

Revelation 1:1-12
October 14, 2012
First Baptist Church, Vancouver
Darrell W. Johnson

HOW TO READ THE APOCALYPSE OF JESUS CHRIST
(First in a series of sermons on “The Apocalypse of Jesus Christ”)

On this Lord’s Day we begin a new series of Sunday Sermons in the last book of the Bible, in the Revelation of Jesus Christ, or in what is more precisely called the Apocalypse of Jesus Christ.

Now why would we do that? Given all that is going on in the world, all of the upheaval and uncertainty – given all that is going on in our own lives – why would we take valuable time to read and study and pray through a book that is initially so obscure and bewildering? It’s a document full of weird and even frightening imagery, a document full of seemingly esoteric symbolism. We meet a man who is clothed in a robe, his eyes are a flame of fire, his face shines like the sun. We meet a great red dragon who has ten horns and seven heads, and a beast from the sea that has ten horns and seven heads, and a beast from the earth that has two horns like a lamb, but speaks like a dragon. We meet creatures who have eyes in the front and the back, and who never cease singing “Holy, Holy, Holy.” We meet four horsemen, three of whom bring devastation upon the earth. We hear of this massive earthquake, the sun becomes so black it looks like sackcloth, the moon looks like blood. There are locusts as big as horses, with faces like men, and on it goes. And the chief figure in the whole book is a Lamb with seven horns and seven eyes. Why, given all that is going on in the world today, and all that is going on in our lives, would we want to spend time in such a strange book?

I can think this morning of four reasons. The first is many of you asked me to lead a study in this book. You know that I’ve spent decades trying to understand it – I’ve been drawn to it since I was a little boy. It came alive for me in a very powerful way on an airplane flight from Los Angeles, California to Seoul, South Korea in 1984. All the lights were dim in the plane that night, and I was reading from Revelation 4 and 5. And it seemed (underline the word seemed) that for a second, the plane filled with light. And it seemed that for a second, I was hearing the worship of heaven. And I had this great impression that I was supposed to wake everyone up and we were supposed to start singing hymns. Since that time, I’ve tried to read as much as I can to understand this document. (I haven’t read everything, because there’s books coming out all the time!) Some of you might know that I have a pastoral commentary on this book called *Discipleship on the Edge*. Since I wrote that, I’ve learned a lot more. And now, I hope in this series, I’m going to give you the more that’s built on that book. So that’s the first reason – you asked me.

I should say, some people asked me because of the possibility that there’s going to be a lot of hype in the next few weeks about the Mayan calendar predicting the end of the world on December 21. On December 23, by the way, we gather to worship, and we’re going to be doing Galatians 4:4 – “In the fullness of time, God sent forth his Son.” Anyways, you asked me.

The second good reason for us to do this is that the last book of the Bible is written to people who are under pressure, as we are. And in particular, they were under the pressure to compromise, the pressure to compromise allegiance to Jesus Christ as Lord. Some of the people to whom John wrote understood this pressure and were resisting it. Some of them were not aware of the pressure, because they were just going with the flow of the culture, and they were losing out spiritually. And John writes to both

types of people. He writes to encourage those who are resisting, and he writes to wake up those who have gone asleep as they flow with the culture. And all the imagery and all the symbolism is geared to do both of these things – to make the issues clear.

A third reason is that no other book I know explains what is going on in the world as well as this book does. In particular, it explains *why* what is going on in the world is going on. And then it shows us where it is all going. On September the 26, a few Wednesdays ago, the editorial section of the *Globe and Mail* had a political cartoon. It's a picture of the United Nations General Assembly opening -- this is where the president of Iran, the president of Egypt, and the president of the United States spoke during those few days. And on the white screen it says, "General Assembly September 2012 Powerpoint Presentation." And then they put on the stage the four horsemen of the Apocalypse. I thought two things. One is "somebody at the *Globe and Mail* has read their Bible." And second, "I wonder how many people in Canada understood this imagery" – because they haven't read their Bibles. But nevertheless it was there. I saw this at a coffee shop, so I was walking home. And when I got home, one of my neighbours was out trimming some of the plants, and I showed her this picture. And she said to me, "Boy. That's our world, isn't it?" This book explains why what is going on is going on, and does so in such a way so that we can keep our balance.

And then the fourth reason for bothering with this book is that this book more than any other book I know gives us the most comprehensive portrait of Jesus Christ ever. And when we read this book the way it is intended to be read, we encounter Jesus in such a way that he overcomes our fears and ignites fresh passion and courage. So, let's launch in.

If you have your bibles, open them up to Revelation 1. We'll read verses 1 through 12. And if you are able, would you please stand for the reading of good news:

The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show to His bond-servants, the things which must shortly take place; and He sent and communicated *it* by His angel to His bond-servant John, who bore witness to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, *even* to all that he saw. 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.

John to the seven churches that are in Asia: 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, and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, the ruler of the kings of the earth. To Him who loves us and released us from our sins by His blood—and has made us *to be* a kingdom, priests to His God and Father—to Him *be* the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen. BEHOLD, HE IS COMING WITH THE CLOUDS OF HEAVEN, and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him; and all the tribes of the earth will mourn over Him. Even so. 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, John, your brother and fellow partaker in the tribulation and kingdom and perseverance *which are* in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like *the sound* of a trumpet, saying, "Write in a book what you

see, send *it* to the seven churches: to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamum and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea.”

And I turned to see the voice that was speaking with me. And having turned I saw ...
(Revelation 1:1-12a, NASV)

Living God, you saw fit to inspire this document and include it in Holy Scripture, and we pray now in your mercy and grace that you would help us understand why, and more importantly, experience the truth of it as never before, for we pray in Jesus' name, Amen.

Strange and weird and bizarre as it may be, just take a moment to listen to what Richard Bauckham of St. Andrew's University in Scotland says about this book: "The Apocalypse of John is a work of immense learning, astonishingly meticulous literary artistry, remarkable creative imagination, radical political critique, and profound theology." Isn't that good? I hope that when we're through these weeks of this series, you'll be able to echo those words.

Now in this introductory sermon to the series, all I want to do is talk about how to read the Apocalypse of Jesus Christ. John has written this for a purpose. He had a goal in mind. How do we read this document in such a way that we read in sync with his purposes? I think we read it five ways.

First, we honour the title. The title of the last book of the bible is the Revelation of Jesus Christ. The title is not Revelations. The title is not Revelation. And certainly, the title is not the Revelation of John. The title is the Revelation of Jesus Christ. Which tells me that the book is fundamentally about a person. Of Jesus Christ. How is this "of Jesus Christ" being used? "Of" as in "by Jesus Christ"? The Revelation of Jesus Christ by Jesus Christ? Or "of" in the sense of "about Jesus Christ"? The Revelation of Jesus Christ about Jesus Christ. Answer: Yes. The Revelation of Jesus Christ, by Jesus Christ, about Jesus Christ. Keep that title before us and we will not go astray as we read this book.

Now literally, the title is "The Apocalypse of Jesus Christ." When you hear this word "Apocalypse", what do you think or hear or see or feel? As you know, most people in our culture today hear the word Apocalypse, and go "Oh, no -- something bad is about to happen." And that's how the media use the word. So, they speak of riots or earthquakes or weird weather patterns as apocalyptic.

In yesterday's *Globe and Mail*, on the back side of the Focus section, is this big ad for Canada Museum of Nature, opening up "Nature Unleashed: Inside Natural Disasters" and the phrase is "Apocalypse Now". This is, I think, Mount Pinatubo going off in Manila, and there's a jeep here with the Filipinos trying to outrun the dust of the volcano. "Apocalypse Now." Wrong use of the word "Apocalypse". I know how it's gotten into our culture, but it's the wrong word. I want to train you when you're watching the news, and someone uses the word "Apocalypse", just to say "Wrong word!" "Wrong word!" The word they ought to use is "Cataclysm Now" or "Catastrophe Now." But not, "Apocalypse Now"!

In the first century when someone heard there was going to be an apocalypse, the response was, "Oh good! Finally! An apocalypse! Bring it on!" Because apocalypse simply means taking the cover off of a box, opening a door or a window, or pulling back a curtain. You take the cover

off the box, you open the door, you pull back the curtain, so that what is always there can now be visible.

If you're visiting Vancouver today, and this is your first day, I have good news for you. Behind those grey clouds out there, is this wonderful, big, round ball. It brings life to the world, it just gives such warmth. It's there! It's really there. And if you go out our church, and you go down Nelson, and turn left onto Burrard, and look down the canyon of all those great buildings, you'll see this big cloud there. Behind those clouds is a wonderful set of mountains. They're gorgeous. They're really there. All you need is an apocalypse. Just for the clouds to part, and you'll see the sun. Just for the clouds to part, and you'll see the mountains. By the way, I think we've had about 72 days of apocalyptic weather. That's a good use of the word. All of the barriers have been removed, and we've seen what a beautiful place we live in.

So, the title of the book is the Apocalypse of Jesus Christ, by Jesus Christ, about Jesus Christ. The pulling back of the curtain by Jesus Christ, about Jesus Christ. The breaking through from hiddenness of Jesus Christ, by Jesus Christ, about Jesus Christ. It's all about a person.

Now, apocalyptic literature, like what we're dealing with in the last book of the bible has two pastoral purposes. (I think apocalyptic literature in the bible is the most pastoral of all.) One is to set the present moment and all its fear, and all its uncertainty -- to set the present moment in light of the unseen realities of the future. Jesus is coming and he's bringing with him a new heaven and a new earth -- chapters 21 and 22. And if we just see that future for just a moment, it will shape the way we understand the present and live in it. So, set the present moment in light of the unseen realities of the future. But, the most important pastoral role of Apocalyptic is to set the present moment in light of the unseen realities of the present. There's more to this present moment than we can know with our unaided intellect, and emotions, and imagination, and the role of apocalyptic literature is to open up that more, so we know where we're actually living.

We could use a little apocalyptic moment right now. Can I have the screen up, please. We're experiencing an apocalypse ... and like the last book of the bible, when one curtain is lifted, you find that another curtain is there too! I think it's time for the curtain to be opened. ... You just experienced the apocalypse of Bob Swann. Bob, how long have you been back there? Twenty minutes -- the whole time, that I've been preaching, you've been back there, and I didn't even know it. That's the purpose of this book -- set the present moment in light of the unseen reality of the future, and set the present moment in light of the unseen reality of the present, and it turns out that the greatest unseen reality of the present is the crucified, risen, reigning, and coming Jesus of Nazareth. Do you believe this?

John says that unless we believe this, we do not understand this historical moment correctly. So, honour the title. The revelation of Jesus Christ, by Jesus Christ, about Jesus Christ. The apocalypse of Jesus Christ, by Jesus Christ, about Jesus Christ. This tells me that if we read this book rightly, we will end up at the feet of Jesus. If we end up anywhere else but at the feet of Jesus, we've read the book wrongly. If after reading this book, I am preoccupied with knowing what 666 is -- that's a good thing to know, but if I'm preoccupied with it, I haven't read the book right. If, after reading the book, I am preoccupied with the battle of Armageddon, I've not read the book right.

My father was involved with building weapons of mass destruction -- the hydrogen and atomic bombs -- and I can remember him and some of his friends talking about all this, and they would say, "But there's this battle of Armageddon that's got to be fought, and we've got to be ready for it." Wrong reading of the book! The title is not the Revelation of the war of the world. And besides, I've got good news for you

-- in the book, the battle of Armageddon is never fought. It's never fought. The kings keep gathering, and all of a sudden Jesus Christ shows up, and it's over. That battle's never fought. Think of all the geo-political machinations that have gone on thinking there's a battle to be fought! Jesus Christ wins. Keep the title clear.

Second: Appreciate the nature of John's experience. He's on the prison island of Patmos. Why is he there? I'll tell you more next week. But it's the Lord's Day, and he says he is in the Spirit -- he's worshipping. He hears a voice -- it's a loud voice, the voice of a trumpet. "And I turned to see the voice" (1:12). I love that expression -- I turned to see the voice. I take that to mean that John's experiencing something outside himself. I take it to mean that he hears the voice behind him -- not his own voice, somebody else's voice. He's not just having this inner, mystical experience. He hears this voice outside his head, and he turns to see this voice. He turns his body to something outside himself. This is not just something played on the screen of his imagination. And he says that when he turned, he saw something.

And then he's going to say, "I saw..." twenty-four more times through the rest of the book. Revelation 1:2 says that John bore witness to all that he saw. Now, what did he see? What was the nature of his experience on Patmos? I think that John witnesses and experiences a living drama. I think that what happened that day is that Jesus put on a play for him. This play has many acts, each of the acts has scenes. There are supporting actors, there are light and sound effects. There are all kinds of things that are involved in a play. There are characters in this play, and an interesting thing about the characters is that they change costumes a lot. Now, exactly how Jesus put on this play, I don't know. But that he could do it -- I have no trouble believing.

Or, better yet, think of it this way. As John turned around, what he saw before him was an animated film, which Jesus had created. Like *Toy Story*, or *Cars*. The actors have all these roles in them. I don't know how he did it, but Jesus uses imagery from the political realm of the Roman empire. But then he mostly uses imagery from the Old Testament. In the book of the Revelation of Jesus Christ, he quotes the Old Testament 150 times, and there are 250 allusions to the Old Testament. Which would say to me that I'm going to most accurately understand this book if I'm steeped in the Old Testament. So, I think that what Jesus does that day is he puts on this play, or he shows John an animated film.

Now, here's what I want you to grasp from this. In his letter -- this is a letter that he's written, it's the longest pastoral letter -- in this letter, John is not interpreting what he saw. He's not going to tell us the meaning of what he saw. He simply describing what he saw. He's describing the imagery and the symbols that Jesus employs. He's not describing what the imagery imagines, and he's not describing what the symbols symbolize. Bruce Metzger in his book *Breaking the Code*, that I recommended to you last week says "the descriptions are descriptions of the symbols, not the reality conveyed by the symbols."

Now, let me illustrate where this is important. In chapter five, we meet Jesus Christ as the Lamb with seven horns and seven eyes. Gross out! Is that how Jesus Christ looks right now? If he pulled back the curtain, or we went to heaven and saw him, would we see a lamb with seven horns and seven eyes? I hope not. What John saw was the symbol that Jesus chose to present himself in. Another example... we're going to meet some locusts; they're strong as horses, and they have the face of a man. I remember in Sunday School years ago, the Sunday School teacher saying "Well, John saw way into the future and what he saw was a helicopter -- a Sikorsky helicopter. He didn't know how to describe it, so he said it's a locust as big as a horse with a face of a man." No. No. No. No. Jesus put locusts in front of John, and that's what he saw. Another example is in chapter 12 -- the woman who is a figure of the

church, and all of her believers are rescued on the wings of a big eagle. I remember another teacher saying "Well, what John saw was this huge United States Air Force jet, taking redeemed Jews into the wilderness." No, no, no. No. Jesus didn't show John an Air Force jet. He showed him an eagle with big wings, because in the book of Exodus it says that God redeemed his people on the wings of an eagle.

Now in this drama, or in this animated film, scenes change a lot. And some of the scenes change very, very quickly. You have to watch that when you're reading. And, as I said, the characters change -- especially Jesus. He changes costumes a lot. That's the analogy that I gave to Luz to work with the Sunday School kids to help them understand Revelation: Jesus is constantly changing costumes. And that's what Lixandro on the front of your bulletin today has pictured -- the curtain has been pulled back and you see this rack of costumes, because Jesus keeps changing costumes. He first appears in a man in a robe, and then we next meet him as a lamb with seven horns and seven eyes, and then we meet him as a Shepherd, and then on and on it goes.

Or, even better yet. I'm seeing the youth in the front, and I should have asked you for one of these. Think Transformers. Right? Think those toys that the same entity but if you move them in different ways, they appear in different ways, and that's what's going on in Revelation. Jesus Christ keeps presenting himself one way. Move it again. Move it again. Move it again.

How John kept up with this, I don't know. And how John was able to remember it all afterwards, I don't know. I trust that it was the Spirit of God that enabled him to do that. But what he's doing in this letter is he's telling us what he saw. I saw. I saw. I saw. I saw. I saw. Something outside of his own head and mind. Something Jesus is showing him. So, honour the title. Try to appreciate the nature of the experience.

Third, keep the larger structure of the book in mind as you read. The basic structure of the book is very simple. There's a prologue, there's an epilogue, and in between there's the big vision. The prologue is 1:1-8, the epilogue is 22:10-21, and the vision starts at 1:9 and goes through 22:9. Now some have suggested that the vision is broken down into seven acts, and each of the acts has seven scenes. That's very inviting because of the number seven in the book. There's seven churches, seven messages, seven seals, seven trumpets, seven bowls -- so it would be cool if the book were broken down nicely into sevens. And for a while I bought into that, but the more I've gotten into it, I feel that it's forced. That's just too tidy.

So, I'm going to propose that a better way to think of this vision is that it's built around "open". This makes sense since apocalypse means opened. And we meet the verb open four times in the whole vision. In 4:1 -- "a door open in heaven". In 11:19 -- "the temple of God which is in heaven was opened". In 15:5 -- "the temple of the tabernacle of testimony was opened". John's going deeper in. And then in 19:11 -- "saw heaven opened". All of that, I submit to you, a fulfillment of a promise that Jesus made to his first disciples in John 1:51 -- "You will see heaven open and the angels of heaven ascending and descending upon the Son of Man."

Now, these four uses of the word open then create five major sections in the vision. The first section begins in 1:9, the second in 4:1, the third 11:19, the fourth 15:5, and the fifth 19:11. I think that's how the book goes together. And in each of those acts, if you will, the props are different -- the setting is different. In the first act, Jesus is standing among the seven churches, giving his seven authoritative messages. In the second act, we're taken into a throne room, and then we see Jesus the Lamb, sitting in the centre of the throne, and he's breaking the seals on the scroll of history, and then there are seven

angels that sound the trumpets. And then in the middle section, the third act is bracketed by the word "Sign" -- "I saw a sign" and then it ends with "I saw a sign". In this act we have this great cosmic battle that's worked out before us. In the fourth section, we then come back to the throne area, and we have the seven bowls of judgment, leading up to John having a vision of the destruction of Babylon the harlot, and then in the final section Jesus emerges on a horse, his name is Word of God, his robe is dipped in blood -- his own blood, the blood he shed for the world, and as soon as he shows up -- the end starts happening. So, I would suggest to you that's the basic way to look at that.

Now, in each of these sections as I've already illustrated, Jesus changes costumes. He presents himself in a different way. Culminating in the last of them, where he presents himself as the temple, and then, as the lamp in the midst of the new heaven and the new earth. And the last thing he says about himself is that he's the bright morning star.

Now, here's the critical thing to take in mind about this whole order. It does not unfold chronologically. This drama, this movie does not move in a straight line from beginning to end. Paul Spilsbury, of Ambrose University and Seminary in Calgary writes that "the book does not unfold in a straight sequential way. Many times the action of the vision takes us back over territory we've already covered, introducing new information, changing perspective, and having surprising twists of plot."

Michael Wilcock of England says it best, he says the question you ask when reading this book is not "What happens next", but "What did John see next?" That's because what John sees next might not happen next. In fact, what John sees, may have happened a long time ago. When you ask what happens next, you're not reading it correctly; you can only ask what did John see next.

And this is illustrated in two ways. One of the puzzling or problematic things about reading this book, is when you come to a place where you think you've come to the end, only for the whole thing to start over again. And then you come to an end again, and the whole thing starts over again. You come to what you think is the end, and it starts all over again. After the seven seals, for instance -- in the seventh seal, there's silence in heaven, and all the pains of the saints are gathered up. Certainly this is the moment of the end. No -- you've got to start all over again. And after the seven trumpets, you have the scene where everyone is gathered, and you hear the great line "the kingdoms of the world have become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ." Where have you heard that before? The Hallelujah Chorus, and then it goes on to say "because you are worthy, because you were, and you are" -- but no "you are to come". And you say, "Certainly this is the end!", but no you've got to go round again. People have said that an analogy of this is a spiral staircase. You go around it from one angle, and then you go around it from another angle, and you go around it from another angle -- all the way making your way up, or further in.

Here's the other illustration of why you don't ask what happens next, but what John sees next. Chapter twelve is I think the theological centre of the book -- most commentators think that. And in chapter 12, you have this sign of a woman. She's going to give birth to a child. This woman, I think, turns out to be Israel focused in Mary, who gives birth to a child. John sees the sign of a great red dragon, who wants to kill the child when he's born. So the scene is the red dragon coming upon the woman, as she's giving birth to a child. Here's the question. When did the red dragon, who is the devil, first try to kill Jesus, the person born of this woman? Christmas. Chapter 12 is describing Christmas Eve. Chapter twelve is a Christmas Eve text. Andrea's brother had the boldness to preach that last year. That event, the centre of the book of the Revelation of Jesus Christ takes place at Christmas. So you can't ask what happens

next... you have to ask, "what did John see next?" Keep this larger structure in mind, be aware of where you are -- which act you're in, and then ask, "What did John see?"

Fourth, put on prologue glasses. There's a prologue to this document -- 1:1-8. And just as John has a prologue to his gospel, so he has a prologue to this apocalypse. The prologue to the gospel of John, you probably know well -- "In the beginning was the Word, the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ... And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us." John puts that at the beginning of his gospel to make sure that when you read the events of Jesus' life, you read them correctly. This is God the Word now in our flesh.

And so, also there's this prologue to the Apocalypse. And so, what we want to do is keep those glasses on, and read the book through the prologue. Now, in the prologue, John makes some amazing claims. Huge claims. As I've been working through this in the last few weeks, I've just felt how audacious these claims feel in a post-modern world. As you know, I read the magazines and the newspapers every day. The bible and the newspaper -- every day. And so I keep up on how people put things. Can you imagine making the kinds of claim John does in the prologue on the back of the *Globe and Mail* or the *Vancouver Sun*? You'd be in big trouble. But these claims John puts there because now the book is going to work those claims out.

So let's look at a couple of them that are in there. Coming: "He is coming". It's going to be repeated in the epilogue. Most of what's in the prologue is repeated in the epilogue. He is coming. I'm coming, I'm coming, I'm coming. Notice coming -- not I will come. It means he's in the process of coming all the time. And it turns out, and when we read the book rightly, that the second coming of Jesus Christ is only the end of a series of his comings to the church and to the world. He's coming! All the time.

"The time is near," says John. That's repeated in the epilogue also. The time is near. It's the same word used in Mark 1:15, when Jesus says "The time is fulfilled, the kingdom of God has come near." It's the same word that Paul uses in Philippians -- "The Lord is near". The time is always near because the Lord is always near. He's right there behind the curtain. When he comes again, in his second coming, he's not coming from a far place! He's very close at hand, he's just going to pull back the curtain. Because he's near, the time is always near.

"The things that must take place." Prologue -- epilogue. The things that must take place. What's this must about? I think it is that as Jesus is always near, as the kingdom is always near, pressing in on the world, things start to happen. Things get upset. The status quo gets turned around. It's because of the nearness of the Lord. These things must happen.

John refers to Jesus as "the faithful witness." That's because he wants to be a faithful witness, and he's holding up Jesus as the faithful witness who bore witness to his Father and to the word under great pressure from the dragon, who came to him through the beast from the sea, which is dragon-manipulated political power (Herod and Pilate), and from the beast from the earth, which is dragon-manipulated religious power (Caiaphas and Annas). And Jesus stood under that great pressure and we can see him standing under the pressure and being a faithful witness, it can help us be faithful.

He is "the firstborn from the dead." He's the first one -- the only one -- the only one who would possibly be leader of the world, who triumphs over death, and he brings in his train all who belong to him.

He's "the ruler of the kings of the earth." Notice that in verse 5. Already. First century. Twenty-first century. You see, this book is not about how Jesus might become ruler of the earth. He is the ruler of the earth. Right now. And the book is about how he does that.

Now, I know it doesn't always appear like that. Sometimes it appears that nobody's ruling the earth. But appearances aren't all of reality. I know you can't see the sun, but it's there. Just because you can't see it, doesn't mean it's not there. And just because you don't believe in a sun doesn't mean it's not there. The mountains are there. I know you can't see them, but they're there. Now, you might now even believe in mountains, but that doesn't change the fact that the mountains are there. And I know we can't always see that Jesus Christ is the ruler of the kings of the earth, but he is. Even now. And the book will work that out.

"Who released us from our sins by his blood." He deals with the root problem of the human predicament – he deals with sin, and delivers us from its bondage, and its shame, and its guilt to help us live a new way.

"He made us to be a kingdom, priests to his God." He's a king, he has a kingdom; he's a priest, he's the great high priest, and now he invites us to be included in his kingly and priestly work. In fact, the word that John uses literally means, he installed us into office. We have been installed as a priestly kingdom in the world. And this book is going to show us what that means -- how to be priests in the world. And the book will work that out.

And then "I am the Alpha and the Omega" (v. 8). It's the Lord God who says that -- I am the Alpha and Omega. But watch this. In the epilogue, the Almighty, the Father says, "I am the Alpha and the Omega." At the beginning of the vision, Jesus says "I am the First and the Last." At the end of the vision, the Father says "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end." And then, in the epilogue, Jesus says, "I am the Alpha, the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end." All three of those phrases are in the mouth of Jesus. It's the highest Christology you can imagine.

I am Alpha and Omega, First and Last, Beginning and End. Now the question is, is he just saying those three things as parallels? Just repeated the same truth in the same way? Alpha and Omega, First and the Last, Beginning and the End. No, he's not. In each phrase, he's expanding it. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and last of the Hebrew Alphabet. Oh, wait a minute... more than that. I'm the First and the Last of any sequence you can think of. And more than that, I'm the beginning of any sequence you can think of, and I am the end of any sequence you can think of. This word beginning is the word *arche*. It means source. We get the word architect and archetype from it. He's the source of all things. And the word end is *telos*, which means goal or inherent destiny. Jesus Christ, right there in this book, claims to be the source, the archetype, of all of creation. And he is the inherent destiny of everything in creation. Wow. Jesus Christ is inescapable. Henry Blocher says "this delivers us from the horrible burden of having final responsibility for the world." The final responsibility belongs to him who is the beginning and the end. Keep that in mind as you read.

And, one more thing from the prologue. Verse 5 tells us that "he loves us". I've skipped over that over the years, but boy, has it come alive to me now! He loves us. And when you trace the word through the rest of the Apocalypse of Jesus Christ, you discover that the last book of the bible is one long love letter. Has anyone ever told you that? The last book of the bible is a love letter. The dominant image of the church in this book is bride. And the bridegroom puts on this play, shows us this animated film, to help

us see where we're not loving him, to bring us back into this intimacy and passion, so that we will remain loyal to him under the pressure to compromise.

One more way to read the Apocalypse of Jesus Christ – you have to adopt an appropriate posture. There's a posture for reading this book, and it is worship. John says I was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day, on Sunday, caught up in the Spirit – it was while he was worshipping that he experiences this Apocalypse, this break-through of Jesus Christ to him. And that tells me that that's the only way we can read this book – in worship.

The story is told of a sculptor who made a statue of Jesus Christ. He tried to capture all the different dimensions of Jesus' character, his splendour, his compassion, his justice, his mercy. He put this all together, and people would come from far and wide, and they would look at this statue from this angle, and then from that angle, and then from another angle, and they were trying to grasp the grandeur of the statue. Then they consulted the man who sculpted it, and he said, "there's only one angle from which to view this statue. You must kneel." It's the only way to read the last book of the Bible. You must kneel before the person who is revealed in it.