

**ST. BARTHOLOMEW’S ANGLICAN PRO-CATHEDRAL IN THE TOWN OF TONAWANDA**

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Scripture: Revelation 1:1-3

***“The Revelation of Jesus Christ...” (part 1)***

**THE SEASON OF ADVENT**

Today marks the beginning of the Church Year. The season and days of the Church Year are to mark the high points of the ministry of Jesus Christ. So the first season of the Church Year is Advent. Advent means “the coming of” and so in Advent we prepare for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ the first time at Christmas as well as the reality of His Return, His Second Coming. Now if you had an important guest coming to your home and you were preparing for that guest, I suspect that you would clean the house, put on some good clothes, and look forward to the arrival of that person.

It is no different with the Lord. Advent is therefore supposed to be a time of not only looking forward to Christmas but to also realize that Christ is coming back; and we need to make sure our own houses, our hearts, are in order for the King. We are to be ready as Jesus said and be on watch. What did John the Baptist preach in preparation for Christ’s revelation as the Son of Man and Son of God? He said, ***“Repent for the Kingdom of heaven is at hand.”*** He was saying change the way you think and turn to God for the Messiah is coming!

And then how did Jesus begin His ministry? The same way with the same words – ***“Repent for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand.”*** And when He referenced the Kingdom of Heaven and God, He was in fact referencing Himself. So the season of Advent is also a season of repentance, of serious introspection to make sure our hearts are right and that we are on the right track spiritually. But what does Satan do? He wants to distract us and he does so with the hustle and bustle of getting ready for the outward celebrations of Christmas – which are okay in and of themselves but which are not most important. What is always what is most important is what is in here (our hearts) than what is out there (the world).

During Advent it is appropriate to hear the Scriptures that deal with the Second Coming, which is now more important than Christ’s first coming. Jesus said He is coming back to earth; and when He does, it will be a time like no other. There will be signs in the heavens and on earth. In fact, Jesus gave us an entire book in the Bible that unpacks those signs – it is the book of Revelation. Many of you know that on Friday nights we have been doing a study on this important book of the New Testament. We spent seven Fridays and covered the first three chapters. We will pick up with chapter four in the New Year.

**REVELATION IN ADVENT**

Since Revelation is often so misunderstood and yet so intriguing as well, the Lord impressed upon me to address it during the season of Advent. We will be looking at only the first chapter. It is the most important chapter in the book because it provides the foundation for the rest of the message. To understand Revelation is not only essential to understanding the signs of the Second Coming and the reasons for it, it is essential to understanding the Christian faith, itself. Now we had a great turnout for the Friday Night Bible Study going from a high of 106 to a low of 68. Most could not attend every study, and some wanted to

come but because of their schedules couldn't make it. So I thought it important to look at Revelation again for five reasons 1) I have immersed myself in Revelation for the last few months so I am very familiar with it 2) it will be a good review for those who attended the studies 3) it will be helpful for those who haven't been able to make the studies 4) it will bring people up to speed who may want to join us in the spring when we continue with chapter four, and 5) it is Advent! – a time to prepare our hearts for the Second Coming of our Lord.

### **THE FIVE MOST IMPORTANT WORDS IN THE BIBLE**

So let's turn to this very important book of the Bible - Revelation chapter 1. We will be looking at the first three verses. We read, *“The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show to His bond-servants, the things which must soon take place; and He sent and communicated it by His angel to His bond-servant John, 2who testified to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw. 3Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy, and heed the things which are written in it; for the time is near.”*

If someone were to ask you what you thought the five most important words in the Bible were, what would you say? “In the beginning God created...?” “God so love the world...?” “Love the Lord your God?” or “Love your neighbor as yourself?” Those are all important statements from God's Word, but they are not most important for they only tell part of the story. The five most important words in all of Holy Scripture are the first five in the book of Revelation – *“The Revelation of Jesus Christ...”*

Why would I say that? Because ultimately this entire book – the Holy Bible – is the Revelation of Jesus Christ. This entire book – from Genesis to Revelation - is about One Person – Jesus Christ. How God created the world through Him and for Him and how God restores the world through Him and for Him.

We see it in Genesis with the first prophecy of Christ when God says that the seed of the woman (the Virgin Birth) will crush the head of the serpent (Gen. 3:15); in Noah (who offered sacrifices to God) and the Ark (through which Noah and his family were saved, Gen. 6-9); in the call of Abraham and that in him all the nations would be blessed (Gen. 12:1-3); in the call to sacrifice of Isaac ( Gen. 22); in the life of Joseph (Gen. 38-50); in Moses – the lawgiver and the one who led God's people out of their bondage; in Job who was innocent but suffered; in David, whose descendant would be the King of Israel from Zion forever; and so forth. Time does not permit to mention Melchizedek, Joshua, Samuel, Elijah and Elisha, and many others!

How fitting that the last book of the Bible which sums up God's plan of salvation begins with the words *“the Revelation of Jesus Christ.”* That statement alone tells us why this book is so important. Let's look at it word by word – “The Revelation” – refers to the process of uncovering that which is hidden. In other words, you do not know what it is unless it is shown to you. It is like a wrapped Christmas gift that someone gives you. You have no idea what is in the box unless you unwrap and open it. Our faith is a revealed faith. That means what we believe is not something that we made up or figured out. It doesn't come from man but comes only from God, and only He can show you the truth about Himself.

And the words, “*of Jesus Christ,*” tell us that this disclosure is both an unveiling of Jesus and it comes from Jesus. So this last book, like the entire Scriptures, is about Jesus and comes from Jesus. Therefore, this is not John’s revelation – it is Christ’s. That means John did not craft it or make it up. He didn’t even tweak it! Look now what we read – “*which God gave Him to show to His bond-servants, the things which must soon take place; and He sent and communicated it by His angel to His bond-servant John.*”

So who is this coming from? From man? No! From God – “*which God (the Father) gave to God the Son to us (his bond-servants) communicated through His angel to John.* In other words, this comes from God the Father and the Son, and an angel is sent to make sure John gets it right! Angels are real. They are a created order of beings that are made in God’s image that do not have bodies of flesh and blood and do not procreate. They are meant to do God’s work behind the scenes and they are meant to minister to us. How many times have you asked God to send His angels to protect you or help you out? They are there for that reason. In fact, the seven churches that John writes to each have an angel. We find in chapters 2 and 3 that the Lord tells John in his messages to the churches to first say, “*to the angel in the church of \_\_\_\_\_ write...*”

### **THE TRANSCRIBER IS THE APOSTLE JOHN BUT THE AUTHOR IS GOD!**

Who is this John? The earliest historical records tell us that it was the Apostle John. Some have raised doubts because he isn’t identified as an Apostle, but there would be no need because he is not putting the message together from his thoughts and does not need to appeal to his apostolic authority. Rather he is simply transcribing the words and visions the Lord is giving him. It also highlights the fact that this message is for all believers no matter what their specific call. John is just a fellow bondservant along with all of us. Church tradition tells us that John the Apostle received his vision while he was in exile on the island of Patmos in the Aegean Sea off the coast of Asia Minor about 30 miles southeast of the city of Ephesus, where he is believed to have overseen the church there. It would have been around 95 AD and toward the end of the Emperor Domitian’s reign. Domitian had instigated a persecution of the church, and banishment to an island was one form of punishment. People had to address the Caesar as “Lord and God” and so this would make Christians a prime target for not doing so.

And so this is **the Revelation of Jesus Christ** – not Revelations, or the Revelation of John. It is communicated by God to John who then “*testified to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ.*” The word, “testify” (*martyria* in the Greek), means “to validate as an eyewitness.” It is what you would expect from a person in a court of law. John is verifying that what he saw is true by virtue of the fact that it is both the Word of God (a divine revelation) and it is personally from Jesus Christ Himself.

### **GOD’S REVELATION – BOTH NATURAL AND SUPERNATURAL**

How does God show Himself to us? He shows himself to us personally in two main ways. First, He reveals Himself through nature in that which has been made. In other words, we can look around at our world and know by virtue of its design, complexity, and order that there is a Creator. And we can look inward and see that as human beings we are self-conscious beings who have a conscience – the internal awareness we have of ourselves, of right and wrong, and the desire for things that transcend our natural

world. This is what separates us from the animal kingdom. We don't lock up animals for doing wrong. We do, however, lock up people who do! But while we can know that there is a God by what we can see and perceive in the natural world, in order to know God personally, we need for Him to reveal Himself personally.

And so the second way God reveals Himself is through the supernatural – that is - the origin of the revelation is outside of nature. God does so through visions, dreams, audible words, miracles, angelic visitations, and spiritual insight. Such things were called “Words of God.” Many of these were written down and became the Holy Scriptures or written Word of God. And then God reveals himself completely and wholly in the Person of Jesus Christ. It is why Jesus is *the Word that has become flesh* – **John 1:1-4; 14-18**. That's how we come to know God personally. Our faith is not only a revelatory faith but a personally faith. We experience God personally; that's why we then read in **Rev. 1:2**, “*even to all that he saw.*”

It is why John also wrote in the beginning of his first letter of John – “*What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the Word of Life— 2and the life was manifested, and we have seen and testify and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was manifested to us— 3what we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ.*”

And then we hear in verse 3, “*Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy, and heed the things which are written in it; for the time is near.*” After John's message was recorded, it was sent first to Ephesus, the main church in the region, and read to the church in that city; and then it went on to Smyrna and Pergamum and Thyatira and Sardis and Philadelphia and finally to Laodicea. There would be one who read it and then the hearers. There is a blessing when we read and hear God's Word but unless we do it, we will fall short. It is why **James 1:22**, says “*But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves.*”

It is why we hear in the final chapter of Revelation, in **22:7**: “*And behold, I am coming quickly. Blessed is he who heeds the words of the prophecy of this book.*” Notice there is no mention of reading or hearing the words. You see, the true blessing of being a follower of Jesus Christ is to obey His Word. Advent is a time to get our spiritual homes in order. The best way to do that is to take a good look inside our hearts and to repent of those things that are keeping us from experiencing His Kingdom. It means having a change of heart and seeking *to do* that which God wants us to do. But this is not only for the season of Advent - it is for every day of the Lord. The blessing is not merely in the knowing or the understanding, it is in the doing! So may we all take heed this Advent Season. May we prepare for the wonderful celebration of Christmas by simply getting ready for Christ's Return! And may we do so by heeding the Word of the Lord! In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, AMEN!