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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes

INTRODUCTION

Revelation is the only book in the Bible that has a blessing promised at the beginning and a warning posted at the end. Revelation 1:3 "Blessed is the one who reads the words of this prophecy and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it, because the time is near." We all know we are blessed when we study and read God's word but this is the only book in the Bible that promises a specific blessing to the people who not only read it and hear it, but especially those who obey the things that are found in it. So hang in here. Read this book. Study this book and the Bible says you are in for a special blessing. There is also a warning posted at the end in 22:8. The Lord Jesus says, "I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds anything to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book." So, it's a very dangerous practice to add to the words of the scripture. Take them just like they are—don't add to them. Then in verse 19, "And if anyone takes words away from this book of prophecy, God will take away from him his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book."

I think that is a principle that holds true to all the word of God, Genesis through Revelation. Don't take away from it and don't add to it but it is a specific warning to this one prophecy. Now back to chapter 1:4-8, the blessing and the warning,

"John, to the seven churches in the province of Asia: Grace and peace to you from him who is, and who was, and who is to come and from the seven spirits who are before his throne, and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father—to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen. Look, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him: And all the peoples of the earth will mourn because of him. So shall it be! Amen. 'I am the Alpha and the Omega,' says the Lord God, 'who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty.'"

I. THE SALVATION

1. The writer—John was an old man by now

Let's begin by talking about the salutation to this prophetic book. A salutation is a greeting or a message from the writer to the recipient. Have you ever gotten a long letter from somebody and you go all the way back to the back of the letter first to find out who it's from if there is not a return address? You start reading and it doesn't make sense until you go to the back and say, "Oh that's from Aunt Sue." Then, you go back and you read it and it makes sense. They had a practice back in Bible days, which I think is better than what we do because they put the name of the writer first.

That's why verse 4 says. "John" so that's the first thing we want to look at in the salutation the writer. Who is the writer of the revelation? It is the apostle John. Several times in this book he calls himself, "I, John" "I, John." John and James were the sons of Zebedee. They were called "the sons of thunder," which could mean they had rather boisterous personalities. Sometimes we

picture the disciples as being very poor and unlearned, but did you notice in the gospel according to Mark that when James and John left their father, Zebedee, it says they left their father with all the hired servants and the boats? James and John were a part of a family fishing industry that was very prosperous for them to have employees. So they came from that kind of a family. It is said by tradition that John was the youngest of all the disciples and that all the other eleven of the twelve disciples of course, Judas committed suicide. And then in Acts, chapter 1, the church elected Matthias to replace him. Tradition tells us all eleven died a martyr's death except John. As I shared with you a couple of weeks ago the tradition says Domitian tried to kill him by boiling him in oil. He survived and then was exiled. In fact, if you will, look down in chapter 1, verse 9 He says, "I, John, your brother and companion in the suffering and kingdom and patient endurance that are ours in Jesus, was on the island of Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus." He is exiled on the island of Patmos and he received this vision this prophecy from the Lord. So that's the writer John.

2. The recipients—these seven literal churches represent all churches

Look at the salutation for the recipients. Who are the ones who are receiving this prophecy? "To the seven churches in the province of Asia." Take a minute and look ahead at chapter 2. There are seven letters to seven churches: Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and the church in Laodicea. Those were seven literal congregations in Asia Minor. When you think of churches, don't think of buildings. They didn't have buildings. These were congregations, groups of baptized believers meeting together in people's homes. As I told you those seven churches were seven little churches but they represent all churches of all days and we're going to find that here in our church we have some Christians who are Philadelphia Christians, we have some Christians who are Ephesus Christians, we have some Christians who are Sardis Christians and some who are Laodicea Christians They represent all churches of all time. Those are the recipients.

3. The greeting—we see the Trinity

Notice the greeting John gives, "Grace and peace to you from him." Grace and peace always appear in that order. You never hear of peace and grace, because you don't have peace until you have the grace of God. It's like repentance and faith are always in that order. It's never faith and repentance. You repent and then you put your faith and trust in God. You receive the grace of God and then you have peace. It's a very common greeting but here we find in chapter 1:4 the reference to the Trinity: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. "From him who is, and who was, and who is to come and from the seven spirits." you say, "What in the world is that talking about?"

A couple of weeks ago, we talked about Jewish Gematria, which is the relevance of numbers how every number represents something. Seven represents perfection and there are not seven holy spirits. The Holy Spirit is perfect in his ministry. Isaiah 11:2 talks about the sevenfold ministry of the Holy Spirit and most people believe this is a reference to that. So you have God the Father "who is and who was and who is to come" the Holy Spirit and, of course, you read in verse 5 "and from Jesus Christ." Revelation is not going to reveal the future to you. It's going to reveal Jesus to you, because all you need to know about our future is that Jesus is in control and Jesus is coming back. In Revelation is you're going to learn more about Jesus Christ. There are

more designations and descriptions of Jesus in the book of Revelation than in any other book. How is he described? "He is the faithful witness." (1:5) Some witnesses are not faithful, but Jesus is. "He is the firstborn from the dead." what does that mean? The Bible says elsewhere "he is the first fruits of the resurrection." He was the first one to be resurrected from the dead, but he is only the first and there are going to be many others us included! We'll be resurrected if we're dead when Jesus comes back but if Jesus comes back and raptures the church before we die, we won't be resurrected, we'll just be changed. Another designation states, "He is ruler of the kings of the earth." When John comes to the topic in the person of Jesus Christ, he breaks out into a doxology of praise about Jesus.

II. THE DEDICATION: THE BOOK IS DEDICATED TO JESUS

That leads us to the second part of this message tonight: the dedication. The title of the message is "This is Dedicated to the One Who Loves Me." *not* "Dedicated to the One I Love." I want you to see how Jesus is described in chapter 1:5-6. First of all we are taught that Jesus *finds* us with his love. He finds us when we are lost and he finds us with his love. The second part of verse 5 says, "To him who loves us." That's what Jesus is. He's the one who loves you and he's the one who came seeking you to find you and to love you.

1. Jesus finds us with His love

Do you remember a few years ago when Campus Crusade for Christ came out with this theme called, "I Found It!" Billboards said, "I Found It!" Bumper stickers said, "I Found It!" People coming on television saying, "Hello, my name is so and so and I found it!" It was sort of a hook to get people curious. Then they would talk about how they found Jesus Christ. That's okay and I don't have any problem with it but the truth is you didn't find him; *He* found *you*! Religion is man searching for God and I don't have much time for religion. Christianity is God searching for man. Jesus said, "I came to seek to find and to save the lost!" In Luke, chapter 15, Jesus said, "Do you know how the Father feels about you?" He said, "The Father feels the about you the same way a shepherd feels about one sheep that wanders off. That shepherd is willing to go and search and find that sheep and carry it in his arms." Jesus said, "That's what the Father feels about you!" Jesus said, "Do you know how the Father feels about you? He feels the same way about you like a woman would feel who has one coin and she has lost that coin in her house. She is so concerned about that one lost coin that she turns her house upside down and sweeps it clean looking under every bed, every chair until she finds that one coin." Jesus said, "That's how much the Father loves you!" Jesus said, "Do you know how much the Father loves you? Like a father whose son has wandered off into sin and when that son comes back. That father literally runs out to claim that son again." You see that's how much God loves you. You didn't go looking for God. God sent his Son looking for you and that's the glorious truth. Jesus found us with his love.

2. Jesus frees us with His blood

There's another thing here John says about Jesus as he dedicates this prophecy to him. "Jesus *frees* us with his blood." Look at verse 5. If you have a King James Bible it says, "He has washed us from our sins by his blood." but the New International Version says, "He has freed us from our sins by his blood." What is it? It's the same idea. Here's the picture. Let's say I have a

piece of cloth, and dirt and filth has been rubbed into the cloth. When you put it in the water and you wash it, what happens to all of that dirt? It comes loose. It's set free, like one those laundry detergent commercials. All the dirt and the grime are set free. That's what this is talking about—Jesus Christ has set us free from our sins. How? By his blood. I recently talked about how some people believe your sins are washed away by baptism. It's not the water in the baptistry that washes away your sins. It is the blood of Jesus Christ. So you need to remember what the Bible says in Revelation 1:5. It's his blood that frees us from our sin.

3. Jesus fashions us for His service

Jesus finds us with his love. He frees us with his blood. He sets our sins free from our lives. Then Jesus fashions us for his service. It says here in verse 6, "and He has made us to be a kingdom and priests" This is literally a kingdom *of* priests. When I go down to Mexico and preach down there, because they are so strongly Roman Catholic, it's not at all unusual for somebody to come up to me and after learning that my name is David for the rest of the week they call me Father David. Because the only thing they have the reference point of is a Catholic priest. That's okay. Do you know why? Because I am a priest. Do you know what else? You are a priest also! In fact, the Bible says God made us; he fashioned us "into a kingdom of priests." One of the most important doctrines we hold as evangelical Christians is "The Doctrine of the Priesthood of Believers." What does that mean? It means there is no other Christian who is more highly elevated spiritually than you are. You don't have to go through some priest to get to God. You don't have to pray through anybody except the Lord Jesus Christ who is our High Priest to get to God. You're a priest and I'm a priest. What does that mean? What does a priest do in the Old Testament? A priest in the Old Testament did two things: First, he talked to God on behalf of the people. He then went into the Temple and prayed and talked to God on behalf of all the people out there who did not have access to God. That's what you do when you pray for other people. When you are involved in the Intercessory Prayer ministry, you are fulfilling your priestly responsibility. When you talk to God on behalf of others.

A priest not only talked to God on behalf of others, but he talked to others on behalf of God. When you pray for people, you are fulfilling that first role but when you are talking to people and telling them about Jesus Christ and telling them about what God's word says then you are fulfilling that second role. You are talking to other people on behalf of God. So guess what? You're a priest. You may not wear a backward collar, you may not wear a robe but you are a priest. No one is more highly elevated than you are. One of the worst doctrines that ever fell on this planet is this idea of some kind of spiritual distinction between clergy and laity. As Baptists we sometimes hang on to a little bit of that. It's straight out of the Roman Catholic Church. The priests have certain sacramental authority that average people do not have. We do not believe that. God gifts different people. God has gifted me and he has called me to be a pastor teacher, but that does not elevate me any more than any of you. Some of you are gifted for the gift of service others are gifted for the gift of teaching, some of you are gifted for encouragement and when all the gifts are functioning together that's when the church is alive and is no longer paralyzed but nobody is more important than anybody else. The Bible says, "Jesus is fashioning us. He makes us into a kingdom of priests."

III. THE DESIGNATION

Look at the designation of Jesus. I told you this book is all about Jesus and that's all we are talking about today: JESUS, because we see in verses 7 and 8 some further designations of who Jesus is and what he's going to be doing. Verse 7 is sort of a preview of the rest of the book. Look at verse 7: "Look, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him."

1. The Coming King

Jesus is pictured as "the coming King" That's why we sing, "The King is coming," because the King *is* coming. It says in verse 7 Jesus is coming back, it says, "with the clouds." Please don't misunderstand this. When Jesus comes back to rapture the church, he is coming "in the clouds." literally the clouds are the sky and the Bible says, "the dead in Christ shall rise first, then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them to meet the Lord in the air." in the clouds caught up we talked about that. That is the rapture. I believe could happen at any moment there is not a single thing that has to be fulfilled for that to happen. It could happen at any moment. It could happen before I finish this sentence! This is talking about when Jesus Christ will come "with the clouds." and this is a reference to the clouds of people he will bring with him at the Second Coming when "every eye will see him."

Have you ever been a little bit confused about the Second Coming? There are some passages that say when Jesus comes back he's going to come "as a thief in the night" He's going to slip in suddenly, silently, secretly and then be gone. And then you say, "There are other passages that talk about him coming 'in power and majesty and glory and every eye is going to see him' Which one is it?" Yes! When he comes to rapture the church, it will be like a thief in the night—suddenly in the twinkling of an eye—but when he comes back seven years later at the Battle of Armageddon "every eye is going to see him." When he comes back to rapture the church, believers will see him then. Everybody else will see him seven years later, whether in the second resurrection (the resurrection of the unjust) or those who are alive when he comes the second time. So he is pictured as "the coming King." Notice what else it says about it, "Even those who pierced him:"

Some folks are going to be glad to see Jesus. Others aren't going to be glad to see Jesus. Can you imagine the very people who must have taken those nails and held them on the hands of Jesus and nailed those nails into his hand and his feet? Those folks are dead. When they are resurrected and they see Jesus whom they pierced. Can you imagine how they are going to feel? Who was it that really crucified Jesus? You say, "The Roman soldiers did it." They did the actual piercing but who really did it? You say, "The Jews did it because they are the ones who told the Romans to do it." Who really did crucify Jesus? In a real sense, God the Father crucified him because the Bible says, "God laid on him the iniquities of us all." If you really want to know the truth do you know who crucified Jesus? We all did! Because it our sin that killed the Lord Jesus and so "even those who pierced him" are going to look upon him when he comes back.

2. The Alpha & Omega

Not only is he the coming King, He is Alpha and Omega. In verse 8 He says, "I am the Alpha and the Omega." Some of you don't know what those words mean. In the Greek alphabet Alpha

is the first letter. Alpha, Beta, Gamma, Delta...Omega is the last letter. So to say, "He is the Alpha and the Omega" is to say, "He is the A and the Z and everything in between." He is the first and the last; he's the beginning and the end and he's everything in between. That means Jesus is everything. Can you think of any English word that can be spelled without using the 26 English letters? There are not any. I probably have 1,500 books in my library and I could go to every English written book and I can guarantee you every word in every book utilizes those 26 letters. You can go to the Library of Congress, which has hundreds of thousands of editions and you can look in every English book and every one of those books will contain words using those 26 letters. That is saying, "Everything that is, is Jesus!"

I remember in the late 1960s and early 1970s we used to sing a song called "He is everything to me!" I used to love that song! "He is everything to me." but I got to thinking about that a while back. That song was really not all that important because the truth is "He is everything—period!" whether he is everything to me or not, "He is everything. Period!" He is the Alpha and the Omega and everything in between.

3. The Almighty I Am

Then the final designation: He is the coming King. He is the Almighty I AM. When it says in verse 8, "I am the Alpha and the Omega" it is more than just a verb of being it says, "The Lord God who is, and who was, and who is to come." That means Jesus Christ is the past, he is the present, and he is the future. What does the phrase, "I AM" mean? Do you remember back in Exodus 3, when Moses stood at the burning bush and God spoke to him and said, "Go back to Egypt and tell Pharaoh to let my people go!" Moses said, "Okay, God. But I have to know your name," because all their gods in Egypt had names. "What's your name?" God said, "You tell them that my name is 'I AM.' You just tell them 'I AM' sent you." You say, "That's a strange name for a god." In the Hebrew language there is no sense of past, future and present tense. When God said to Moses, "I AM" He was saying, "I have always been. I AM being right now and I will always be!" We can't say that. We've never "always been." We are right now and we will always be but there was a time when we were not. But not God. God said, "I've always been. I'm being right now and I will always be." Jesus is saying there, "Everything in this life is so temporary but I've always been and I'll be." and he says, "My words will never pass away." There are only two eternal things from this point on in this world: the word of God and the souls of men and women. Your houses, your bank accounts, your cars; everything else is temporary. It will disintegrate. Only the word of God and the souls of men and women will last for ever and ever. Jesus said, "This is who I am. I am the coming King, get ready for me." He said, "I am the Alpha and the Omega I am everything you need from A to Z. You just pick out the letters and spell out a word and that's what I am to you." and he said "I will always be and my word will never pass away."

CONCLUSION

A number of years ago I had a friend who was a pastor up in Louisville, Kentucky. On a very wintry, freezing Saturday night, some teenagers broke into the church and stole some audio equipment and then did a terrible thing—they set that church on fire. It was in the middle of the night and the church was already consumed in flames when an alarm finally reached the

Louisville Fire Department. By the time the Fire Department got there, the building was almost completely burned down. It was such a cold night, that when firefighters sprayed water, it froze instantly on the parking lot. The people who had not heard about the fire at St. Matthews arrived on a Sunday morning to see their building nothing but a charred ruin with an amazing ice covering. Of course the church membership was devastated. They found a place to meet that Sunday and God began to do some things in that church, great things. The pastor stood up about a week later and talked about his library in the church, which had been completely destroyed. He said but for some reason there was one book in my library on my desk and it was the only one he salvaged and he said, "Here it is!" and he held up his Bible. Every other book in his office burned. He said, "Jesus said, 'Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.'"

When we say "the word of God" we're not talking about the written print on these manmade pages. He's talking about his eternal word that will never, never end. You had better plug your life into the one who has always been, is right now and will always be!

OUTLINE

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2. The recipients—these seven literal churches represent all churches
3. The greeting—we see the Trinity

II. THE DEDICATION: THE BOOK IS DEDICATED TO JESUS (vs. 5-6)

Jesus

1. Finds us with His love
2. Frees us with His blood
3. Fashions us for His service

III. THE DESIGNATION: JESUS IS SEEN AS: (vs. 7-8)

1. The Coming King
2. The Alpha & Omega
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