

CHAPTER 1

This chapter is a general preface to the whole book, and contains,

- I.** An inscription, declaring the original and the design of it (v. 1, 2).
- II.** The apostolic benediction pronounced on all those who shall pay a due regard to the contents of this book (v. 3-8).
- III.** A glorious vision or appearance of the Lord Jesus Christ to the apostle John, when he delivered to him this revelation (v. 9 to the end).

◀ REVELATION 1:1-2

THE SUBSTANCE OF THE BOOK

Here we have,

I. What we may call the pedigree of this book.

1. It is *the revelation of Jesus Christ*. The whole Bible is so; for all revelation comes through Christ and all centres in him; and especially *in these last days God has spoken to us by his Son*, and concerning his Son. Christ, as the king of his church, has been pleased thus far to let his church know by what rules and methods he will proceed in his government; and, as the prophet of the church, he has made known to us the things that shall be hereafter.

2. It is a revelation *which God gave unto Christ*. Though Christ is himself God, and as such has light and life in himself, yet, as he sustains the office of *Mediator between God and man*, he receives his instructions from the Father. The human nature of Christ, though endowed with the greatest sagacity, judgment, and penetration, could not, in a way of reason, discover these great events, which not being produced by natural causes, but wholly depending upon the will of God, could be the object only of divine prescience, and must come to a created mind only by revelation. Our Lord Jesus is the great trustee of divine revelation; it is to him that we

owe the knowledge we have of what we are to expect from God and what he expects from us.

3. This revelation Christ *sent and signified by his angel*. Observe here the admirable order of divine revelation. God gave it to Christ, and Christ employed an angel to communicate it to the churches. The angels are God's messengers; they are ministering spirits to the heirs of salvation. They are Christ's servants: principalities and powers are subject to him; all the angels of God are obliged to worship him.

4. The angels *signified it to the apostle John*. As the angels are the messengers of Christ, the ministers are the messengers of the churches; what they receive from heaven, they are to communicate to the churches. John was the apostle chosen for this service. Some think he was the only one surviving, the rest having sealed their testimony with their blood. This was to be the last book of divine revelation; and therefore notified to the church by the last of the apostles. John was the beloved disciple. He was, under the New Testament, as the prophet Daniel under the Old, *a man greatly beloved*. He was the servant of Christ; he was an apostle, an evangelist, and a prophet; he served Christ in all the three extraordinary offices of the church. James was an apostle, but not a prophet, nor an evangelist; Matthew was an apostle and evangelist, but not a prophet; Luke was an evangelist, but neither a prophet nor an apostle; but John was all three; and so Christ calls him in an eminent sense his *servant John*.

5. John was to deliver this revelation to the church, to all his servants. For the revelation was not designed for the use of Christ's extraordinary servants the ministers only, but for all his servants, the members of the church; they have all a right to the oracles of God, and all have their concern in them.

II. Here we have the subject-matter of this revelation, namely, the things that must shortly come to pass. The evangelists give us an account of the things that are past; prophecy gives us an account of things to come. These future events are shown, not in the clearest light in which God could have set them, but in such a light as he saw most proper, and which would best answer his wise and holy purposes. Had they been as clearly foretold in all their circumstances as God could have revealed them, the prediction might have prevented the accomplishment; but they are foretold more darkly, to beget in us a veneration for the scripture, and to engage our attention and

excite our enquiry. We have in this revelation a general idea of the methods of divine providence and government in and about the church, and many good lessons may be learned hereby. These events (it is said) were such as should come to pass not only *surely*, but *shortly*; that is, they would begin to come to pass very shortly, and the whole would be accomplished in a short time. For now the last ages of the world had come.

III. Here is an attestation of the prophecy, v. 2. It was signified to John, who bore record of the word of God, and of the testimony of Jesus Christ, and of all things that he saw. It is observable that the historical books of the Old Testament have not always the name of the historian prefixed to them, as in the books of *Judges*, *Kings*, *Chronicles*; but in the prophetic books the name is always prefixed, as *Isaiah*, *Jeremiah*, etc. So in the New Testament, though John did not prefix his name to his first epistle, yet he does to this prophecy, as ready to vouch and answer for the truth of it; and he gives us not only his name, but his office. He was one who bore record of the word of God in general, and of the testimony of Jesus in particular, and of all things that he saw; he was an eye-witness, and he concealed nothing that he saw. Nothing recorded in this revelation was his own invention or imagination; but all was the record of God and the testimony of Jesus; and, as he added nothing to it, so he kept back no part of the counsels of God.

⦿ REVELATION 1:3-8

APOSTOLIC BENEDECTION

We have here an apostolic benediction on those who should give a due regard to this divine revelation; and this benediction is given more generally and more especially.

I. More generally, to all who either read or hear the words of the prophecy. This blessing seems to be pronounced with a design to encourage us to study this book, and not be weary of looking into it upon account of the obscurity of many things in it; it will repay the labour of the careful and attentive reader. Observe, 1. It is a blessed privilege to enjoy the oracles of God. This was one of the principal advantages the Jews had above the Gentiles.

2. It is a blessed thing to study the scriptures; those are well employed who search the scriptures.

3. It is a privilege not only to read the scriptures ourselves, but to hear them read by others, who are qualified to give us the sense of what they read and to lead us into an understanding of them.

4. It is not sufficient to our blessedness that we read and hear the scriptures, but we must keep the things that are written; we must keep them in our memories, in our minds, in our affections, and in practice, and we shall be blessed in the deed.

5. The nearer we come to the accomplishment of the scriptures, the greater regard we shall give to them. The time is at hand, and we should be so much the more attentive as we see the day approaching.

II. The apostolic benediction is pronounced more especially and particularly to the seven Asian churches, v. 4. These seven churches are named in v. 11, and distinct messages sent to each of them respectively in the chapters following. The apostolic blessing is more expressly directed to these because they were nearest to him, who was now in the isle of Patmos, and perhaps he had the peculiar care of them, and superintendency over them, not excluding any of the rest of the apostles, if any of them were now living. Here observe,

1. What the blessing is which he pronounces on all the faithful in these churches: *Grace and peace*, holiness and comfort. *Grace*, that is, the good-will of God towards us and his good work in us; and *peace*, that is, the sweet evidence and assurance of this grace. There can be no true peace where there is not true grace; and, where grace goes before, peace will follow.

2. Whence this blessing is to come. In whose name does the apostle bless the churches? In the name of God, of the whole Trinity; for this is an act of adoration, and God only is the proper object of it; his ministers must bless the people in no name but his alone. And here,

(1.) The Father is first named: God the Father, which may be taken either essentially, for God as God, or personally, for the first person in the ever-blessed Trinity, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ; and he is described as the Jehovah *who is, and who was, and who is to come*, eternal, unchangeable, the same to the Old-Testament church which was,

and to the New-Testament church which is, and who will be the same to the church triumphant which is to come.

(2.) The Holy Spirit, called *the seven spirits*, not seven in number, nor in nature, but the infinite perfect Spirit of God, in whom there is a diversity of gifts and operations. He is before the throne; for, as God made, so he governs, all things by his Spirit.

(3.) The Lord Jesus Christ. He mentions him after the Spirit, because he intended to enlarge more upon the person of Christ, as God manifested in the flesh, whom he had seen dwelling on earth before, and now saw again in a glorious form. Observe the particular account we have here of Christ, v. 5.

[1.] He is *the faithful witness*; he was from eternity a witness to all the counsels of God (~~418~~ John 1:18), and he was in time a faithful witness to the revealed will of God, who has now spoken to us by his Son; upon his testimony we may safely depend, for he is a faithful witness, cannot be deceived and cannot deceive us.

[2.] He is the first-begotten or first-born from the dead, or the first parent and head of the resurrection, the only one who raised himself by his own power, and who will by the same power raise up his people from their graves to everlasting honour; for he has begotten them again to a lively hope by his resurrection from the dead.

[3.] He is the prince of the kings of the earth; from him they have their authority; by him their power is limited and their wrath restrained; by him their counsels are over-ruled, and to him they are accountable. This is good news to the church, and it is good evidence of the Godhead of Christ, who is King of kings and Lord of lords.

[4.] He is the great friend of his church and people, one who has done great things for them, and this out of pure disinterested affection. He has loved them, and, in pursuance of that everlasting love, he has, *First, Washed them from their sins in his own blood*. Sins leave a stain upon the soul, a stain of guilt and of pollution. Nothing can fetch out this stain but the blood of Christ; and, rather than it should not be washed out, Christ was willing to shed his own blood, to purchase pardon and purity for them. *Secondly, He has made them kings and priests to God and his Father*. Having justified and sanctified them, he makes them kings to his

Father; that is, in his Father's account, with his approbation, and for his glory. As kings, they govern their own spirits, conquer Satan, have power and prevalency with God in prayer, and shall judge the world. He hath made them priests, given them access to God, enabled them to enter into the holiest and to offer spiritual and acceptable sacrifices, and has given them an unction suitable to this character; and for these high honours and favours they are bound to ascribe to him dominion and glory for ever.

[5.] He will be the Judge of the world: *Behold, he cometh, and every eye shall see him*, v. 7. This book, the Revelation, begins and ends with a prediction of the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. We should set ourselves to meditate frequently upon the second coming of Christ, and keep it in the eye of our faith and expectation. John speaks as if he saw that day: “*Behold, he cometh*, as sure as if you beheld him with your eyes. *He cometh with clouds*, which are his chariot and pavilion. He will come publicly: *Every eye shall see him*, the eye of his people, the eye of his enemies, every eye, yours and mine.” He shall come, to the terror of those who have pierced him and have not repented and of all who have wounded and crucified him afresh by their apostasy from him, and to the astonishment of the pagan world. For he comes to take vengeance on those who know not God, as well as on those that obey not the gospel of Christ.

[6.] This account of Christ is ratified and confirmed by himself, v. 8. Here our Lord Jesus justly challenges the same honour and power that is ascribed to the Father, v. 4. He is the beginning and the end; all things are from him and for him; he is the Almighty; he is the same eternal and unchangeable one. And surely whoever presumes to blot out one character of this name of Christ deserves to have his name blotted out of the book of life. Those that honour him he will honour; but those who despise him shall be lightly esteemed.

⦿ REVELATION 1:9-20

JOHN'S VISION OF CHRIST

We have now come to that glorious vision which the apostle had of the Lord Jesus Christ, when he came to deliver this revelation to him, where observe,

I. The account given of the person who was favoured with this vision. He describes himself,

1. By his present state and condition. He was *the brother and companion of these churches in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Christ*. He was, at their time, as the rest of true Christians were, a persecuted man, banished, and perhaps imprisoned, for his adherence to Christ. He was their *brother*, though an apostle; he seems to value himself upon his relation to the church, rather than his authority in it: Judas Iscariot may be an apostle, but not a brother in the family of God. He was their companion: the children of God should choose communion and society with each other. He was their companion in tribulation: the persecuted servants of God did not suffer alone, the same trials are accomplished in others. He was their companion in patience, not only a sharer with them in suffering circumstances, but in suffering graces: if we have the patience of the saints, we should not grudge to meet with their trials. He was their *brother and companion in the patience of the kingdom of Christ*, a sufferer for Christ's cause, for asserting his kingly power over the church and the world, and for adhering to it against all who would usurp upon it. By this account he gives of his present state, he acknowledges his engagements to sympathize with them, and to endeavour to give them counsel and comfort, and bespeaks their more careful attention to what he had to say to them from Christ their common Lord.

2. By the place where he was when he was favoured with this vision: he was in *the isle Patmos*. He does not say who banished him thither. It becomes Christians to speak sparingly and modestly of their own sufferings. Patmos is said to be an island in the Aegean Sea, One of those called Cyclades, and was about thirty-five miles in compass; but under this confinement it was the apostle's comfort that he did not suffer as an evil-doer, but that it was for the testimony of Jesus, for bearing witness to Christ as the Immanuel, the Saviour. This was a cause worth suffering for; and the Spirit of glory and of God rested upon this persecuted apostle.

3. The day and time in which he had this vision: it was *the Lord's day*, the day which Christ had separated and set apart for himself, as the eucharist is called *the Lord's supper*. Surely this can be no other than the Christian sabbath, the first day of the week, to be observed in remembrance of the resurrection of Christ. Let us who call him *our Lord* honour him on his

own day, the day which the Lord hath made and in which we ought to rejoice.

4. The frame that his soul was in at this time: *He was in the Spirit*. He was not only in a rapture when he received the vision, but before he received it; he was in a serious, heavenly, spiritual frame, under the blessed gracious influences of the Spirit of God. God usually prepares the souls of his people for uncommon manifestations of himself, by the quickening sanctifying influences of his good Spirit. Those who would enjoy communion with God on the Lord's day must endeavour to abstract their thoughts and affections from flesh and fleshly things, and be wholly taken up with things of a spiritual nature.

II. The apostle gives an account of what he heard when thus in the Spirit. An alarm was given as with the sound of a trumpet, and then *he heard a voice*, the voice of Christ applying to himself the character before given, *the first and the last*, and commanding the apostle to commit to writing the things that were now to be revealed to him, and to send it immediately *to the seven Asian churches*, whose names are mentioned. Thus our Lord Jesus, the captain of our salvation, gave the apostle notice of his glorious appearance, as with the sound of a trumpet.

III. We have also an account of what he saw. *He turned to see the voice*, whose it was and whence it came; and then a wonderful scene of vision opened itself to him.

1. He saw a representation of the church under the emblem of *seven golden candlesticks*, as it is explained in the last verse of the chapter. The churches are compared to candlesticks, because they hold forth the light of the gospel to advantage. The churches are not candles: Christ only is our light, and his gospel our lamp; but they receive their light from Christ and the gospel, and hold it forth to others. They are golden candlesticks, for they should be precious and pure, comparable to fine gold; not only the ministers, but the members of the churches ought to be such; their light should so shine before men as to engage others to give glory to God.

2. He saw a representation of the Lord Jesus Christ in the midst of the golden candlesticks; for he has promised to be with his churches always to the end of the world, filling them with light, and life, and love, for he is the very animating informing soul of the church. And here we observe,

(1.) The glorious form in which Christ appeared in several particulars.

[1.] He was *clothed with a garment down to the foot*, a princely and priestly robe, denoting righteousness and honour.

[2.] *He was girt about with a golden girdle*, the breast-plate of the high priest, on which the names of his people are engraven; he was ready girt to do all the work of a Redeemer.

[3.] *His head and hairs were white like wool or snow*. He was the Ancient of days; his hoary head was no sign of decay, but was indeed a crown of glory.

[4.] *His eyes were as a flame of fire*, piercing and penetrating into the very hearts and reins of men, scattering terrors among his adversaries.

[5.] *His feet were like unto fine burning brass*, strong and stedfast, supporting his own interest, subduing his enemies, treading them to powder.

[6.] *His voice was as the sound of many waters*, of many rivers falling in together. He can and will make himself heard to those who are afar off as well as to those who are near. His gospel is a profluent and mighty stream, fed by the upper springs of infinite wisdom and knowledge.

[7.] *He had in his right hand seven stars*, that is, the ministers of the seven churches, who are under his direction, have all their light and influence from him, and are secured and preserved by him.

[8.] *Out of his mouth went a two-edged sword*, his word, which both wounds and heals, strikes at sin on the right hand and on the left,

[9.] *His countenance was as the sun shining*, its strength too bright and dazzling for mortal eyes to behold.

(2.) The impression this appearance of Christ made upon the apostle John (v. 17): *He fell at the feet of Christ as dead*; he was overpowered with the greatness of the lustre and glory in which Christ appeared, though he had been so familiar with him before. How well is it for us that God speaks to us by men like ourselves, whose terrors shall not make us afraid, for none can see the face of God and live!

(3.) The condescending goodness of the Lord Jesus to his disciple: *He laid his hand upon him*, v. 17. He raised him up; he did not plead against him with his great power, but he put strength into him, he spoke kind words to him.

[1.] Words of comfort and encouragement: *Fear not*. He commanded away the slavish fears of his disciple.

[2.] Words of instruction, telling him particularly who he was that thus appeared to him. And here he acquaints him, *First*, with his divine nature: *The first and the last*. *Secondly*, With his former sufferings: *I was dead*; the very same that his disciples saw upon the cross dying for the sins of men. *Thirdly*, With his resurrection and life: *"I live, and am alive for evermore*, have conquered death and opened the grave, and am partaker of an endless life." *Fourthly*, With his office and authority: *I have the keys of hell and of death*, a sovereign dominion in and over the invisible world, opening and none can shut, shutting so that none can open, opening the gates of death when he pleases and the gates of the eternal world, of happiness or misery, as the Judge of all, from whose sentence there lies no appeal. *Fifthly*, With his will and pleasure: *Write the things which thou hast seen, and the things which are, and which shall be hereafter*. *Sixthly*, With the meaning of the seven stars, that *they are the ministers of the churches*; and of the seven candlesticks, that *they are the seven churches*, to whom Christ would now send by him particular and proper messages.