**The Unveiling**

Revelation 1

We just finished a series in Genesis called ***FOUNDATIONS***. We saw the key truths the Bible presents in the very first chapters. These convictions form the basis for our Christian worldview - it is a firm and unshakable foundation!

Now we flip to the end of the story, with a nine week series called ***FINALE***. Nothing in the Bible is there by accident, so the details matter. And when you study the details of Revelation 21-22, the last two chapters in the Bible, the details very much recall Genesis 1-2. So God Himself has invited us to read the beginning and the end together. We’ll point out some of these connections as we go along, but just one obvious one: **the tree of life**.

“On either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month.” Revelation 22:2

In the New Heaven and the New Earth **the curse** God placed on the world because of Adam and Eve’s rebellion will ***fully and finally be removed***. The way to the tree of life that was blocked by a huge angel with a flaming sword, and which has remained block throughout history by our sin, will finally be open again. We will have free access to the tree of life, from which you can ***eat and live forever!***

And best of all, the harmony and **SHALOM** that existed between Adam and Eve and all creation and between people and God, will fully and eternally be restored. PEACE. No sin, no death, no disease, no sadness, no pain - no curse. Instead, peace, life, love, healing, wholeness. God. The throne of God in the center. The river of life flowing from the throne feeding the tree of life.

Oh, if you ever need encouragement, meditate on heaven and the final state. Study Revelation 21-22 and soak in the truth of how it will be ***when Jesus comes back and says, “Enough.”***

**Revelation** is a deep and detailed book, and we can’t deal with all of its fascinating complexities in a nine week series. We will skip like a stone across nine prominent themes. But I invite you over these nine weeks to dig into this book on your own. Read it. Study it. Pray through it. Listen especially to the message Jesus speaks in the letters to the church. We are going to skip over those for this series, so read them as personal letters to you and to Oakwood.

Our goal and our prayer for this series is to ***PREPARE***. Consider this series your **ORIENTATION to the END OF THE WORLD**.

You all know I’m a history guy. My favorite is WW2, and especially **D-Day**. From Pearl Harbor until D-Day the United States and our allies labored tirelessly, harnessing the full social, spiritual, economic, and military power of our country, dedicated to the task of defeating Germany and Japan and restoring peace to the earth.

The logistics that went into D-Day alone are utterly staggering.

**D-Day Mobilization**

* 156,000 soldiers
* 195,700 sailors
* 6,939 navy vessels
* 3,262 aircraft
* 7M tons of supplies

Obviously ***the Nazis made comparable preparations*** for the invasion they knew was coming, but did not know where or when.

***The Moms*** in the room look at those numbers and start to add up the number of meals and bandaids. ***The military folks*** in the room imagine the number of training exercises and drills. President Rooselvelt and Winston Churchill knew the invasion was necessary and decided the coast of France was the best point of entry. From December of ‘41 until June 6, 1944, they worked with their military leaders to craft a ***masterful and daring plan of attack***, including massive amounts of misdirection and spycraft to confuse the Germans (which succeeded beautifully).

Now hear me on this. ***I’m not saying you should start building your ZOMBIE APOCALYPSE BUNKER.*** Don’t hear me say that. Some of you may have a “Go Bag,” or some kind of survival preparedness plan. But part of the purpose of this series is to show us **HOW TO PREPARE**. And it is mostly heart / soul / mind work - not bunker work. The whole point is that this world is not our home, and it’s all gonna burn down anyway. So stockpiling as much stuff as you can for yourself would be the OPPOSITE application. Better to think of storing up as much treasure in heaven as we can because the days are coming, and maybe very soon, when all that will matter is what you have sent on ahead, because you can’t take anything with you.

Today in Revelation 1 we will hear an encouraging **message directly from Jesus to us**. Listen to verse 1 again.

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

God the Father gave the Lord Jesus **a special revelation, a special preview**, and our Lord has carefully and wonderfully passed that along to us through his servant, John the apostle. Here is the summary of Jesus’ three-fold message to us:

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| **A Message from Jesus to us:** | |
| 1. Be Ready 2. Be Faithful 3. Be Confident | “The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants the things that must soon take place.” Revelation 1:1 |

There is an important **double meaning** in that first phrase - ***“the revelation of Jesus Christ.”*** The Greek contains the same ambiguity as the English - does it mean the revelation FROM Jesus or the revelation OF Jesus. And the ambiguity is intentional. Central to the revelation FROM Jesus is the revelation OF Jesus.

***How can we be ready?*** How can we remain faithful? How can we be confident in the face of the coming persecution and the destruction of the only world we know?

The answer is **Jesus**. ***We need to SEE Him***. We need to hold onto Him. We need to know that He is holding onto us. The book of **Revelation** is the unveiling, the ***revealing of how the world ends***. But it is even more essentially ***the final revealing of who Jesus is***.

So let’s listen to this message, let’s join John the apostle in seeing this vision - the revelation of Jesus Christ. The first part of the message is:

1. Be **Ready**

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

***The word “must” is a strong word in Greek.*** It’s more than “have to” in English. It is often translated as ***“necessary”*** in places like **Luke 24** when Jesus explained that the things happened to him HAD TO BE fulfilled - they were necessary. There was a divine MUST, a divine IMPERATIVE.

And that same level of **MUST applies to the sequence of events that lead to the end of the world**. Jesus showed John the things that MUST take place in the divine plan of God. According to God’s sovereign decree, **it is necessary** that ***seven seals*** be opened in heaven, releasing the four horsemen of the apocalypse and unleashing judgment upon the earth. The seventh seal will activate the ***first trumpet***, releasing even more furious wrath and punishment. The seventh trumpet will trigger the first bowl, pouring out the ***seven last judgments*** of God that will consume the earth entirely in fiery wrath.

It is necessary that the world be UNMADE so it can be REMADE and restored to the sinless harmony of the original creation. ***The last remnants of sin*** and the brokenness that sin has caused ***must be purged from the earth and its inhabitants*** - and only then can the holy city of God descend from heaven and be united with earth. This MUST take place. It is necessary.

**It’s like the doctor tells you**. This won’t be pleasant, but it is necessary. Colonoscopy prep. Not pleasant. But necessary. Chemo - not pleasant, but sometimes necessary. Open heart surgery - not pleasant, but necessary.

These are things that “must **SOON** take place.” John wrote this around 90 AD. It was the last book of the New Testament; the last revelation from God from the last surviving apostle. Christians have been living in **a state of vigilant watchfulness** since Jesus ascended into heaven and told his followers he would return in the same way. Just as he ascended into the clouds, so he will soon descend from the clouds - in glory, with angels, at the last trumpet.

Jesus was clear that his coming would be ***“like a thief in the night,”*** at a time when most people will not expect. So the calling for his followers is not to be like the average worldly person, caught up with the affairs and indulgences of life. No, we are to like the ***WISE young women*** who kept their lamps trimmed and kept extra oil on hand so when the bridegroom arrived they could rush out to meet him. We are to be like ***the faithful household manager*** who takes care of his master’s house and his master’s servants - not abusing or neglecting anyone - but working as though the master was present, and watching every day for this master’s return. THAT servant will be rewarded. But the one who gets drunk, who beats the servants and who neglects the master’s will will find himself shocked when the master suddenly returns, and that wicked manager will be punished most severely.

***KEEP WATCH***. Be ready. Stay awake. Verse 3.

1. Be **Ready**

“Keep what is written in [this prophecy] ***for the time is near***.” Revelation 1:3

***The time for WHAT?*** The time for the birth pains to accelerate in frequency and intensity, ushering in the Great Tribulation? The unveiling of the antichrist? The rise of a global government led by one who will demand worship from all people?

Or the time for Jesus’ coming? Verse 7:

1. Be **Ready**

“Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him.” Revelation 1:7

Now, I’m on the record here that my understanding of the return of Christ is ***POST-tribulational***. I believe Jesus will come back AFTER the Great Tribulation. Others believe that Jesus will come back BEFORE the tribulation FOR the saints and again AFTER the tribulation WITH the saints. That is the **Pre-trib** view.

Both pre- and post-trib believers agree ***there will be a time of great tribulation***, they simply disagree on the role of Christians in that time. I’ve said before, that of all the views I hold in the Bible, this is ***the one on which I would be most happy to be wrong***. High fives all around as we fly up into the clouds to meet Jesus in the air.

If we had to decide between these two views based only on Revelation 1:7 ***the first round in that debate would go to the pre-trib side***. What must soon take place? What time is near? The answer John is clearly driving toward is the return of Christ. Soon. Near. Imminent. Any moment.

But then ***the post-trib group would have its turn*** and say, “Hold on, look at the second phrase in verse 7. “Every eye will see him, even those who pierced him.” That can’t be the rapture, because only Christians are supposed to see Jesus in the rapture. Remember **Left Behind**? Nobody saw Jesus in the clouds in glory at the start of that movie. Everyone just vanished. Now trust me, I am not saying that we should make any serious theological decisions based on Left Behind. Quite the opposite. I’m calling us to really study the relevant passages.

In the end, ***it really doesn’t matter which view you hold***. Either way, Christians MUST be ready. **We have to pay attention**.

* If we are waiting for the ***sudden rapture*** of the church, then we better be about the Lord’s work every minute of the day because when we vanish, that’s it - the work is done - nothing more we can do - no more people we can reach.
* And if we are waiting for ***the revealing of the antichrist*** and the onset of the Great Tribulation, we have to be equally diligent in the Lord’s work and especially vigilant in watching for the signs of the times.

Here is how Jesus said it in Matthew 24:

1. Be **Ready**

“From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts out its leaves, you know that summer is near. So also, when you see all these things, you know that he is near, at the very gates.” Matthew 24:32-33

Ha! Say the pre-tribbers - HE is near - that must mean Jesus. Yeah, unless it means the antichrist. Let’s not waste time in endless debate. Let’s do the work the Lord has called us to do - let’s make disciples and carry the gospel to the ends of the earth. ***Our Master is coming and He has given us clear marching orders until He returns.***

We must be ready. Time is short. Jesus is coming. The end is near. The second part of Jesus’ message to us:

1. Be **Faithful**

“His servant John, who bore witness to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ.” Revelation 1:2

In his gospel John called himself, ***“the disciple whom Jesus loved.”*** That wasn’t a point of pride or arrogance, it was a statement of affection. ***It wasn’t that John was so worthy or deserving.*** He was right there with James when they wanted to call down fire from heaven to destroy an unresponsive town. He was right there with James when their Mama asked Jesus for the seats of honor in heaven. He was right with James as one of the “sons of thunder.”

James, the brother of John, was the first of the apostles to be martyred. That James drank the “cup” of suffering much sooner than John did. John had the special blessing and challenge to live the longest of all the apostles, and to survive in exile in order to receive this final revelation. ***John was a faithful servant of the Lord***. He preached the gospel, according to tradition, assuming leadership of the church in Ephesus and probably overseeing the growing Christian movement from there.

He bore witness to the word of God, testifying about Jesus Christ. “Even to all that he saw.” That applies to this whole book of Revelation - John saying, “I’m just writing down what God showed me - what He told me.” And it applies to John’s life. John was faithful, even when his life was threatened, even when banished into exile. He never denied Jesus. He remained steadfast. And so in verse three, ***he calls all believers to also be faithful.***

1. Be **Faithful**

“Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear, and who keep what is written in it.” Revelation 1:3

The blessing Jesus promises is for those who OBEY HIM, who keep His Word. Our memory verse for the foundations series was Matthew 7 - ***“Whoever hears these words of mine and DOES THEM*** is like the wise man who built his house on the rock.” It’s not the hearing but the doing that brings security and blessing in Christ.

This same blessing is pronounced here at the beginning of Revelation. “Blessed are those who HEAR, and ***who KEEP what is written***.” Christians are called to “the obedience of faith.” True faith in Jesus always obeys Jesus. Don’t deceive yourself that you believe in Jesus if you don’t obey Him. To believe in Jesus as Savior is to follow Him as Lord. You cannot separate the two.

I like the **lifeboat illustration** for salvation - you have to get on board to be saved. It’s not enough to know about Jesus or to say you believe in Him. You have to “get on board” by committing your life to Him. But getting on board with Jesus means you submit to Him as the Captain of the Ship. You don’t climb on board and then start barking orders. You listen to the Captain and get involved doing the work on the ship, caring for the other shipmates and helping to rescue those still struggling in the water.

Jesus calls us to obedience - faithful, enduring obedience. Verse 9.

1. Be **Faithful**

“Your brother and partner in the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance that are in Jesus.” Revelation 1:9

John presents himself as a co-sharer in ***three Christian realities***. In Jesus, we all share in these three things - tribulation, kingdom and endurance. Sharing in the kingdom, we are like YES! We’re in - we are princes and princesses under King Jesus. But the tribulation and endurance that are in Jesus sound a little less pleasant…

But Jesus didn’t say, ***“In this world you will have COMFORT,”*** He said, “In this world you will have trouble.” He said, “Since they persecuted me, they will persecute you.” Don’t expect different treatment than your Master experienced. Jesus faced fierce opposition, rejection and ultimately execution. We follow Him on the way to the CROSS, not the way of the COUCH.

So our calling is to remain faithful, steadfast and **obedient NO MATTER WHAT.**

***Athletes understand this***. They put up signs in the gym like “Pain is weakness leaving the body.” They push each other through muscle soreness and even mild injuries to keep playing.

***Soldiers understand this.*** When you go through basic training, discipining your body and learning to use deadly weapons you have no illusion that your assignment will be safe or comfortable, especially in a time of war.

***Teachers understand this.*** In the first days of class with a new teacher - a good teacher - they prepare you to work hard. They don’t promise an easy ride, they give motivation to work hard to get the most out of their course - so you learn, so you grow.

***Christians understand this***. If you haven’t suffered in your faith yet, then you haven’t followed Jesus very far. The way of Jesus is the way of service, sacrifice and suffering. We shouldn’t bring persecution upon ourselves by being obnoxious and confrontational. But we should extend ourselves in loving service that sometimes hurts, that has a cost to us.

***Making disciples is some of the hardest***, most challenging and **frustrating work** there is. Working with people is messy. We all have good days and bad days - good seasons and hard seasons. But as Christians we cannot avoid working with people - that is our central calling - to love the unlovable; to serve the resistant; to keep giving even when there is no response.

Be Faithful. Persevere. Never, never, never give up.

**Adoniram Judson** is one of the great heroes of the faith in this regard. The flourishing church in Myanmar today is there because Judson went as a missionary 200 years ago. One of the first missionaries sent from the United States, Judson should be a household name for us. He spent 40 years in the jungles of Asia - a lot like Florida, I suppose, just without the air conditioning, mosquito treatment or any other modern conveniences.

It took over a year to reach Burma, as it was then called. Then it took three years to learn the language, which was very difficult for Judson even though he already knew Latin, Greek and Hebrew. Judson’s wife, Ann, ***miscarried*** with their first child before they reached Burma. Then they ***lost their son***, Roger, at the age of eight months.

The Burmese people were Buddhists for generation upon generation, so at first they had no interest in a message about one God. The first convert was baptized an 1819, after living in Burma for six years, preaching for three. By 1822 there were 18 believers. So it took almost **ten years to win 18 converts**. But in that time he had translated the entire New Testament and printed the first Brumese Grammar ever.

Then war broke out and for 17 months Judson became a **prisoner of war** - suffering in miserable conditions, tortured and abused. His wife may have had it even worse than him, losing their third child and running all over the country trying to get her husband set free. Then, soon after the war ended, Judson’s wife herself succumbed to illness and died.

There are many more details about Judson that fill in the picture even more graphically. But the point is that he suffered terribly with minimal fruit for his labor during the first 15 years of his ministry in Burma. Most of us, in similar circumstances, would have given up and headed back to the U.S. within a year or two. But Judson persevered. He remained faithful to his calling. He stayed a full forty years in Burma, eventually seeing a true gospel movement sweep the region.

We need the patient endurance of John the Apostle and Adoniram and Ann Judson. This is Jesus’ message to us: be ready and be faithful. Verse 9.

1. Be **Faithful**

“I, John… was on the island of Patmos on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.” Revelation 1:9

John was exiled for remaining faithful to the Word of God - the gospel - and the testimony of Jesus. John would not betray his allegiance to the Lord Jesus and the message of salvation in him. That is our calling to continue - faithful to God’s Word, continuing to testify to the gospel of God’s grace!

One more message from Jesus to us.

1. Be **Confident**

“Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven spirits who are before his throne.” Revelation 1:4

There are lots of **sevens in Revelation**. 7 seals, 7 trumpets, 7 bowls - that 3 fold repetition of seven judgments completes the outpouring of the wrath of God upon a sinful world. Seven is God’s number, the number of perfection and completion. Six is the devil’s number - short of perfection. Close enough to impersonate, which is what the devil does in Revelation - makes a mokery of the Trinity with a false god (the Dragon, or devil), a false Christ (the antichrist or the beast) and a false spirit (the prophet of the beast).

In Revelation one we hear of **seven churches**, each with a lampstand, also represented by seven stars. Jesus writes letters to these seven churches, not to exclusively address them, but to address the entire church - the sevenfold church - the complete church throughout history. And here in verse four we see the seven spirits before the throne of God, or the seven-fold Spirit. This does not mean there are seven Holy Spirits within the Triune Godhead, it symbolizes the perfection and completion within the Godhead as a sevenfold Spirit.

This book is **the Revelation of Jesus Christ** - the final unveiling of the glory, power and perfection of Jesus. That should lead us to worshipful awe and joyful CONFIDENCE as we trust in and follow Him. If Revelation chapter one has a primary goal and if the whole book of Revelation has a single purpose, it is ***to exalt the Lord Jesus*** and by lifting up Jesus in all of His glory to encourage and strengthen believers who will be called to endure great suffering.

When John saw this unveiling of Jesus, look at his response in verse 17:

1. Be **Confident**

“When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. But he laid his right hand on me, saying, ‘Fear not.’” Revelation 1:17

To see the Lord Jesus in His fully manifested glory would be to see the Shekinah Glory of God - and ***any human who saw this would immediately die***. No mortal can see God and live. What John saw was not the full revelation of Jesus’ glory for he saw Jesus as “one like a son of man.” John saw Jesus in his resurrected, glorified HUMAN body; but still a human body. The glorious radiance of the Godhead contained in a form John could look upon.

But even this human form of ***Jesus was overwhelmingly spectacular and terrifying*** to John, who fell down as though dead. Like one who tries to look directly at the sun or at a solar eclipse for too long, John could not endure the brilliance of the Lord Jesus for long.

Listen to **the vision John saw of Jesus**:

“In the midst of the lampstands one like a son of man, clothed in a long robe and with a golden sash around his chest. The hairs of his head were white, like white wool, like snow. His eyes were like a flame of fire.” Revelation 1:13-14

“His feet were like burnished bronze, refined in a furnace, and his voice was like the roar of many waters. In his right hand he held seven stars, from his mouth came a sharp two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining in full strength.” Revelation 1:15-16

The details in this vision communicate **the holiness, splendor and power of the exalted Lord Jesus**: a royal robe, a golden sash; white hair - snow white, pure, untarnished; blazing eyes that see everything; glowing feet like a polished bronze statue; a sword coming from his mouth and a face as radiant as the sun.

And notice two critical details: this glorious Son of Man was standing ***“in the midst of the seven lampstands.”*** Jesus is present with His Church - He is in our midst. Even more than that, ***“in his right hand he held the seven stars”*** - those stars represent the angels of the seven churches. The powerful spirit messengers for each church rest in the palm of Jesus’ hand. He directs them according to His sovereign will and they act in His power.

Here is the message of Revelation one in summary: **Jesus has got you**. He is holding on. He will never let you go. He is with us, walking in our midst. He is protecting and guiding us with His sevenfold Spirit and with the support of his mighty angels. Listen to the words of Jesus to his servant John:

1. Be **Confident**

“Fear not, I am the first and the last, and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades.” Revelation 1:17-18

We have nothing to fear in the coming tribulation - whether it’s the Great Tribulation or just the “small T” everyday challenges in the future. We have nothing to fear because Jesus is with us. The first and the last - the Creator and King - the Risen One who defeated sin and death forever. Jesus our King is telling us “Do not be afraid.”

I expect this reminded John of Luke chapter 12.

1. Be **Confident**

“Do not fear those who kill the body, and after that have nothing more that they can do… fear him who, after he has killed, has authority to cast you into hell.” Luke 12:4-5

Our problem is not that we are too fearful - **our problem is that we fear the wrong things**. We worry about disease and death, the loss of loved ones. We worry about what people think of us, if someone might be offended. We fear 1,000 little things that “could happen,” because they are beyond our control.

But we shouldn’t worry about any of that (in fact Jesus has commanded us NOT TO worry about any of that - for Godless pagans run after all of those worldly things) but instead to TRUST in God.

**The One Thing we should fear is GOD**. Our reverence for Him - our worshipful confidence in the eternal, immortal, invincible, all-powerful, unchanging, all-faithful, all-glorious God of the Bible should drive out all fear of other things.

Once you see the Risen, Exalted Jesus - the appropriate fear of HIM should drive out all other fears. What can mortal man do to us anyway?

Think about this - hold onto this truth. For the Christian, there is nothing to fear in suffering, persecution and death. ***The enemies of God cannot hurt us - all they can do is send us home.***

Sure, they can torture and kill our bodies. But those bodies are irrelevant in the scheme of eternity. Jesus will raise up the dead from 5,000 years ago in glorified eternal bodies. If he can resurrect the dust of ancient bones then some freshly killed Christians will be no effort at all.

***“To live is Christ and to die is gain.”*** All they can do is send us home. They have no real authority over us - all authority - in heaven and on earth - has been given to the Lord Jesus. Earthly rulers only have a delegated authority, and that also comes from God in heaven, for a short period of time, for which they will have to give an account. But even the worst earthly kings have authority only over earthly things. They can kill, they can torture, they can imprison. But that is as far as their authority extends. They cannot touch your spirit - your soul.

The part of you that lives forever cannot be reached by any sword or guillotine or axe. All that such weapons can do is kill your sickly, weak and dying body - sending you directly into the arms of Jesus.

So **be CONFIDENT**. Not in yourself. Not in your wisdom or power. But in the wisdom and power and glory of the Lord Jesus Christ. He walks with us. He is with us, to the end of the age. His eyes blaze with fire and He sees everything that happens to us. One day He will come back to punish the nations with the sword that comes from his mouth. He will not need to wield a sword with his hand, nor will any angel or Christian. The weapon that will end Armageddon comes from the mouth of Jesus.

Just as Jesus spoke the universe into being by saying, “Let there be light,” so He will speak and everything will freeze. ***“Enough.” “Peace.” “Finished.”***

So here is our lesson as we start this new series.

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| **A Message from Jesus to us:** | |
| 1. Be Ready 2. Be Faithful 3. Be Confident | “From Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth. To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood… to him be glory and dominion forever.” Revelation 1:5-6 |

Brother, sister - do not be afraid. Is the world falling apart? Yes, it most certainly is. Is the end of the world at hand. Yes, in all probability the end is quite near. ***Be ready.*** Be prepared. Pay attention and watch for the signs.

***Be faithful.*** Serve your Master. Remain holy and pure, undefiled by the world. Serve and love the Bride of Christ. Be busy about your Master’s work, making disciples and building His church.

And ***be confident.*** Do not give in to worry or fear - not for one second. Trust that Jesus is with us, and He holds us in His mighty hand. Don’t focus on what happens in the news. Don’t obsess over anything in this world - your health, your kids, your safety - obsess over JESUS. Look to Jesus - the author and perfecter of our faith. Study the book of Reveation and pray that the Lord Jesus will show YOU His glory.

When you see Jesus nothing else matters. He’s got you. And He is coming soon!