

Revealing Revelation

Scripture: Revelation 1
Date: September 13, 2020

PERSPECTIVE

TRIBULATION

The past year at Maranatha YYC (and pretty much everybody) has been quite the journey. A journey that began with a search for clarity in life and in faith through a Vision 2020 theme was drastically turned when the Covid 19 pandemic shuttered our ability to worship together, to minister together and even to meet together. We faced – still are – some very dark times as our world faced uncertainty, chaos, murkiness and mystery.

The book of Revelation was written in a troubled time as well. It's written about 70 – 90 AD following some of the early persecutions of the church from the Jews and from the Romans. The author is exiled to an island called Patmos - off the coast of current day Turkey - because of his preaching of Jesus the Christ.

The author – a man named John – writes of these hardships and in vs. 9 the NIV translates as suffering comes from the Greek word – *thlipsis* which is has as part of its meaning – tribulation. Tribulation could easily describe the context for the first church. This is a tough time for these people as they were they were persecuted and there was confusion & chaos as well as frustration and fear.

Their present is hard and their future is unknown. They – like us – were a people looking for answers, a vision – a revelation.

REVELATION - APOCALYPSE

The bible book Revelation is entitled because the very first word is translated – revelation. But the Greek word that is behind this technical translation has given rise to an emotional translation. That word in Greek is – Apocalypse. Now in today's culture apocalypse has connotations of disaster – of horror – of evil. In the context of the book of Revelation the images of dragons, destruction and death easily give rise to this understanding.

BUT - on the island of Patmos – with the prevailing Greek culture the word had a very different understanding. Apocalypse – revelation - was a term meaning 'unveiling'. In fact it might have been used in the context of pulling back of the curtain so that an audience could see a play or performance.

Rather than an understanding of the end of something – it would be more likely seen as the beginning of something. Thus the biblical understanding of Revelation is better seen as the unveiling of mystery, the insight through the mystery.

PERSON

MYSTERY OF JESUS

The mystery of life is illuminated by God's revelation but the difficulty is that God's revelation can easily point to things that we aren't looking at. God speaks into greater wisdom than our micro view of today and sometimes that is lost on us.

John 1 speaks of the Word – Jesus – coming into the world and the world not receiving Him. The gospels are filled with people – including the disciples – not getting Jesus' role or Jesus' power. Later in the chapters of the book Revelation – the phrase – for those who have ears to hear / let them hear - resounds

The book of Revelation if taken only as a quick fix on what comes next will never be understood. All the imagery can't be understood on human terms - the signs and the seals, the dragons and the horses or the dangers and the disasters. They ARE mysterious because they aren't about HOW we are to live life. They are mysterious because they are about WHO we are to live for

MAJESTY OF JESUS

The text introduces an image of Jesus – the Christ - that is mind boggling. The vision has barely started and we are already overwhelmed. Smashed together are all these images – these titles – of Jesus (vs. 5-6) shine forth.

The faithful witness [of God]

The first born from the dead

The ruler of the Kings of the earth

He who loves us

He who has forgiven us

He who has made us as His priests and to serve His Kingdom

They continue on in vs. 17-18

The first and the last

The Living One who was once dead but now alive forever and ever

MERGED

In a world increasingly polarized by opinions on the ends of the spectrum of thought it is seemingly impossible to fathom thoughts both at once. Not as a compromise of one side to another but a compilation of both – at the same time.

Jesus is not about either mystery or majesty – but both! N.T. Wright in his book Revelation for Everyone describes the wonder of the amalgamation of these two phenomenon – the mystery of Jesus and the majesty of Jesus. He describes the Jewish world – in the Old Testament – which saw the temple as the place where the gap of mystery and majesty melded together. God dwelling amongst them

He continues that in Jesus Christ – that understanding is most fully complete. Jesus – God incarnate. Jesus – son of God AND son of man. This Jesus the Christ is the full blend of the mystery of God and the majesty.

It's no wonder that much of the book of Revelation is shrouded in images. How DOES one describe the Holy God and how DOES one reveal God's words to His creation

PROCLAMATION

PROPHECY

The writer of the book – John - speaks of the words revealed as being a prophecy – vs. 3. There are also instructions that the revelation will point to the things yet to come and our culture eats this up as it looks at the symbols, at the numbers and at imagery.

Trying to decipher – with our own wisdom, strength and power - what comes next? The mysteries of life that will – if revealed – would help us live our life easier / better.

But if you were to move – again – past the emotional understanding of the word into the technical you'd find a different look at the word. Culture sees the word as looking ahead but Christians see the word as looking up. Prophecy is commonly used in both new and old testaments and its use is common with men – and women – speaking God's truth to His people.

In this context - a prophecy is a divinely inspired instruction or exhortation. It is FROM God and FOR His people. It might look ahead but it points up. We think its to guide us into the future but rather it's focus is to have us live fully in the present.

Eugene Peterson in his book – Reversed Thunder speaks of how a prophecy might speak about things happening in the future BUT with an intention of how they are lived out in the NOW!

PASTORAL CARE LETTERS

YOU'VE GOT MAIL

In the late 1990's a cheesy romance movie starring Tom Hanks and Meg Ryan called - You've Got Mail – illustrated the hunger that humanity has. We like – we need to communicate with each other. In this Covid 19 context our ability to connect has been greatly diminished as many depended on face to face conversations to connect and those were drastically reduce or removed. Email / texts / phone calls didn't have the same power for many.

But letters have regained some power in the last months. A note specifically intended from one person to another with an address on the envelope and a return address on the corner or back. It took effort, it took purpose, it took intention.

SEVEN CHURCHES

The book of Revelation is a letter – a letter to seven churches that the author of this book – John – is acquainted with. There is an assumption that the vision he's getting is going to be delivered to them. There is an assumption that there is a relationship with them.

In essence – the first part of Revelation is a letter from God – through Jesus – written by John – to these churches. The letter identifies the churches – their strengths, their weaknesses and their callings. The book of Revelation is more about them – than us in its effort to encourage them and to exhort them.

APPLICATION / CONCLUSION

YET there is still a place to see ourselves in the revelation. The pulling back of the curtain to see / hear the prophecy. To see what the commendations of those churches were and if they might apply to today. To see what the critiques of those churches were and if they might apply to today.

In times of tribulation we can still get revelation of God's presence with us. A prophecy of God's promises for us. Through a letter that encourages us to seek God's holy face as we live in God's amazing grace.