated otherwise.)

The Old Testament prophets did that. In Daniel chapter 7, 'monsters come out of the sea'. The sea *represents* the Gentile nations, and the four beasts *represent* world empires. It is vivid symbolism, but its meaning was understood at the time—as our symbols are, for we also have symbols. Commentators often point out how we use

animals to signify nations; America is an eagle; England is a lion; Russia, a bear; China, a dragon. We see them, we know what they represent...and that's what is happening in the Book of Revelation.

The meanings of the symbols are found largely in the Old Testament, like in the Book of Daniel. But I don't want to seem sanguine; I don't want to seem over-confident; it's not always easy when we get to the trumpets of chapters 8 and 9, and the bottomless pit that belches out smoke, and locusts, and scorpions. We have to be cautious; I'm pretty sure the locusts and scorpions are not helicopters and tanks with American flags. (That kind of interpretation is popular, and it has an appeal because it makes it all seem relevant and imminent.) But we have to be careful, and we have to acknowledge we don't understand fully all of the details. The Book of Revelation should humble us.

But then what book of the Bible doesn't escape that? We read Paul...and Paul gives us difficult passages to ponder, where there are differences of opinion. In fact, Peter, in 2 Peter 3:16, speaks of Paul; and he is praising Paul but he says that he writes of things that are, "hard to understand". So we shouldn't be surprised that there are hard things to understand in this book, (and I won't be dogmatic on many of the things in it.)

Still, in spite of the difficulties, I think the book is very understandable and has an important message for us today, here in the 21st century, just as it did for those in the 1st century. The message is simple:

The future of the world does not belong to the Roman Emperor, or to any ruler of this age. It belongs to Christ, who has saved His people on the cross and will establish His kingdom on the earth.

This is a book that sets forth, very clearly, the absolute sovereignty of God. He has His all-powerful hand on all of the events, guiding time...and is guiding it to its appointed end. I would add within that, (and I think we made this point back when we

did our studies in Daniel a few weeks ago), He has His hand equally, and every bit as much, on you personally, His child in the faith, as He does on all of the events of history.

History is not *circular*, as the Greeks believed. History is not ages endlessly repeating themselves like the changing of the seasons...or like a wheel endlessly going around but going nowhere. *History is linear*. It is moving from A to B to C...to Z. It is progressing, advancing. It's not pointless, (as modern man believes), it has meaning, it has a goal—the Kingdom of God.

But there are also evil powers in the world working against that, working for their own ends, their own kingdom: The devil and his minions; and in the future, “the man of lawlessness”, (2Th 2:3), the antichrist. These are powerful forces—and to understand the world and how it works, we must understand that.

The Book of Revelation uncovers all of that and shows that evil, while it exists and it is powerful, (and it seems to be the dominant force in this world today), evil will not prevail. We have a Savior, Jesus Christ, who is God's Son. That, too, is one of the great teachings of this book. He is ‘very God of very God’, the second Person of the Trinity. He is the Almighty, so He is well able to defeat the devil and his forces, and save all of His elect ones—and He will.

Things are never in doubt. They are to us, at times, when we wonder why things are happening the way they are, or why things are going in the direction they seem to be going. Things are never in doubt, and that's what the book states very clearly. —That is our hope, and it is important that we understand it. It's important that we believe it in order that we live it in the present—live in light of the triumphant future that is guaranteed to God's people. We are, “more than conquerors”, as Paul told the Romans, (8:37). The kingdom is coming, and what we do in the meantime, what you do today, what you do right now, counts for all eternity.

Now, briefly, just a few words about the author and background of the book. We know the author is “John”, he identifies himself as that in verse 1, verse 4, and verse 9—

and we take that as John the Apostle, and the early Church accepted that. In verse 9, he says that, 'he was on the island of Patmos because of his testimony for Christ', and calls himself a "fellow partaker in the tribulation and kingdom...". (vs9).

So John was exiled to Patmos for his faith, for his faithful ministry as an apostle. It was, as the book indicates, a time when the church was suffering persecution...and he had experienced that himself.

Persecution occurred earlier under Nero, and that persecution was intense. It was also brief, and it was limited to the city of Rome.

This one, however, was widespread. It happened during the reign of Domitian about AD 95. It was era when emperor worship was advancing, (and that began under Julius Caesar). Some of the emperors refused it, but Domitian not only accepted it, he thought he was divine. He liked to be called 'Our Lord and God', (and that is the title that John gave to Christ). No human is lord and god, and John refused to worship a mere man...so perhaps that was the reason that he was sent into exile.

But there, on the rocky island of Patmos, he became the author of this book and prophecy. It is a revelation that Jesus had promised to give his disciples. Back in John 14:26, the Lord said that He would send to them, (to the apostles), the Holy Spirit who would reveal things to them. And He did that; He did that all through the New Testament, and He does it here at the end, in the Book of Revelation, revealing the future.

The future dominates the book, and that's indicated in the simple three-part outline that Christ gave to John in chapter 1, verse 19;

"Therefore, write the things which you have seen,
and the things which are,
and the things which will take place after these things."

The *things* he had seen are the vision of Christ in chapter 1. *Second*; the *things which are*, are the letters to "the seven churches" in chapters 2 and 3, (and I would say

that applies presently today, because those churches all reflect what goes on today in all churches). The *third*; the *things which will* take place "after these things", are events still future, chapters 4 through 22. Most of the book is about *eschatology*, events that will take place in the future, (and maybe in the near future). But the events have both moral and spiritual relevance for Christians today.

J.B. Phillips wrote a popular translation of the New Testament in the 1950s. (In fact, I can remember as a boy in church hearing a minister, here and there, quoting Phillips. They would do so to maybe give some clarity to the King James Version, which was still very popular then.) He, (*Phillips*), described the experience of translating the Book of Revelation as, (in his words), "Thrilling!" He wrote that, "The translator is carried, 'Not into some never-never land of fancy, but into the ever-ever land of God's eternal values and judgments.' " And we could add to that that 'God's ways and values and judgments are timeless and timely.'

But the main focus of the book is the future—the last days in Christ's victory and kingdom. The purpose of the book is encouragement, it's hope...which can be stated in the title of Shakespeare's play, *All's Well That Ends Well*.

And for God's people, 'All ends well!'

Now, John begins this great and final book of the Bible with the title, *The Apokalupsis*, "The Revelation of Jesus Christ", (vs1a)...and that can mean two different things.

First of all, it tells us the nature of the book, that it's '*Revelation*'. As we have already pointed out, *apokalupsis*, (or apocalypse), means, 'the uncovering of something hidden.' This is a book of truth that man could not have found out in his own abilities... by himself through his own efforts of pursuing and thinking.

Men have done that for millennia. The great men, like Plato and Aristotle, applied their prodigious minds to that, and they didn't come up with anything like this. No, this is something that is beyond man's ability; this is *Revelation*.

So it's not a book of human wisdom or a book of philosophical speculation. It's not an allegory, like *The Pilgrim's Progress*...It is *Revelation*, it is the uncovering of what God has made known.

John calls it "The Revelation of Jesus Christ", (vs1a), which I was about to say a moment ago has two different possibilities of meaning. It could be: 'The Revelation about Christ'...or, 'The Revelation given *by* Jesus Christ'.

In a sense, both are true. We certainly have glorious *revelation* all through this book of the person and work of Jesus Christ—as well as a glorious *revelation* about heaven and the kingdom to come, and the eternal state...and all of that. But probably the main meaning is, 'The Revelation that Jesus Christ gave'. It's a revelation about Himself.

But the strict meaning of this phrase, I would say, is;
'The Revelation that He gave'.

And I think verse 2 supports that because there, John spoke of it as the 'testimony of Jesus Christ'...so it is His revelation. This isn't John's production; he is just the reporter.

In fact, it didn't even originate with Jesus. John explains further that Christ received it from His Father, and He gave it to an angel, who gave it to John, who gave it to God's servants, (the saints), (*see vs1b-2*). So there are, in all, five stages of transmission...and what a pure channel of communication it is from the Father, to the Son, to the angel, to the apostle, to the readers. So this book has great authority behind it: the Trinity, the angels, the apostles. This, then, is the pure Word of God, and therefore, it is necessary reading, and it is reliable reading.

John then explains it; he says it's about events, "which must soon take place", (vs1b). It is "prophecy", (vs3), but what does he mean "must soon take place"?

That has to puzzle many of us in the 21st century. After all, nearly 2,000 years have passed since John wrote that, and yet he said back almost 2,000 years ago, "...must soon take place." 'Well, maybe he was wrong'...some say so. And that is certainly the easiest way to explain it, 'It's a mistake. Oh, well, it's interesting reading.' [But then if John was wrong, this is not prophecy, and we don't need to read any further.]

There are other answers, better answers: It may mean that when the events begin to happen, they will happen "soon"...they will happen quickly, suddenly. Or, we're to understand "soon" from the prophetic perspective. Old Testament prophets often blended near events with distant events, (and we see that in Christ's Olivet Discourse). The prophets and the writers of Scripture didn't see gaps of time between these events necessarily...so from the prophetic perspective, it is 'soon'.

John didn't see long ages between his day and the last days, and from that perspective, 'the end of days is soon to come.' But the speed with which those days occur is not according to our perception, it is according to God's perception.

God looks at time differently from the way that we do. He is both outside and inside of time. He sees it all at once, the end from the beginning —like we might do when we look at a chart covering all the different ages of the world and we see events listed and dates listed...we can see it all at once. That is how God sees all things, that's how He sees the events of this world. So with Him, (as Peter said in 2Pe 3:8), "...one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years like one day." So on His timescale, we're at the end of the second day. The point is, 'It will happen, all of it will happen—it is a certainty!' And John lays some stress on that with the word "*must*", "...things which must soon take place." (vs1b).

These events have been sovereignly determined, but not in a sense of some mechanical determinism or fatalism; for human decisions and actions enter into all of this, along with the evil work of the devil, (and those that are associated with him and mankind that's in rebellion)...and those are acts that are freely made, freely taken by all

of them, (but according to their fallen nature which will determine that all of those are evil), but God uses all of that. All of that enters into God's plan.

God has sovereignly planned everything, and uses everything—mysteriously, we have to admit, but He uses it all. And He is working out His plan today, and will to the very end...and it “must” and “will” take place, all of the events here. Christ will come and He will triumph, and He will rule and reign.

Again, that is reliable because it is ‘The Revelation of God’, which He “communicated”, (*vs1a*), to John. But He did that by means of *signs* and *symbols*, (in fact, “communicated” can have that sense of doing so through *symbols*). It's all about literal people and events, but often they are described in symbolic language...which should caution us against taking descriptions literally.

In chapter 13, when we read of, ‘a beast coming out of the sea’, we are not to think of some literal monster—like Godzilla, rising out of the water and stomping on Tokyo. We think of Daniel 7, where the *sea* and the *beast* have symbolic meaning, and we need to interpret them in that way. ‘All of this revelation’, John says, was “signified”, [*“communicated”*], to him...and the codebreaker is the Old Testament.

Now, John swears that it is all true. He recorded it all, fantastic as some of it may seem, and does seem, but he recorded it just as he saw it. That's what he affirms in verse 2, where he says that he testified to the word of God and, “...to the testimony of Jesus Christ, *even* to all that he saw.” (...with his eyes; and much of what he saw, he saw in these visions before him...but it is for our reading and for our understanding.)

So in verse 3, John promises a blessing on, “...those who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy...”. That word “reads” means, ‘*read aloud*’—and that's generally how people read in the ancient world, they *read out loud*.

Augustine, in his *Confessions*, writes of watching Ambrose, the great preacher of Milan. He and a friend were in his house, and they saw Ambrose in his study, and he was

reading, (and Augustine wrote), "...while his voice and tongue remained silent." (and he found that unusual). And evidently, it was unusual at that time—and unusual in the 1st century.

But what is meant here is not just reading out loud but reading out loud publicly in the church service—and that indicates that John was affirming to us that this book is Scripture...and it's to be read. We're not to neglect it; we are to read it publicly in the church. I'm not talking about reading all of Scripture, but reading the Book of Revelation, reading it just as the Jews read the prophets aloud in the synagogue.

It is a prophecy with a promise of blessing—so it has moral force. There is probably no book in the Bible that causes more fascination and curiosity than the Book of Revelation does...but it wasn't given to satisfy our minds, it wasn't given to satisfy our curiosity, it was given to influence our conduct, our way of thinking, and our way of behaving.

It will bless us, that's the promise, but we could ask, 'Well, how will it bless us?' Well, by giving us hope for one thing, (which we've already mentioned), a hope that is real, that is grounded in God's Word and God's promise. This life is not the end; there is an eternal kingdom to come. There is heaven to come, and we have a glorious *revelation* of that. Maybe the greatest *revelation* given to us in the Bible on heaven is found here in the Book of Revelation.

But our hope goes beyond that, for there is an eternal kingdom to come and that hope galvanizes action because we know that what we do today has purpose...and has great reward. When people lose hope, they lose motivation; they stop striving; they stop building.

But the assurance of this prophecy is that God's kingdom *must* come...it is inevitable. God cannot be frustrated, He will bring all of these things to pass.

And having that hope makes people better—and that's what John wrote elsewhere. He wrote in 1 John 3, verse 3, that when Christ appears and we see Him, we will be like Him, and everyone who has this hope fixed on Him, "purifies himself just as

Christ is pure". It makes us pure, it sanctifies us because the hope of Christ's return not only galvanizes action and service, it also acts as a restraint on sin—and that attitude of restraint is a biblical attitude. Jesus said in Mark 13:33, "Take heed, keep on the alert; for you do not know when the *appointed* time will come."

We don't know when He is coming, but John tells us that the time is near. It's always at hand, (and always has been). Every generation has lived with the real possibility of the Lord's return.

But how much truer that is for us. The prophetic clock is ticking; the time is nearer now than ever before, and that should stimulate diligence in our work and carefulness in our walk. We don't know when He's coming, He may not come for another thousand years, but it's certainly closer now—and we know that He is coming.

My hope is that our studies in the Book of Revelation will have that effect upon us so that we will say, as John did at the end of this book, "Come, Lord Jesus." (Rev 22:20). Not simply, "Come, Lord Jesus", to give us relief from the terror that we are facing in this world, the difficulties that we have...but "Come, Lord Jesus" because You are so glorious and You have loved us so much, we desire to see You and be with You personally.

May that be the result of our time of study in this book together.

If you're here without Christ, this book is full of terrible threats of judgment on all who are in unbelief...so turn from that. Turn to Christ, believe in Him.

He is God's Son, who came and died for sinners so that all who believe in Him would be saved from the wrath to come, so look to Christ, turn to Christ; believe and live.

(Closing prayer) What a blessing Father to have hope, real hope, hope founded and grounded in Your Word, Your *revelation* from Genesis to the Book of Revelation.

We have hope:

The hope of salvation,

the hope of eternal life,

the hope of a glorious, endless, eternal future...

and it's all because of Your grace, because You chose to send Your Son into this world, who gladly came for the joy set before Him to suffer the cross to gain brothers and sisters of His own.

We thank You for the ministry of the Spirit, who drew us to that, and who enlightens our minds to understand things that are difficult to read. But You give us understanding as we look to You, and we thank You for that. Again, we see in all of this the great hope You have given to us. You are a sovereign, and good, and gracious God.

Now,

The Lord bless you and keep you;

The Lord make His face shine on you,

And be gracious to you;

The Lord lift up His countenance on you,

And give you *shalom*. Peace.

In Christ's name. Amen.

(End of Audio)