

September 11, 2022

The God who speaks to us

Revelation 1

This Fall we'll be looking at the first few chapters of the book of Revelation. In Revelation 2-3, Jesus gives us seven letters to seven churches. On the one hand, these are seven specific Christian churches in a specific place and time, facing horrific persecution, the like of which we cannot imagine (1:4).

There were many more than seven churches in Asia (what we now call Turkiye). Seven is a symbolic number for God's perfection (thus the sevenfold Spirit of God [see Isaiah 11:2], seven lampstands, seven stars, seven angels [Revelation 1:12-20, 3:1], seven eyes of the Lamb [Revelation 5:6]). These seven churches represent ALL Jesus' churches, in all places, at all times (even Lethbridge in 2022).

When we read these letters (and any other passages in the Book of Revelation) we do have to remember that these passages are written to real people, facing really, really difficult times in a real time and place. These letters meant something, very specific, to the people to whom they are addressed. Yes, we can "read their mail," after the fact, and learn a lot from them. But we do need to keep the original context in mind.

But even before we get to those letters, in Revelation 2-3), we need to put them in context. There is a Revelation, Chapter 1! We will spend a couple of Sundays thinking about some of the big themes addressed in Revelation 1:

- God the Father
- Jesus the Son
- The Holy Spirit
- God's people – the church – us

This morning we focus on God, our loving heavenly Father.

1. This Scripture is a revelation from GOD (1:1-2)

What is your mental image of who God is? Whether we recognize it or not – whether we have thought about it or not – we all have a "picture" of who God is ... Is He

- A dottering old man? Rather out of touch. Old Fashioned. Irrelevant. Who we can safely ignore, because He doesn't understand our world and isn't capable of really solving any of the problems in our world ...
- A judge? God is rather scary. He's all making sure we believe just the right things. We follow all the rules. We pray just the right prayer. We confess every sin. Or we get zapped by lightning bolts from heaven ... You better watch out, you better think twice, He's making a list and checking it twice, He knows whose naughty and nice ...
- A vague force, distant and remote? Yes, there may be some sort of "god" but who or

what He is, who knows? We have a sense of some spiritual reality, but it's unknowable, unapproachable, and un-everything-else-able. He may have set the universe in motion, but He's stepped away. He ignores us. We can ignore Him.

What Scripture consistently teaches us is, in fact

- God is real, personal, and knowable
- God created us
- God loves us
- God reaches out to us, drawing us in, making the first steps toward a personal relationship with us.

This God is a God who communicates with us:

- Through our prayers
- Through our hearts, souls, and minds,
- AND through His Word

What does this all mean for us, on September 11, 2022?

It means that when we go through the trials and tribulations of this life – and our trials are real, God is WITH us, personally, today and every day. We don't face life alone.

In His Word, God says:

- *"Be strong and courageous! Do not be afraid or discouraged. For the Lord your God is with you wherever you go."* (Joshua 1:9)
- *"Don't be afraid, for I am with you. Don't be discouraged, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you. I will hold you up with my victorious right hand."* (Isaiah 41:10).

God is with you. God is for you. Be encouraged.

2. God blesses the one who reads His word, who listen to its message, AND obey what it says (1:3).

God is WITH us, and God is FOR us. God wants what's best for us. The word the Bible uses is that God "blesses" us ... in and through our relationship with Him.

We think we know that "blessing" means. Some North American Christians have bought into a corporate vision of life that says what we HAVE matters most. So to "blessed" means health, wealth, and a vacation cottage in Hawaii. Those are not really the things God values most for us. If we read through all of Revelation, we don't get the sense these brutally persecuted followers of Jesus are going to be wearing Louis Vuitton-emblazoned suits, wear extravagant jewelry, or drive flashy cars. Not at all.

What we do see it that those who put their faith in Jesus, AND who obey what He says, are blessed in much deeper ways.

- With **hope** – God gets us through. He may not get us through the way WE would want, but He gets us through. One day, we will be with Him, forever. In our culture we like to think we can have it all now and hereafter. Tertullian, a wise saint from North Africa in the 2nd Century, once said we are fools if we honestly think even the best things in this life can compare with what is awaiting us, when we are with Jesus.
- With **peace** – God gives us peace with Himself. We no longer need to carry any guilt, shame, or worry. He loves us, forgives us, and gives us new life. He gives us peace with other people. He gives us the power to forgive others.
- With **love** – We are loved by God. For who we are, as we are. Yes, God will help us grow and change to be who He created us to be – He will not leave us as we are. Because He loves us, we know His agenda is always what is BEST for us. There is nothing more precious than knowing we are loved by other people. Family. Friends. And, at its best, God's church is a place where we are loved for who we are, as we are. Again, the best family/friends, in love, help us become the best we can be.
- With **joy** – there is a profound joy knowing we are safe in God's hands. *"If God is for us, who can ever be against us? ... Can anything ever separate us from Christ's love? Does it mean he no longer loves us if we have trouble or calamity, or are persecuted, or hungry, or destitute, or in danger, or threatened with death? No, despite all these things, overwhelming victory is ours through Christ, who loved us. I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from God's love. Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither our fears for today nor our worries about tomorrow – not even the powers of hell can separate us from God's love. No power in the sky above or in the earth below – indeed, nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord"* (Romans 8:31-39).

What does this all mean for us, on September 11, 2022?

It means that our God, King, Creator, and Saviour is WITH us and FOR us. He blesses us with the strength, power, wisdom, and help we need to make it through the hard times, as well as the good times. To become the people He created us to be. God blesses you with His Spirit to help you deal with it, get you through, and come out the other side.

3. God is the Alpha and the Omega – the beginning and the end (Alpha and omega are the A-Z of the Greek alphabet). The one who is, who always was, and who is still to come. The Almighty One (1:4, 8)

God who is WITH us, God is FOR us, and God is TRUSTWORTHY. Trust is a big issue. Can we trust the politician? Can we trust the website? Can we trust God? This God who is with us and for us IS the amazing God, who created the wonders of the universe, and yet, personally and passionately, loves us, and gives us a future.

God is the One who always WAS. Even before the beginning of all things, God WAS. He was/is/will be the Almighty One. He is the One who created the roughly 200 billion galaxies in the observable universe, with as many as 1×10^{24} stars (more stars than all the grains of sand on all beaches of the planet Earth). As the James Webb Space Telescope reveals more

an more of the wonders of God's creation, we are reminded God set all this in motion and holds it all together. God is the One who led the Israelites from Egypt. Who delivered them from Babylon. Who raised Jesus from the dead. Can God get us through our difficulties? Our family problems? Our issues at work? Our mental health struggles? Our physical ailments? Absolutely.

God is the One who IS now. God is not just the God of the past, He is the here and now. He is the Almighty One today. Believers in the 1st Century, facing intense, bloody torture and persecution by the likes of Nero needed to know God was not just the God of the past – the creator, the One who led the Israelites out of Egypt, the exiles from Babylon – He is the God who is doing things now. Revelation gives them glimpses into what God was doing in their world. As we move into Fall 2022, God is at work, too. He is getting us through Covid. He is doing amazing things through our partners in mission. He is building our church. He is getting us through our health issues. He is getting us through our personal struggles.

God is the One who IS STILL TO COME. The best is yet to come. We may think this is the best it gets. In fact, the best is yet to come. In our personal lives, when we are raised up with Jesus, one day, we will experience a quality of life we cannot imagine. Have you noticed the Bible is vague in its descriptions of heaven? I think, in part, that's because it's beyond describing in human words. There are images of a glorious throne room, an extravagant wedding feast, and amazing garden-city made of precious stones, filled with verdant trees. All of these, I suspect, are attempts to describe the indescribable, mere shadows of a reality so much more amazing than we can imagine.

What does this all mean for us, on September 11, 2022?

It means that we are loved by a God who walked with us and was for us yesterday, who walks with us and is for us today, and will walk with us and bless us into a glorious eternity. We are BELOVED by our Almighty God, today and forever. We are SAFE in the hands of our Almighty God, today and forever. We are STRENGTHENED our Almighty God, today and forever. We have WISDOM from our Almighty God, today and forever. We have LIFE through our Almighty God, today and forever.

We face today – and the future – with confidence. We are in God's hands. Those are best of hands to be in.

At the end of a service, we often used this blessing from Numbers 6:24-25: *"May the Lord bless you and keep you. May the Lord smile on you and be gracious to you. May the Lord show you his favor and give you his peace."* This is God's Word, God's blessing, God's promise to you, today and all days. May we live in that place of knowing God's good blessing in our lives, through all the ups, down, and in-betweens.