The Revelation From Jesus Christ

Revelation 1:1-20

Key Verse: 1:1 “The revelation from Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John.”

 Some people who know me said that I am a realistic person. I don’t like unrealistic fiction movies or stories, and I especially don’t’ watch SF movies such as Star Wars or Star Trek. When I was in art college, I didn’t paint unrealistic abstract paintings, but mostly real life, human figures, and landscapes. I didn’t like to study the book of Revelation because it seemed to be too unrealistic and eschatological, which means “end-times.” It was hard for me to understand it verse by verse and interpret the meaning behind each symbol. I didn’t want to be called ‘cultic’ because I interpreted it in my own way. Therefore, I believe that some of us here are not willing to study the book of Revelation for the same reasons as me. But as Christians we have to study this book at least once in our lifetime because it is also the word of God.

 When we study the book of Revelation with the knowledge from a biblical background, it will help us to understand and interpret easily and properly. The writer of this book is John the Apostle, one of the Twelve, who wrote John’s gospel and 1,2,3 John. He introduced himself in verse 9. “***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***.” John wrote Revelation around AD 95, while he was exiled in the island of Patmos, near western Turkey, because of the persecution from Domitian, the Roman Emperor. While he was there, he saw the revelation from Jesus Christ (1). He described this revelation as the word of God, the testimony of Jesus Christ (2), and the words of prophecy. (3) The word, ‘revelation’ is ‘*apokalypsis*’, which means ‘unveiling’ or ‘disclosure.’ Verse 1 says that revelation is to show what must soon take place. In a word, revelation is to expose in full view what was hidden in the past and what is going to happen in the future. In verses 2-3 John said that those who read the book of Revelation in a loud voice and hear it and take to heart are blessed. Indeed, we are really blessed because we come to know what is going to happen in the future. Many are curious about their future. Remember that your future is written in this book of Revelation. When you study this book prayerfully and carefully, you know what you are going to be and where you are going and what you have to do. Amen!

John starts this book with the typical epistle greetings and doxology, “***Grace and peace to you…”***(4) Since John was the witness of the revelation, the author of this letter is God and the recipients are the seven churches in the province of Asia and all Christians scattered around the world. (5) In verses 4,5 the author God is introduced as the Holy Trinity; 1) from Him who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Father, 2) from the seven spirits before his throne, the Holy Spirit, and 3) from Jesus Christ, who is faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. (4,5)

 The recipients are the seven churches in the province of Asia. They are written in verse 11. “***which said: “Write on a scroll what you see and send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea***.” All these seven churches were located in the western part of Turkey. We’ll study about these churches from next week. In the book of Revelation the three sets of number 7 appear such as seven stars, seven churches, seven seals, seven trumpets, seven angels, seven bowls. The number 7 is the symbol of completeness. So, the seven churches represent all the churches in the world. God’s messages to the seven churches in chapter 2 &3 are the same messages to all churches in the past and present, including our church and even to each person.

 In verses 5b-8 John glorifies the Lord Jesus who loves us and saved us and made us his church and who will come again with great power and glory. We call this doxology (*doxa*: glory, *logy*: saying) Here we find that John draws all tenses, past, present, and future in testifying the identity and function of Christ Jesus. Christ loved us, has freed us from our sins by his blood, and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and the Father. (6) He will come again with the clouds while every eye seeing him, even those who pierced him. (7) Here, a kingdom and priests mean church. Christ Jesus loved us and freed us from our sins by his blood. Based on the confession of our faith Jesus built his church. This means that not only we can serve Jesus in church, but also we, each person, are Christ’s church. Church represents each person and each person represents a church. We are loved, saved, and called to become a church, Christ’s church to serve him. This is the same as God’s covenant with the Israelites in Exodus 19:5,6. “*You will be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation*…”

 Look at verse 8. “***I am the Alpha and the Omega,” says the Lord God, “who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty***.” The Lord God said “I am Alpha and the Omega.” These words appears three times in this book (1:8, 21:6, 22:13), but only in the book of Revelation, not other places in the Bible. Alpha and omega are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet. These words are the same as the First and the Last in verse 17. God is the Alpha, the first, which means that he is the Creator, the source of life and history. He is also the Omega and the Last. This means that our God is the judge. Look at verses 17b and18. “***Don’t be afraid. I am the First and the Last.*** ***I am the Living One, I was dead and now look, I am alive for ever and ever. And I hold the keys of death and Hades***.” When Jesus came to this world the first time, he came as the Savior. But when he comes again, he comes as the judge. He will judge between the living and the dead. He holds the keys of death and Hades. Here, hades means hell. He has authority and power to send us to heaven or to hell. Jesus said in John 5:28-29. “*Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out—those who have done what is good will rise to live, and those who have done what is evil will rise to be condemned*.”

 When Jesus said, ‘I am who is, who was, and who is to come,” he meant that he exists beyond our time and space. God’s concept of time is different from ours. 2 Peter 3:8 says, “*With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day*.” Historians write human history according chronological order. But God works beyond our time order because he is omnipresent. He is everywhere and he works beyond our human history. The God of Abraham is the same God of David and the God of Jesus Christ, and the God of each of us.

 When Jesus said, “I am who is, who was, and who is to come,” he demonstrates his faithfulness. Jesus is the same yesterday, today, and forever (Heb 13:8). He was not changed, is not changed, and will not be changed. His love endures forever and his kingdom will never end. People often say that they are not the same as before. They were changed, being changed, and will be changed both positively and negatively. But Jesus is not changed because he is the eternal God. God who had made a promise with Abraham remembered it through Moses and fulfilled it through Jesus Christ. God who had visited us is with us now and will be with us forever. God who started good work through you and in you will continue until we see the glory of his good work. Paul had confidence about God’s faithfulness. So he said in Philippians 1:6. “*being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus*.” (Php 1:6)

 When Jesus said, “I am who is, who was, and who is to come,” he proved that he completed our salvation once for all on the cross. Jesus died for our sins which we had committed in the past, sins we are committing at present, and the sins we will commit in the future. When Jesus said on the cross, “It is finished!”, he meant that he completed our salvation through his death on the cross. God works beyond ages and places because he is the Almighty God. He is omnipresent and omniscient and omnipotent. He knows everything about us, our past, present, and future. He leads us into the best future because he is our loving Father and shepherd. He is faithful.

 Verses 9-20 show us John’s vision of Christ. On the Lord’s Day John was filled with the Holy Spirit. He heard a loud voice like a trumpet which asked him to write on a scroll what he saw and to send it to the seven churches. (11) When John turned around to see the voice, he saw the seven golden lampstands, and a someone like a son of man, dressed in a robe reaching down to his feet and with a golden sash around his chest. The son of man appears for the first time in the book of Daniel, who saw a vision, and in the book of Ezekiel. Here, the son of man indicates the Messiah who would be born as the son of a woman. Jesus often called himself as the Son of Man. When Jesus called himself a Son of Man, he was a man of sorrow and familiar with suffering, just as the Prophet Isaiah had said about the Son of Man. (Is 53:3) The Son of Man was the Messiah who was born of Mary and served sinners and fulfilled the Father’s will through his death on the cross. So, even to the eyes of his disciples, the image of the Son of Man was a suffering servant of God.

 How did the Son of Man who John saw in his vision look like? He was glorious and victorious. There is no hint of darkness or failure in the Son of Man. He appeared as the Almighty and Everlasting God. Look at verses14-16. His hair was as white as snow, his eyes were like blazing fire. His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace, his voice was like the sound of rushing waters. In his right hand he held seven stars, which means seven angels who guide the seven churches. Out of his mouth a sharp, double-edged sword was coming out. His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance. (14-16) No great artist in this world can draw or paint this glorious image of the Son of Man.

 This image is completely different from the image of Jesus as the Son of Man in the gospel. Jesus said “*Even though foxes have holes and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head*.” (Mt 8:20) In modern terms, Jesus was homeless. Isaiah said about him, “*He grew up before him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of dry ground. He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him.*” (Is 53:2)To the eyes of people he was a man of suffering and affliction. But the image of Jesus in John’s vision was completely different---glorious and victorious. This image foretells the whole story of the Revelation. Glory after suffering! Victory after perseverance. Resurrection after death. The kingdom of God after the life on this earth! We all will be changed in the last day. We all will be changed glorious and victorious like Jesus. We’ll see the glorious and victorious Jesus in the kingdom of God.

 In his vision Jesus encouraged John who fell at his feet as though dead. “***Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. I am the Living One; I was dead, and now look, I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades.***” (17-18) Jesus asked John again to write what he saw. Jesus said, “***Write, therefore, what you have seen, what is now and what will take place later. The mystery of the seven stars that you saw in my right hand and of the seven golden lampstands is this: The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches.”*** (19-20)

 Today I want to ask you to meet this everlasting God personally, who is, who was, and who is to come. Those who met this everlasting God may have this glorious picture of Jesus in your heart. Endure all hardships as disciplines as the Scripture says, and draw this glorious and victorious image in your broken heart. Our present sufferings are nothing compared to the glory to come in the future. (Ro 8:18) Believe that Jesus is the same yesterday, today, and forever. His love endures forever! Amen!