

“The Unveiling” // Revelation 1:10–18; 17–18 // *The Whole Story* #43

Bibles: Revelation

The Christian tradition I grew up in talked **a lot about the end times**. It was one of our favorite themes. We had our annual prophecy conferences, our end-times movies, our rapture board games...

And one of the results was that I grew up **obsessed with, and frankly a little terrified** of, the rapture.

- If **for any reason** I couldn't find my parents in the house, I just knew they'd been raptured. I'd run through the house yelling “Mom, mom” to see if her clothes had fallen neatly into a pile on the floor...
 - I had this **recurring dream**
 - My **wife had a different experience** growing up, her church didn't teach the rapture. So one night early in our marriage we were talking about the rapture I slipped out of bed...
- When I was in high school, a little book came out that got instant popularity: “88 Reasons why Jesus is coming back in 1988.”
 - “We're going to sit here and wait.”
 - You **may not have had that experience**, but I know for a fact that some of you still have some Y2K food tucked in a closet somewhere.

Works Consulted:

Tim Keller, “Two Cities”

James MacDonald, “An Autopsy of ‘My Way’”

Ryan Stone, “Outside the Kingdom – Hell”

David Platt, “The Danger of Worldly Desires”

Tim Lucas, “Revelation in a Nutshell”

Craig Groeschel, “Snapshots of Revelation”

I'm glad we're not obsessed like that at this church, **but sometimes I think we've fallen into an opposite, and perhaps even more pernicious error**: We rarely think or talk about the end of time at all. To many of us, it seems like something only crazy people, or religious zealots think much about.

- **But consider this: the 2nd coming of Christ is the most talked about doctrine in the Bible:**
- The Bible talks about the **1st coming of Christ a measly 129x**, and we have a whole holiday for that. It talks about the 2nd coming 329 times, nearly 2.5x as much!
- For every 1 prophecy in the Bible concerning Christ's first advent, there are **8 that talk about his second**.

So, you tell me: Which is more worthy of our focus?

Which brings us to the **book of Revelation**. The book of Revelation is a book about the end times, the 2nd coming of Christ.

Now, **be honest**: *How many of you—when you think about the book of Revelation—find the book intriguing but confusing, exciting but a little scary? (Maybe in our Bible reading plan this year you sat down and read it straight through for the 1st time.)*

- It's certainly easy to get lost in it; all the talk about **raptures and bowls of judgment**, beasts, false prophets, a gigantic woman who is called the ‘mother of all prostitutes’, the 4 horsemen, poison locusts, human-eating dragons, the number 666.
- And yes, there's **a lot to be confused** by. But **fear not**, Summit Church! Your pastor is a **trained professional**.

- I **went to seminary** where I **mastered Divinity**—which I’ve always thought was a little bit of a presumptuous title, mastering “God”—**at any rate, I am now certified** to take you safely in and out of this book ensuring that no one gets left behind.

Listen: sometimes even I get confused as to what all the symbols point to, but the **big picture point** is crystal clear, and that’s what we are going to focus on for the next couple of weeks:

[1:1] The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show to his servants the things that must soon take place.

- “Revelation” literally means “the unveiling.”
- Now, *question*. **What is being unveiled?** Is it **Jesus himself** who is being unveiled? Or is **Jesus the one** is doing the unveiling—of the things that must soon take place?
- The answer is... **both**. The way it is written in Greek is ambiguous—and I think deliberately so. And that’s because it is both a **revelation of Jesus** to the church and also a **revelation from Jesus** about the things that must soon take place.
- That’s the **central thing** to keep in mind as you read Revelation: The point is not to give you a **specific timeline** of events or who to identify as various figures.
 - The point is not to help you figure out which beast is Vladimir Putin; the point is to **pull back the curtain of history** so you can see the powers at work behind the politics on earth.
- **You see, people read the book of Revelation**—with all the dragons and beasts and imagine it as this **delusional, fantasy-world**.
 - It’s actually **the most accurate depiction of the world** you’ll see.
 - It’s seeing the world with **spiritual eyes**.
 - The **powers and forces** of the world are in fact an illusion.
 - **This is the unveiling**.

- **The unmasking.**
- It reminds me of one of my favorite **Nicolas Cage movies**, Faceoff. (You say, “Is that one **really your favorite?** I say, They are all my favorite.) Nicolas Cage goes into a coma, and John Travolta steals his face (he has a doctor cut it off and put it on him) and then he impersonates Cage in order to gain information and steal some things. He looks like Nicolas Cage, but he’s not... then Nicolas Cage wakes up from his coma without his face, which is always a bad day, so he forces the doctor to put Travolta’s face on him, and *therein lies the drama*. No one knows who is whom. So the climax of the movie is when **who is whom is unveiled**.
- Think of the book of Revelation as **the “Faceoff” of the New Testament**. I might get my seminary degree revoked for that analogy. **I’ve always wanted to preach a message where I could say that Jesus is the truer and better...**

You see, the church at this point, is not doing particularly well.

- All of the Apostles have been martyred, except for John, and he’s been exiled to the isle of Patmos.
- Christians are being **hunted down** like dogs and fed to the lions, in part because they were being **wrongly blamed** for the burning of Rome and other problems in the Empire.
- **Roman and Jewish leaders** have made it illegal almost everywhere to be a Christian.
- The **movement is still growing**, but seems like the bad guys are definitely winning!

And so, **Jesus appears to John the Apostle**, in his prison cell, and gives him this revelation of how God sees the world and a forecast of what he plans to do in the world.

You and I need to see the vision just as badly as they did. But maybe we’re not going through the Tribulation, because we wrestle with the

same questions; overwhelmed by disease or discouragement or dysfunctional people.

2 things I want to focus on: *The Unveiling of our World* (Jesus pulling back the curtain on the world), and then *The Unveiling of Jesus Himself*.

I. The Unveiling of our World (Rev 17–18)

Let's go to chapter 17, because there we find a really strange picture:

17:1 One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls (these are a series of judgments God pours out on the world) came and said to me, "Come, I will show you the punishment of the great prostitute, who sits by many waters. ²With her the kings of the earth committed adultery, and the inhabitants of the earth were intoxicated with the wine of her adulteries."

³Then the angel carried me away in the Spirit into a wilderness. There I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast that was covered with blasphemous names and had seven heads and ten horns. ⁴The woman was dressed in purple and scarlet, and was glittering with gold, precious stones and pearls. She held a golden cup in her hand, filled with abominable things and the filth of her adulteries. ⁵The name written on her forehead was a mystery: **BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF PROSTITUTES, AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH.**

⁶I saw that the woman was drunk with the blood of God's holy people, the blood of those who bore testimony to Jesus.

When I saw her, I was greatly astonished.

This **woman represents the enemies of God**. All those who do not belong to Jesus.

Notice (**vs. 2**) that her customers are kings from every kingdom and their inhabitants all over the earth.

- Hers is a universal kingdom. There's essentially only two kingdoms in the world: hers and Jesus', and you belong to one or the other.

A few things you notice about her:

First, she's a prostitute:

- **That's not because she is all about sex.** It's because **sin, at its core, is spiritual adultery.** We were created to love and worship God; to serve him as the center of our lives; to find our fulfillment, our security, and our greatest delight in him.
- The primary sin of the human race was, the Apostle Paul says, to **put ourselves in the place God was supposed to be:** we worshipped and served ourselves rather than the Creator.

Second, she is called "Babylon."

- Babylon is the name of a city with a **long history in the Bible**, symbolizing man's rebellion against God.
- We **1st encounter** Babylon in Genesis 11, (where it is called Babel). There the human race unites to build a tower in rebellion to God; the human race was attempting to demonstrate its glory, power and potential.
- The **essence of the spirit of Babylon is**, "*I will do what I want to do rather than what God wants me to do. I will be the point; I'll be the center.*"
- The theme song of Babylon is Frank Sinatra's, "I did it my way."

*And now, the end is near;
And so I face the final curtain.
My friend, I'll say it clear,
I'll state my case, of which I'm certain.*

... I did it my way.

*For what is a man, what has he got?
If not himself, then he has naught.
To say the things he truly feels;
And not the words of one who kneels.
The record shows I took the blows -
And did it my way!*

Yes, it was my way.

- This is the song they sing in Babylon, and the song they sing in hell. You don't want that song on the playlist of your life.

Third, she's really attractive:

- Now, she **may not seem that attractive**, because she's sitting on a beast (and that's not typically how a guy envisions a hot girl), but John uses several images to convey that she's really attractive.
 - Vs. 4 she's "arrayed in purple and scarlet, adorned with gold and jewels and pearls."
 - Even John himself, vs. 6, is awestruck by her.
- Living with her, vs. 2, is intoxicating, for a while. She promises so much.
- Listen: Sin is enjoyable, for a season. I remember one of my old youth pastors saying, "If sin ain't fun, you ain't doing it right."
 - It's fun for a season; it just ends in a place you don't want to be.

Fourth, (this one may be a surprise) **she is super-religious.**

- One of her companions is the **false prophet**. False religion engages in a lot of activity for God, but without ever putting God back into the **central place** he belongs in our hearts.
- I'll give you just **two examples** of this:
 - **First, every false religion in the world** teaches that you can save yourself. If you are good enough, work hard enough, give enough money, pray enough, you will be saved—the list that each religion provides is different, but

the message is basically the same. Work hard enough, and you can earn heaven or Nirvana or whatever. And **that makes man his own savior**. Which means we will get the glory for our salvation, and we are in a negotiating position with God: "God, I did this, so you owe me *that*."

- **The gospel teaches the opposite.** We could do nothing to save ourselves, so God had to do it all for us; all we can do is receive it; that means he gets the glory for it.
- **It also means that we owe him everything**—our love and gratefulness for his salvation makes us willing to give him everything.
- **Here's a second example of her religion: The message that you can get God back in your life** without ever surrendering yourself fully to God. I've told you before they are embodied in the bumper sticker a lot of people used to have on their car, "God is my co-pilot." I need God to give me guidance and companionship and suggestions about where to go; to help me out of a jam.
 - **If God is your co-pilot, somebody is in the wrong seat.** When you come to God, you come to him saying, "This is your car, and I stole it, and you hand him the keys and get in the back seat and say, "Where are we going?"

Fifth, she has successfully seduced a lot of God's people: 18:4 Then I heard another voice from heaven say: "'Come out of her, my people,' so that you will not share in her sins, so that you will not receive any of her plagues;

It is possible to be one of God's people and still be swept up into her enchantments.

- In fact, I'd say **it's more than just possible**; I would say it is what is happening to most of us.

- Studies show that our lifestyles as professing Christians look just like those of the world around us. We are just as materialistic, just as sexually immoral, and just as self-centered as the world. Our spending patterns are strikingly similar to the world around us. Only 6% of Bible-believing American Christians tithe.
 - Summit: 18%. 82% do not.
- In parenting, the priorities of Christian parents for their kids look virtually identical to non-Christian parents. **We cart our kids** all over town in the same way that non-Christian parents do, teaching our kids to be good at the things this world says like sports and entertainment.
- And the **effects are evident**: 60–80% of our kids will leave Christianity behind once they hit 18.¹
- You see, when we **live with the values of this woman**, you bring upon yourself the plagues. You rob yourselves of God’s blessings. And we rob ourselves of our spiritual power.
 - A guy I quote a lot, Charles Spurgeon said: *“Put your finger on any prosperous page in the Church’s history, and [you] will find a little marginal note [that says]: ‘In this age [people] could readily see where the Church began and where the world ended.’”* We can hardly tell that today, which is why we are often powerless.
 - Another Christian leader says, “The greatest challenge facing [Bible-believing] American [Christians] is not persecution from the world, it is seduction by the world.”

This is **an important question for you. Are you more shaped by Babylon or the Bible?**

- Who is the center of your life?
- Who do you believe owns your stuff?
- Whose glory are you living for?

- Whose will are you pursuing?

Sixth, she hates Jesus. In Vs. 9, the beast is described as having 7 heads, which John says *symbolizes 7 mountains and 7 kings*. Scholars say this could refer to either 7 Roman emperors or 7 empires that have come or are to come in history before the coming of Christ.

And they are **drunk with the blood** of God’s people because this woman has always hated Jesus and his people.

You need to get your mind around this. In every generation, true followers of Jesus have been hated.

- **Some of the Empires that have hated her have been religious empires.**
 - **They have persecuted the followers of Jesus** for preaching that salvation is a free gift of God’s grace and not something you earn by religious zeal.
 - And, they have hated **the followers of Jesus** for saying that the religion is not all about earthly power and control, but following Jesus means emptying yourself and becoming a servant of all.
- **In non-religious Empires**, the prostitute has hated and persecuted the people of God for saying that Jesus is in charge and that he makes the rules about morality.
 - **I see it right here in this church.** I’d say most of the people who come each week would think of themselves as religious.
 - They love the music and they like to learn the Bible and think that they have God as a part of their lives...
 - But then I say something like, “God’s word says that sex is reserved for marriage, and the fact that you are living with

¹ David Platt, “The Danger of Worldliness,” sermon on Revelation 17–18

or sleeping with your boyfriend/girlfriend/fiancée before you are married is sin and puts you out of fellowship with God,” that starts to make people mad.

- And then they leave and send me nasty notes. They love the religion of the prostitute more than the religion of Jesus.

Those who love the prostitute—those who want to be their own Lords and Saviors—have always hated those who say “Jesus is the only Lord and can be our only Savior.”

Jesus said in John 16, “Don’t be discouraged when they hate you and lie about you and mistreat you. That’s what they did to me, and what they’ve done to my people in every generation.”

- Don’t be surprised when they misrepresent your intelligence, your convictions, or your motives.
 - Interesting thing from Roman history: Cannibals and atheists
 - They blamed them for the burning of Rome.
 - These things were not true.
- My point is not that the church doesn’t have any problems and that everything that gets said about us is not true. We do have problems, and we need to address those. But I am trying to get you to see that the prostitutes hatred of us goes far beyond our problems. It’s a hatred of Jesus.
 - If you’re thinking one day we could get good enough that everyone will speak well of us, CNN and NYT will do articles praising us, it’s never going to happen.
 - Christian college students: Lovers under the influence of the prostitute will make fun of you in classrooms and fraternities.
 - They are going to misrepresent your intelligence, your convictions, and your motives.
 - Don’t be surprised, Jesus says. They did the same thing to me! And I don’t want you to be surprised or discouraged.

Seventh, she loses. 18:6–8

[6] Pay her back as she herself has paid back others, and repay her double for her deeds; mix a double portion for her in the cup she mixed. [7] As she glorified herself and lived in luxury, so give her a like measure of torment and mourning, since in her heart she says, ‘I sit as a queen... and mourning I shall never see.’ [8] For this reason her plagues will come in a single day, death and mourning and famine, and she will be burned up with fire; for mighty is the Lord God who has judged her.”

There are 2 rival kingdoms and 2 rival kingdoms. Babylon or Jerusalem; you and Jesus. Only one is left standing, and it will be Jesus.

Those who stand with Jesus in life will stand eternally with him in heaven; those who stand against him in life will die eternally in the 2nd death.

*That’s **the world unveiled**... Now, let’s go back to the first chapter, because John also wants to make sure we also see Jesus unveiled.*

II. The Unveiling of Jesus (Revelation 1:10–18)

[10] I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet... [12] Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking to me, and on turning I saw seven golden lampstands, [13] and in the midst of the lampstands one like a son of man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash around his chest. That’s a **symbol of him being the high priest**, [14] The hairs of his head were white, like white wool, like snow. His eyes were like a flame of fire, [15] his feet were like burnished bronze, refined in a furnace, and his voice was like the roar of many waters. All symbols of power and

judgment. [16] In his right hand he held seven stars, These, we find out, represent all the churches, which, in the midst of all the turmoil, Jesus holds all in his hands. from his mouth came a sharp two-edged sword, (again, power and judgment) and his face was like the sun shining in full strength. You couldn't even look at it!

[17] When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead.

- Keep in mind, Jesus had been John's BFF on earth.
 - In fact, in his Gospel, John had rather **confidently described himself** as "the one that Jesus loved," which I've always thought took a **lot of nerve** to put in print.
 - John's was like, 'Jesus loves you, but I'm his favorite.'
 - At any rate, John must have felt pretty confident about it.
 - **At the last supper**, John says he reclined his head and leaned it back on Jesus' chest (John 13:23). I've got some close guy friends, but if of them lean their head back on my chest during dinner, we're going to have a change in relationship status.
 - Suffice it to say, John and Jesus were close.
- This is the first time they are seeing each other in almost 60 years. So, what does this reunion entail?
- He falls at Jesus' feet *as though he were dead*. And that's not a figure of speech. He literally thought he was going to die.

People have this image of Jesus as a sad, jobless guy with tears in his eyes who wore a robe and talked a lot about his feelings.

- First, that's not true, but in Revelation, you see a different picture of Jesus together. He's not a man of sorrows with tears in his eyes, he sounds rather like a guy you'd never want to meet in a back alley. He's got on steel-toed shoes and crazy hair and eyes and a white shirt and he's looking for a fight.

Is this a different Jesus than the one John knew? Of course not.

- **Truth be told, Jesus has always had this power**, but throughout his ministry on earth it had been veiled.
 - For example, **thinking of feeding of the 5000**. Cool trick. Quaint miracle.
 - But **I read a scientist who considered the question of how much power would it take to generate the matter to create the food necessary to feed the 5000?** Remember, Jesus created that food out of thin air standing on a hillside. The scientist assumed each person ate **8 oz of food**, using Einstein's infamous matter to energy formula ($E=MC^2$), he concluded that the amount of energy necessary to create that much matter would be equivalent to all the electrical power available on earth, working at 100% output, 100% of the time, for 4 years straight, just to create the energy to create the matter for that meal. Jesus did it without breaking a sweat.
- That power was always there; you just couldn't see it. But now it is unveiled in all its strength.

So why is Jesus appearing this way to John? Why not appear as John knew him on earth? Because John and the church is about to go through a time of intense persecution and suffering.

And when you go through intense persecution, you don't need a sentimental Jesus who simply makes you feel warm at night; you need to see Jesus as he really is.

Watch what happens next: [17] But he laid his right hand on me, saying, "Fear not, I am the first and the last,

- This is a statement about Jesus' absolute control. First and the last. I was there when it started, I'll be the last one standing, and in the meantime I'm guiding it all to my perfect appointed ends.
- This fall, I memorized **the 1st chapter of Ephesians** with some friends. One phrase that I can't get out of my head: Paul says that

we “...we have been predestined according to the purpose of him who works *all things* according to the counsel of his will.”

- God has a purpose—to perfect Jesus’ church on earth and present it as a bride to Jesus.
- And all of history—all things—are working toward that purpose. Brothers and sisters, “all things” means there is not one stray molecule, not one stray cancer cell, not one stray spouse.
- In my time with God this week, I read some in Matthew: “Are not two sparrows sold for a cent? And yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. The very hairs of your head are all numbered!” (Matt 10:29–30). It’s hard to get more micro than that—Birds in the sky and hairs on your head! Nothing happens apart from the will of the Father.
 - Now, let me be careful there. I’m not saying that God is the one making all these things happen to you. We live in a fallen world, and the result is a lot of people do a lot of terrible things to each other.
 - I’m saying that Jesus promises that none of those are out of his control and he promises to use every single one as a part of his perfect purposes in your life.
 - You can’t always see that now: many of his purposes of much of what he does will stay hidden until eternity.
 - **Like a tapestry.** At that point, we’ll see with clarity all the beautiful things he has done.

He goes on... [18] I am the living one. I died (the crucifixion, for your sins), and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades. (hell)

- Not only am I **immensely powerful**, John. I died for you so you would never have to face death. I used my greatest power to save you, and now I am using that same power to perfect my purposes in you.
 - I have the keys to all that could ever threaten you.

- **John, what are you afraid of?** Do you really think Caesar is winning? (The only legacy he’s going to leave is a cheap pizza place).
 - Do you think I can’t control cancer?
 - Do you think I don’t know you need a job? That you’re worried about your marriage?
- **LOOK AT ME!** Look at my power! Look at my control! Look at my love! **Why do you doubt?**
- That **POWERFUL HAND sitting on John’s shoulder**, which calms storms and creates matter from nothing is nail-scarred for John’s sin.

So, I have 3 points to end with:

1. Do you need to see Jesus this way this weekend?

- When you go through **suffering or persecution**, whether it’s caused by the beast of Revelation or the mockery of your friends or a lost job, you need to see this Jesus!
- John **opens up the book of Revelation** saying, “There he is! He’s standing at the end of history, the first and the last, the defeater of death, and he wins!”
- I’ve told you before about the time I binge-watched **24**. I think he died in one of the seasons.
 - In fact, now I know that Jack is eventually going to get his own show where he’s the president!
- **Look at him!** There’s his face on the cover. He stands as **Lord and absolute sovereign** over history.
- I know this seems like a **dark episode** in your life. You feel banished in exile and some forgotten island.
- But lift your eyes, because Jesus stands there above it all and in control of it all.
 - That was true in John’s day; it is true in ours.
 - It will be true when the 4 horsemen bring their judgments on the earth; it will be true on the day you get diagnosed with cancer or the day your husband leaves.

- *Behold him there, the Risen Lamb, my perfect spotless righteousness! The great unchangeable, I am, the King of glory and of grace.*

2. Do you dare stand against him?

Not a religious convenience. One day you'll see him—his face shining with the brightness of the sun at full strength!

On that day, those who sided with the prostitute will call on the mountains to cover them from that face! (Rev 6)

3. Do you see what this shows us that we should be about?

- If this is what Jesus is about on earth—if he's got the **7 stars in his hand**—shouldn't it be what we are about, too?
 - The stars in his right hand show you his agenda—Building the church. Shouldn't you be involved?
 - The church's one commission: Spreading the gospel. Shouldn't you be giving your life to that?
- There's still so many people who have never heard...
- The point of Revelation is not to give you details for idle speculation about the 2nd coming. It's to motivate us to go and tell people about his 1st coming.
- **The 1st time he came as Savior; the 2nd time as Judge**

John says: 'he's coming back soon. Every eye will see him.'

- "These are the things which must shortly take place" (1:1)
- "the time is near" (1:3).
- "Behold, he is coming" (1:7)

Now live accordingly!

