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CHAPTER 1

The Theme of Revelation: **“Jesus Is Victor!”**

The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, to shew unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass; and he sent and signified it by his angel unto his servant John: who bare record of the word of God, and of the testimony of Jesus Christ, and of all things that he saw. Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand. . . .

For I testify unto every man that beareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, 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.

He which testifieth these things saith, Surely I come quickly. Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.

(Revelation 1:1–3; 22:18–21)

HAVE YOU EVER HEARD OF A PERSON EAGERLY reading an interesting book, then suddenly deciding to abandon it without reading the last chapter? The last chapter ties together the threads of the narrative; it summarizes the arguments; it climaxes the action. You and I would agree that to close a book without reading the final chapter would be to read without purpose and without satisfaction.

I have had people tell me that although they read the Bible, they stop short of Revelation—the final “chapter.” Imagine! That particular Bible book announces itself as the Revelation of Jesus Christ. It forecasts the consummation of all things and introduces the new order. How can readers form a balanced understanding of God, sin, unbelief and divine judgment if they ignore so important a book? In these crisis days of world government, no Christian can afford to ignore the climactic Revelation.

We may take one of only two stances in regard to this prophetic “unveiling”—this portraying of the future return of Jesus Christ to this earth, to this world that once rejected Him as Messiah and crucified Him at Calvary. We may ignore it, in effect despising it and jeering at the prospect of a future divine intervention affecting the entire world. Or we may embrace it, cheering for the promised victory of a righteous Ruler, the coming King of kings.

Those who ignore Revelation take their place with the many who believe a humanistic view of life is sufficient: that men and women are responsible captains of their own souls. They take their place with the defiant multitude who shout the age-old refrain: “We will not have this Man to rule over us!”

Those who take Revelation seriously are convinced of an actual heavenly realm as real as the world we now inhabit. They are persuaded that the day of consummation nears when “the kingdom of the world” becomes “the kingdom of our Lord, and of his Christ,” who “shall reign for ever and ever” (Revelation 11:15).

God is sovereign

Living in this generation, we are fully aware that the competitive world and our selfish society have brought many new fears to the human race. I can empathize with those troubled beings who lie awake at night worrying about the possible destruction of the race through some evil, misguided use of the world's store of nuclear weapons. The tragedy is that they have lost all sense of the sovereignty of God! I, too, would not sleep well if I could not trust moment by moment in God's sovereignty and omnipotence and in His grace, mercy and faithfulness.

The prevailing attitudes of fear, distrust and unrest permeating our world are known to all of us. But in God's plan some of us also know a beautiful opposite: the faith and assurance found in the church of Jesus Christ. God still has a restful “family” in His church. As believers we gladly place our confidence in God's revelation of Himself. Although the material world has never understood our faith, it is well placed in the Scriptures. The Bible tells us many things we could learn in no other way.

This amazing Revelation—the final section of the holy Scriptures—tells us plainly that no human being and no world government or power will have any control or any say in that fiery day of judgment yet to come upon the earth. John's vision of things to come tells us clearly and openly that at the appropriate time the direction and administration of this world will be taken away from men and women and placed in the hands of the only Man who has the wisdom and power to rightly govern. That Man is the eternal Son of God, our Lord Jesus Christ.

Revelation describes the age-ending heavenly and earthly events when our Lord and Savior is universally acknowledged to be King of kings and Lord of lords. All will acclaim Him victor. God's Revelation leaves us with no doubt about that.

In our present period of time, however, there is little recognition of God's sovereignty or of His plan for His redeemed people. Go into the marketplace, into our educational institutions and—yes—even into our popular religious circles, and you will find a growing tendency to make mankind large and to make God small. Human society is now taking it for granted that if God indeed exists, He has become our servant, meekly waiting upon us for our will.

Believers are the true realists

In the face of this kind of human thinking, I want to make a case for the committed Christians in this world. We are the true realists. We confess that we do not hold the powers of life and death in our own hands. We have sensed the importance of John's vision in the Revelation. We are assured that God is alive and well and that He has never abdicated His throne. While others may wonder and speculate concerning God's place in the universe, we are assured that He has never yielded to any of His creatures His divine rights as Lord of man and nature.

It is for this reason that the Christian believer, related to God by faith, is assured of final victory. Even in the midst of earthly trials, he or she is joyful.

The unbeliever, who boastfully will "take my chances," can only remain cynical. Deep within, he or she discovers doubts and uncertainties multiplying

daily. Tell that person about this Revelation, about the certainty of Jesus Christ’s ultimate victory, of God’s promise of new heavens and a new earth, and he or she can only react with the cynic’s biting contempt: “Who cares about fables and empty promises? No person in his right mind would ever confess that he has been reading the book of Revelation!”

Take my word for it. Men and women who think they have all the answers about this life and the next have been mouthing their brave words for generations. They are big, challenging words, but they come from puny, empty hearts and minds. These infidels are too blind to recognize or acknowledge that God *does* have an eternal plan—a divine plan in which mankind is never permitted to utter the first word or the last.

The fact is that God has always been God—and He always will be God. He knows all about our human beginnings. He has had to consult with no one about anything!

One day that little bundle of delight, so fondly nurtured by parents and family, finds herself in human consciousness and accepts the fact that she is. It is at that point that her volitional life begins. Until that time, she had nothing to say about anything—absolutely nothing.

God will have the last word

Have you noticed, in the human family, how encouraged we are by the sound of our own voice? Men and women take to strutting and boasting, and in their pride they may declare their independence of God. Little do they realize that God in His divine sovereignty has reserved the right to take up at the last where He

began at the first. It can mean only one thing: human beings are in the hands of God finally, whether they will or not.

I declare this truth in all frankness because God's Word, including the book of Revelation, tells us clearly that our man-made civilizations, so called, will not prevail in the coming day of judgment and consummation.

Secular-minded men and women seem annoyed by the premise that the Creator-God has in mind a plan for ending this age in which we live. They do not want to be told that organizations, governments and institutions cannot expect earthly things to continue as they are for ever and ever. Repeatedly and plainly the Bible tells us to expect Jesus, the Christ of God, to return to this earth in power and glory. People who have long joked about the "invisibility" of the kingdom of God will see it established in righteousness and with authority.

Humans try to ignore God, continuing to make their own ambitious, selfish plans. In the years before World War I, Germany's Kaiser Wilhelm, largely blamed for the beginning of that first world conflict, was exceedingly headstrong. At a chapel service attended by the kaiser, a faithful German minister preached on the coming again of Jesus Christ to establish God's kingdom of righteousness and peace throughout the earth. Wilhelm was greatly offended and spoke to the minister at the close of the service.

"I never want to hear that kind of a sermon again," he warned the preacher. "Such an event is not at all in keeping with the plans we have for the future and the glory of our Fatherland!"

But Kaiser Wilhelm and, a generation later, Adolph Hitler are merely fading memories—illustrations of

that vain human propensity to make ourselves big and God small.

There is vastly more in the Revelation than you or I will ever know while we are on this earth. But just God’s urging that we be ready for the announced coming events should be sufficient to keep us expectant, interested—and praying!

The Revelation has to do with relationships

This Revelation of Jesus Christ has to do with His relationship to the Father, to the human race and to the church. It has to do with His relationship to Israel, to the nations, to our enemy the devil and to the coming judgment. Ministers faithful to the Word of God have always said that Christ can be found on every page of the Bible. In the Revelation, we see Him dominating the eternal future. The message of the book is the almost overwhelming portrayal of Christ’s victory, bringing about the final destruction of Satan and all of his works.

Part of our Christian restfulness comes from the fact that we are in the hands of a loving God who has already existed throughout all of the tomorrows. Because all time is in God, the flow of time never concerns God. He never has to run in an effort to catch up with the movement of time. The end of time is seen by God just as easily as the beginning of time.

That is why the Bible tells us that God knows the end from the beginning. That is why a godly man like John, caught up in the Spirit of God, could be shown the outline of future events. They were future to him, and they are future to us. That is because we are in the stream of time. They are not future to God because He is not in the stream of time.

The Revelation is the only New Testament book that may be classified as “predictive” in its character and content. (It has been interesting to me to find in the writings of Blaise Pascal, the great 17th-century scientist and religious philosopher, his conclusion that no true prediction of mankind’s future can be found anywhere but in the Christian Scriptures.)

About the predictive quality of the Scriptures we ought to be in agreement. If there cannot be any valid foresight, no revelation from God, nothing to warn us or prepare us for tomorrow, this life on earth would have to be considered a gloomy business indeed. Thankfully, we have a definite word, a promise upon which we can lean. Peter, one of God’s special spokesmen, expressed it this way:

We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts: Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost. (2 Peter 1:19–21)

We may count on God’s illumination

As Christian believers, we are assured that no matter how dark it becomes around us, God will faithfully provide the illumination of His Spirit. The Old Testament offers in the release of Israel from Egyptian bondage a fitting illustration. When God was moving toward the climax of that deliverance, the darkness of night covered Egypt, but, miraculously, there was light in the dwellings of all of the Israelites. So, too, there is

light even now for us who are Christian believers concerning our future. God’s Word is a light that shines in a dark place until the morning star rises in our hearts.

Note, for your encouragement, that God has done something special in the Revelation that He has done in no other part of the New Testament. He has promised a divine blessing for those who will read it:

Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand. (Revelation 1:3)

This should be encouragement enough to read and consider what the Revelation has to say. Although it is significantly complex, the book is modest in size. There are but 22 chapters, and none of them can be considered lengthy. A good reader can read through the book in two or three hours.

God’s message in Revelation, viewed as a whole, is a prognosis of events affecting the entire created universe—“the things that must shortly be done” (22:6). Those who give themselves to its reading will sense they are on a fast-moving guided tour, discerning a variety of scenes and events in John’s panoramic view of the heavens and earth. In quick succession he takes us from the highest heaven to the deepest hell. We hear the trumpets sounding in heaven and see the woes and judgments that follow upon the earth and its seas. Instead of repenting, people harden their hearts against the God who created them and loved them.

John sees Jesus

John sees his Lord, Jesus Christ, in several different appearances. He is the dazzlingly radiant Son of

man with eyes like blazing fire (chapter 1). He is the victorious Lamb standing before the heavenly throne (chapter 5). He is the Conqueror on the white horse riding down the skies to the marriage supper of the Lamb (chapter 19). John also testifies to his vision of the seven-fold Spirit of God before the heavenly throne, whom he sees as seven blazing lamps (4:5).

As we read, we follow the spectacle of the suffering but triumphant church of Jesus Christ (chapters 7, 19) and the divine seal set upon the righteous. John tells us of the Israel of that future day (chapter 7). He was profoundly impressed to see God's record books opened (chapter 20). John saw the "synagogue of Satan" (2:9, 3:9), but before the vision ended, he foresaw the total defeat and chaining of Satan, his every power destroyed, his every license taken away (20:1-3, 7-10).

The Revelation is sobering, for it is a vision of judgment that is coming upon a sinful, selfish, violent world. John sees the Son of man appearing with clouds to "[swing] his sickle on the earth; and the earth was reaped" (14:14-16). John must have been greatly moved as he viewed the new heaven and the new earth God is preparing for His people (21:1-5). He tells us of the river of life that flows forever and, beside it, the tree of life with its leaves for the healing of the nations (22:1-2).

I speak of these things as still future. Many Christians of past centuries insisted that all the events and scenes in the Revelation were already history, that none of the book was predictive. It is a gracious aspect of our evangelical Christian fellowship that we do not make uniformity in prophetic interpretation the test of Christian orthodoxy. As believers we do not sit in judgment of others whose views on these matters are not identical with our own. Determining the actual day

and hour of Christ’s return to earth is not the occupation God has assigned to us. Our constant readiness to meet Him when He does return should be our most important consideration.

I have been studying these Scriptures for many years. I am prepared to give my answer to an ancient question: “Are all these scenes in the Revelation history?” I can best answer with some questions of my own:

Has the sun yet turned black like sackcloth? Has the moon yet become blood red? Have the stars yet fallen from the heavens? (Revelation 6:12–13)

Has there been a time when the sky receded like a scroll being rolled up? Have the mountains and the islands been moved from their places? (6:14)

When did the earth experience an invasion of locust-like creatures whose sting killed a third of the world’s population? (9:1–11)

If the prophesied destroyer has already appeared and the seven angels of judgment have already done their work (chapters 8–9), would we not have known it?

Would there not be some notice in our history books if four specially commissioned angels and 200,000,000 extraterrestrial cavalry had wiped out a third of earth’s population? (9:15–19)

When was the abyss—that bottomless pit—opened to allow Satan to come forth again for a short time? (20:7–8)

No, I do not think all these events have taken place. On the other hand, I do believe that the Word of God tells us we stand on the verge of the most dramatic and far-reaching developments since Adam stood up in the garden of Eden and Eve stood by his side. I do not know all the details of the future. But I do know that our Lord is returning to earth. And in that Day of our

Lord, the Holy City will come down out of heaven beautifully dressed as a bride for her husband (21:2).

We have in the Scriptures many appeals to be ready for that day. We are not to live just for now and for this world. We are to live each day with a view of the world above! I am troubled because the church of Jesus Christ today does not seem to know as much about spiritual victory and rejoicing in the Lord as did our forefathers in the Christian faith and fellowship.

Within my own denominational background, I have read much and reflected often on the ministries of A.B. Simpson and the joyful fellowship of those who associated with him in the late years of the 19th century. One of the godly Christian brothers who joined with Dr. Simpson was an officer in the Salvation Army, Russell Kelso Carter. He and those sincere believers were so enthralled with the scriptural promises of Christ's ultimate triumph that Carter was moved to write a gospel song that is still in our hymnal: "Jesus Is Victor!"

Congregations sang that message often in their services of praise, for they believed it was true. Jesus is Victor indeed! Kelso Carter's song depicts clearly and confidently the major themes that prevail throughout the book of Revelation:

Jesus is victor—His work is complete,
 Crushing all enemies under His feet.
 Jesus is victor; He died not in vain,
 Risen and glorified, Jesus doth reign!

Jesus is victor—without and within,
 Saving and keeping and cleansing from sin;
 Jesus is victor, O heavenly Dove,
 Come to abide and make perfect in love.

Jesus is victor—the heavens shall ring,
Great king of terrors, where is thy sting?
Jesus is victor—we’ll shout o’er the grave,
Glory to God, He is mighty to save!

My word to you is this: Do not neglect, do not
ignore God’s message to our race in this Revelation of
Jesus Christ.