**Jesus Stands with His People in Their Suffering**

**Revelation 1**

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| **Natural Divisions** | * Revelation 1:1-8 John greets seven churches, offering glory to Christ and proclaiming that Jesus will come again in judgment, and all will see Him and mourn because of Him. * Revelation 1:9-1:11 John was on Patmos when he heard a voice announcing a vision and a commanding him to write down what he would see and send it to seven churches in Asia * Revelation 1:12-1:20 John turned to see Jesus standing among seven lampstands—glorious in appearance, brilliant in majesty, stern in justice, revealing His authority as the One who holds the keys of death and Hades, and Jesus revealed that the lampstands represented the seven churches who would receive John’s account of his vision. |
| **Summary Sentence** | John authenticates the Revelation as being a vision from God and a message from Christ to be delivered to seven churches in Asia |
| **Central Idea** | The exalted Jesus stands with His people in their suffering |

I have spent the last few days living through the upheaval resulting from the fires in the area. I don’t live in Steiner Ranch, but our house is just about ¼ mile from the entrance to Steiner Ranch. Our house wasn’t in danger from the fires because we were upwind from the fires, but when Steiner Ranch lost power, we lost power. The police didn’t force us to evacuate our home, but the rising temperatures inside our house did. So we spent all day Monday camping out at our son’s house in Anderson Mill.

The disruption to our lives was a minor one, but there are hundreds of families in central Texas who lost their homes this week. There are hundreds of families who have lost their family photos and videos, their needlework, their handmade quilts, their collectibles, their gardens, their artwork. Hundreds of families have encountered sudden, severe losses in their lives.

I also attended a funeral this week. It was a sudden, unexpected death of a man in seemingly good health, years younger than I am—a godly man, a brilliant man. He bent over to tie his daughter’s shoe, and he collapsed.

We know that God is in control of these things; God is in control of our lives—but that doesn’t mean that we will never suffer. God is sovereign, but that doesn’t mean that we will never experience loss—even severe loss.

In the first century, at the time that the book of Revelation was written, the church of Jesus Christ was suffering a great deal. The book of Revelation was written during the reign of the emperor Domitian. It was a time of intense persecution of the church.

Sixty years previously, the Son of God—the Savior—had died on a cross. Jesus been raised from the dead, and forty days later, Jesus had publicly, visibly ascended into heaven. This was wonderful, to be sure, but how did that help the churches in what they were going through that day, back in the year 95 A.D.?

Life was hard. Where was Jesus? Where was the comfort, the protection, the provision that God’s people expected to enjoy if indeed their faith was true. Where was Jesus?

Christians of the first century had seen the city of Rome had burn uncontrollably for five days.

* They were falsely accused of starting that fire, and Nero began rounding up Christians and torturing them—executing them with gruesome and extreme cruelty.
* Christians had endured ravaging civil war in Judea.
* Christians in Jerusalem died of starvation during the Roman siege, and those who survived experienced the total destruction of the city of Jerusalem, including the Jewish temple.
* There had been multiple earthquakes in that day, bringing devastation to the province of Asia.
* The eruption of Vesuvius had wiped out Pompeii and created atmospheric darkness and clouds of soot and ash that spread over a large area and lingered for a long time
* Over the prior five years, the people had suffered from extensive famine conditions.
* Christians were hated; they were thought to be enemies of the state.
* Christians were the victims of mob violence and plundering of their property
* The emperor had instigated intense persecution against Christians in the Roman empire.

Life was hard for Christians in that day, very hard. It had been very hard for decades. Where was Jesus?

It was in this day of persecution, and ostracism and economic hardship that the apostle John received the vision that has been given to us as the book of Revelation. Revelation was given to comfort the suffering church in its struggle to survive in a world that is not the way it’s supposed to be. Revelation was given to comfort the suffering church in its struggle against the forces of evil.

Let’s begin our study of the book of Revelation by standing back and considering some foundational facts we need to keep in mind as we study this book.

In Revelation, we’re going to see fantastic images—visions that reveal events that will occur at the end of this age. We will see images that describe events that have not yet occurred, but will occur in the future.

* First, be aware that there are several valid approaches to interpreting this book.

Whatever view you’ve been taught, be aware that there are many, many Christian scholars throughout history who have held a different view.

Whatever interpretation you have embraced, be aware that there are many, many Christians who are just as committed to the inerrancy of Scripture as you are, who have held a different interpretation.

Whatever your view of the meaning of the images in Revelation, there are many, many Christians who are just as careful and scholarly in their study of the material as you are, who hold a different view.

I urge you—do not let your conclusions regarding the interpretation of Revelation be a cause of division between you and your brothers and sisters in Christ. There are several valid approaches to interpreting this book.

Next, Revelation is *not* a coded message.

Revelation is not a jigsaw puzzle. It’s not a mystery novel. It wasn’t written to be a coded message for us to decode.

Throughout the ages, Christians have tried to associate contemporary events of their own time with particular images in Revelation. This has not been helpful, and as time has passed, those speculations have been shown to be false. Nero was not the Antichrist. Hitler was not the Antichrist. Kissinger was not the Antichrist. Saddam Hussein was not the Antichrist.

All of this sort of speculation is not what God intended when He gave the book of Revelation to the church. Revelation is a book of hope. It’s a book of comfort. It was given to assure us of the sovereignty of God and the certainty of the coming Kingdom.

* Finally, keep in mind that Revelation is a challenge for us. It’s hard. It’s hard for us to understand.

Revelation is a challenge for us because it assumes that the reader has detailed knowledge of the Old Testament. In the first century, very few churches would have had access to many of the books of the New Testament. The New Testament books had been only recently written, and only sparsely distributed. The first century church did, however, have access to the Word of God in the Old Testament.

In Revelation, there are over 500 allusions to events or concepts in the Old Testament. Revelation doesn’t give explicit direct quotes from the Old Testament, but it gives allusions. For the first-century reader, these allusions would have dramatic impact. These allusions would convey significant meaning. But as 21st century readers, we’re blind to these allusions, because we don’t have the knowledge of the Old Testament that they had. Often, we read Revelation and we just don’t “get it.”

Let me give you an parallel example from modern American culture. Suppose I wanted to write a short story about a woman named Scarlett. Scarlett, along with her little dog Toto and her butler named Rhett, decide to take care of a house full of children whose mother has died. Scarlett comforts the children in their grief. She takes them for walks along a yellow brick road, and she tells them that tomorrow, and each day after that, is another day. Scarlett encourages the children so that in their lives they will be able to climb every mountain. She teaches them to keep their attentions fixed on a few of their favorite things. Somewhere, perhaps somewhere over the rainbow, Scarlett, her little dog Toto, and the butler will find happiness for the children, and there will be sounds of music.

If you grew up in America, or even western Europe, you immediately recognize the allusions to Gone With the Wind, and The Wizard of Oz, and The Sound of Music. If you grew up in another culture, however, and if you’ve never heard of these classic movies, then this short story has nothing more to say to you than the words at face value.

And so, as we study the book of Revelation, we have a challenge before us to understand it rightly, to recognize the allusions to Old Testament realities, and we will enjoy a huge blessing as we dig deep to extract the riches that are in this book.

With that very long introduction, open your Bibles to Revelation chapter 1.

Look at verse 1. The book begins, *“The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Jesus to show his servants what must soon take place.”* This book is given to us from Jesus, and it teaches about Jesus—it teaches about the ministry of Jesus both now and in the future.

In verse 4 of chapter 1, we see that this document was written to be sent to seven churches in the province of Asia. We’ll begin to look at those churches more specifically next week, but it’s important to realize that this book contains information that is vital to the church back in the first century. Although this book speaks of events yet future; nevertheless the encouragement from this book that was vital to the church in the first century is still vital for the church today.

John begins by affirming that this document is not just a message from the apostle John, it’s a message from the Godhead—from God as Trinity. Look at verses 4-5. He writes this: *“John, to the seven churches in the province of Asia: Grace and peace to you from Him who is, and who was, and who is to come,* (that’s God the Father) *and from the seven spirits before His throne* (that’s an allusion to Isaiah chapter 11:2, and we understand that expression to refer to the Holy Spirit)*, and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth.”* This Revelation proceeds from the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

John then proclaims what Jesus has done for us and what He has made of us. Look at verse 6: *“To Him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by His blood, and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve His God and Father—to Him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen.”*

We are to remember what Jesus has done for us. Jesus loves us, and He has freed us from our sins by His blood. How has He freed us from our sins? His death on the cross paid the just penalty for our sins, and so our sins are forgiven. We are freed from the penalty of our sins.

Verse 6 also proclaims what Jesus has done *with* us. Verse 6 says that *Jesus has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve His God and Father*. We are already a kingdom. We are already citizens of the Kingdom of God. The fullness of the future Kingdom has not yet come, but we are the kingdom of God on earth in the present age.

We are also priests. We serve God. We proclaim His glory and His righteousness. We pray for the world. We have a significant role and a significant calling. We are priests in the Kingdom of God.

John then affirms that Jesus is coming again.

Look at verse 7: *“Behold! Jesus Christ is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, specifically, those who pierced Him; and all the peoples of the earth will* (rejoice because of Him—no, it doesn’t say that. Look again. …all the peoples of the earth will…) *mourn because of him. So shall it be! Amen.”*

Jesus is coming back. Jesus will come in a dramatic way such that every eye will see Him. It won’t be a time of joy for the peoples of the earth, because Jesus will come in judgment. Among all the peoples of the earth there will be mourning because of His appearing.

When the peoples of the earth realize that the King of Kings has returned to set things right, to deal with injustice, to punish every evil deed—I believe that we will all mourn to see the immediate events of that day.

In Ezekiel 33:11, the Sovereign Lord says, *“As surely as I live, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather my pleasure is when they turn from their evil ways and live.”* In the same way, we, as God’s children, will take no pleasure in the judgment of the wicked on that day. When Jesus returns in judgment, those who rejected Him; those who opposed Him; those who mocked and scorned Him will now see the dire consequences of their rebellion. This will be the day of judgment.

This event—the future return of Christ—is the theme of the book of Revelation. All of the events described in Revelation from chapter 1 to chapter 20 are precursors of this return. The theme of Revelation is the ultimate victory of Jesus over all of His enemies, and the establishment of His ultimate eternal Kingdom.

In the first century, the church of Jesus Christ was suffering. John goes on in verse 9 to affirm that he himself had suffered in the same way that his fellow believers were suffering. John had been persecuted for the gospel. John understood the fears they were facing.

At the time of his writing, John was being held in exile on the island of Patmos—a small, rocky island in the Mediterranean near the city of Ephesus. John was the last remaining apostle. All the rest had been martyred for their faith.

In verse 10, John begins to describe a glorious vision that God had given him. It began with a voice. John heard a a magnificent, resonant voice—a voice like a trumpet, and John turned around and he saw a vision of the risen Christ.

Look at what John says in verse 12: *“I turned around to see the voice that was speaking to me. And when I turned I saw seven golden lampstands, and among the lampstands was someone "like a son of man," dressed in a robe reaching down to his feet and with a golden sash around his chest.”* The term *“son of man”* is an allusion to Daniel chapter 7, where Daniel sees a glorious, exalted divine being who is welcomed into the presence of God the Father, the Ancient of Days, and this exalted one is given dominion over all creation for eternity. That is the image from Daniel is the image we’re to see when John call Jesus *“one like a son of man.”*

Look on the screen at this description from the book of Daniel. Daniel said this: *“In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all peoples, nations and men of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.”*

This Person, this Being, described in Daniel was not a mere man; He was deity. The prophecy in Daniel doesn’t say that when He was given authority, that all nations *obeyed* Him; it says that all nations *worshiped* Him. This is God in human form—God incarnate.

This is the One John saw among the golden lampstands.

Let’s see more aspects of John’s description.

* He had golden sash around His chest, indicating that He comes as a ruler and a judge.
* His hair and head are white, signifying agelessness and wisdom.
* His eyes are a blazing fire; He has the penetrating gaze of an all-knowing judge.
* His feet are glowing bronze, alluding to judgment. His feet are bronze; He will come in judgment.
* His voice, like the sound of rushing waters recalls the description of the voice of God in Ezekiel 43
* From His mouth there is a double-edged sword. This also speaks of judgment and alludes to Isaiah 11:4
* His face is more brilliant than the sun, which speaks of His holiness, His purity, His perfect righteousness.

Here we have the Glorious One, the judge of all the earth. But where is He standing? He’s standing among the lampstands. He’s standing among His people. There will be a day when Jesus Christ will return in judgment, but at present, Jesus is standing among the lampstands. Jesus is standing with His church. Today and every day, **the exalted Jesus stands with His people in their suffering**.

Consider John’s reaction to this vision of the risen Christ. Remember, John called Himself the disciple whom Jesus loved. It appears that of all the disciples, John is the one who was most intimate, the most personal relationship with Jesus, his teacher. At the last supper, John had the place of intimacy with Jesus; John was the disciple who leaned his head against Jesus’ chest. When Jesus was dying on the cross; it was John who was given the responsibility of taking care of Jesus’ mother.

John hadn’t seen Jesus since the Ascension. John hadn’t seen Jesus for 60 years. You would think that when John saw Jesus, he would run to embrace him, to weep with joy with his arms wrapped around Him. But that’s not what happened. John saw Jesus in His glory as God incarnate. Look at what happened in verse 17: *“When I saw Him, I fell at His feet as though dead.”* John was undone. John came face to face with the King of Kings, the Judge of Universe, and John was so terrified that he lost consciousness and fell down at His feet.

But Jesus touched John, and said, *“Don’t be afraid.”*

And then Jesus said, *“I am the First and the Last. I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades.”*

Jesus said, *“I am the First and the Last.”* In Isaiah 44:6, God said, *“I am the first and I am the last; apart from Me there is no God.”* For Jesus to say *“I am the First and the Last.”* is to declare that He, Jesus, is God incarnate.

Jesus said, *“I am the Living One. I was dead, and behold I am alive forever and ever.”* Jesus is eternal. Jesus is alive, and yet He died to pay the penalty for our sins. The church didn’t imagine His resurrection; they didn’t imagine His ascension; Jesus is alive, forever and ever. And Jesus isn’t absent; He is near. **Jesus stands with His people in their suffering**.

Jesus said, *“I hold the keys to death and Hades.”* To hold the keys is to have authority. If I have the keys to my house, that demonstrates that I have ownership of the house. With my keys I can determine who can go in and who must stay out. With my keys I have access to the interior—access to the contents. Hades is the place of the dead. Since Jesus conquered death in His sacrificial death on the cross, Jesus holds the keys. Jesus can determine who will enter death, and when that will happen. Jesus has power over death and the grave. Jesus holds the keys to death and Hades.

Jesus then instructed John to write this revelation of Jesus and to deliver it to the seven churches. Jesus also explained two of the elements John had observed in His vision. Jesus explained that the stars that He held in His right hand represent the angels, or the messengers of the seven churches that would receive the revelation. The seven golden lampstands represent the churches. Jesus is among the lampstands. **Jesus stands with His people in their suffering**.

That is such a comforting assurance to us as we live our lives in a world that is not the way it’s supposed to be. **Jesus stands with His people in their suffering**. Jesus stands with you in the suffering you encounter as your live your lives before Him.

Let’s close in prayer.