

The Unveiling of Jesus

• *Revelation* •

I can still remember the peculiar sensation, composed of a mixture of suspense and satisfaction, that I felt one more time while sitting in the church pew, listening as my father told the story in his sermon. I had heard the story before, but, for some reason, it still gripped me. Maybe this happened to me because I knew the ending, or perhaps it was because I could identify with the main character in the story. I knew what was coming, and yet I savored every word, the way only a child can, as if I were hearing it for the very first time.

The story was about a boy who loved the main hero of a series of books. He had all the books about this valiant and beloved hero and was never disappointed. He admired this heroic star for his strength, his integrity, and his ability to save those in trouble. The mighty hero was always the victor, who stood for justice and had the power to bring it about. The boy intensely absorbed every book and relished every page. But one day it all changed. A new book was published that was very different. This time his hero was beaten, suffering, and constantly lost. It seemed like he was always down and could never get up! What was happening?

Having barely started the book, the boy couldn't take it anymore and, holding his breath, went straight to the last chapter. He just couldn't wait; something was terribly wrong, his hero was supposed to be victorious, yet the villain was constantly winning. With trembling hands, he turned to the last page of the book and read the last sentences. And there in the final words of the book he discovered something that gave him exceedingly great joy! It turned out that in the end, following the many seeming defeats, his hero was the victor after all and the villain was vanquished. The villain was not strong enough, and his hero was the undisputable winner. Now that he knew the ending, he was at peace and went back to the place he had left off and continued reading the book. This time, having in his possession the new information, whenever the villain seemed to be winning, the boy would say aloud, "If he knew what I

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know—IF HE JUST KNEW WHAT I KNOW!”

The book of Revelation is the last chapter in the story of redemption. It is the last sentence, God’s final word in Scripture on salvation’s history. This book is the “unveiling” of Jesus from a cosmic perspective. Just as the last chapter of the hero book brought peace and joy to the anxious little boy, God revealed to us the final chapter of the story of this world so that we won’t be afraid. This last book of the Bible can be summarized in two words: JESUS WINS! I like to visualize an impressive angelic orchestra and a massive heavenly choir in a flamboyant worship scene, followed by a long and superloud drumroll, with the final universal announcement:

TA-DA! JESUS WINS!

The unveiling: Jesus wins!

In the book of Revelation, the Master’s eternal hand removes the veil to reveal a beautiful masterpiece that exceeds all of our expectations and surpasses our wildest imagination. Everyone who beholds this reality unveiled experiences an indescribable sense of amazement. Earthly and heavenly beings bow in awe as they get a glimpse of God’s love for His fallen children and the price that He paid for their redemption. The last book of the Bible is the revelation of Christ* as the ultimate Redeemer, victorious against the villain in the great controversy between good and evil. The book is introduced as the unveiling of Jesus: “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” (Revelation 1:1; emphasis added). In this book, the villain is finally exposed: “And the great dragon was thrown down, the serpent of old who is called the devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world” (Revelation 12:9). We know exactly who the villain is and he is about to be no more.

But as important as it is to ponder the eradication of evil, the real focus is on the universal Hero, the Victor, the Lamb, who made redemption possible. This revelation (*apokalupsis*, which means “unveiling” or “disclosure”) of Jesus is the final word of the Bible. It is written in apocalyptic style: a

* Part of the material in this section is shared in my book *Surprised by Love* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press® Publishing Association, 2010).

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narrative genre that utilizes visualizations and symbols to convey the history of the plan of salvation from a “cosmic” perspective. It relates things from the past, the present, and the future (see Revelation 1:19). This literary genre, common during the time when the New Testament was written, utilizes many visions and symbols to convey the history of the world. Among many interesting patterns, it lists seven churches and seven seals, seven trumpets and seven plagues as well as seven beatitudes. In many ways, this book is a summary of the whole Bible. In its English version, it contains a little more than four hundred verses; but it has more than five hundred allusions to the Old Testament. The author uses the main themes of salvation’s history (such as the plagues, the Exodus, the Exile, and Babylon, etc.) to demonstrate and announce the ultimate victory of our Redeemer over evil.

Two of the most important characteristics of the book of Revelation, and, in fact, of all apocalyptic literature, are the eschatological and dualistic nature of its narratives. The word *eschatology* is based on the Greek word *eschatos*, which means “last” and focuses on the final intervention of God, the last days, the last chapter of the story. It narrates all of human history and the plan of redemption until the very end, with the re-creation of the new earth. It is extremely important that Jesus says, “I am the first and the last [*eschatos*]” (Revelation 1:17). The appropriate study of the last-day events focuses on Jesus, who is the First and the Last, and therefore never produces fear. This is why Jesus’ revelation of Himself is preceded by “Do not be afraid” (verse 17.)

By the way, isn’t that a great reminder for all of us? “Do not be afraid” is the most often repeated exhortation in the Bible. It is said that there are 365 of these reminders (I haven’t counted them): one for each day of the year! God knows that sometimes life can be scary and that we need to turn to the end of the book, just like the little boy, to regain a positive perspective and to know that this world is temporary and that our Hero wins.

The second important characteristic of the apocalyptic literature utilized in the book of Revelation is that the narrative develops two systems, which is why this genre is called *dualistic*: it reveals God’s way and Satan’s way in the great conflict between good and evil. Readers are invited to align with God, even though they are also free to align with the evil

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forces. The two systems are represented by two cities (Jerusalem and Babylon), two women (the bride and the great prostitute), two numbering systems (seven and six), and so on. Written at the end of the first century of the Christian era according to some scholars, this book was composed to encourage the faithful under difficult circumstances. This was the time of the rule of Emperor Domitian (A.D. 81–96). He was one of the first emperors to demand to be worshiped while still alive!

Others believe that the church had entered into a period of apathy because the second coming of Jesus had not occurred, even though they had expected it soon after His ascension. And yet others believe that the early church members had become fearful because the church was facing all kinds of problems from without and within. FEAR! Sounds familiar? Fear of uncertainty, fear of the future, fear of a lack of safety—fear and confusion. It certainly sounds like the author is writing for us today, doesn't it? John announces to his readers that the final showdown between our Hero and the evil villain is imminent. But if they hang in there until the end, believing in the Lamb who was slain, they will spend eternity with God. This is a book of worship; in other words, it is the ultimate WOO-HOO book! Everybody is praising; everybody is singing; and everyone keeps repeating, time after time, “Worthy is the Lamb” (Revelation 5:12). Sixteen major worship scenes are portrayed in this unveiling narrative, where heaven and earth erupt in songs of exaltation, praising Him who has won victory by His blood.

Full circle

The whole Bible is an *inclusio*. This is an academic term for a narrative “sandwich,” in which something starts and ends in the same way. In the last three chapters of Revelation, we encounter the same themes that we saw in the first three chapters of the Bible, just in reversed order. This way the Bible has symmetry.

Remember the sequence of topics in Genesis 1–3: Creation (Genesis 1), intimacy with God (Genesis 2), and then the evil villain who brought about sin and death (Genesis 3)? Well, the last three chapters of Revelation announce the reversal of those same things: Satan is bound and destroyed, and sin and evil are no more (Revelation 20); God once again dwells with His children; and there is no longer “any mourning, or cry-

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ing, or pain; the first things have passed away” (Revelation 21:4). The intimacy with God is restored (Revelation 21). And finally, the Bible gives a description of the re-created earth with all of its original attributes (Revelation 22) and more. I can’t even tell you how many times, during difficult seasons in my life, I have repeated and imagined this reality: no more pain, no more sickness, and no more death! WOW! Pause for a moment and read the outcome in Revelation 21:1–4. I already feel better, don’t you?

And all of this will be possible *only* because Jesus died for us! He took our death upon Himself, so that we, who are mortal because of sin and have distanced ourselves from the Life-Giver (Genesis 3), are now handed eternal life as a gift (Romans 3:23; 6:23). The New Testament is filled with constant reminders of such an incredible exchange: “He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him” (2 Corinthians 5:21). Because this is the “Revelation of Jesus Christ” (Revelation 1:1), this booklet will focus exclusively on some of the breathtaking portraits of Jesus in Revelation. In this booklet, we will not analyze prophecies, trumpets, or seals, as important as they may be. We will focus *only* on some amazing pictures of Jesus, portraits of the Redeemer filled with rich images that were given to John to encourage us on our journey and to assure us of our salvation.

I can still remember the sense of excitement that I felt when my father once again shared the story of the boy who loved reading books about his hero overtaking the evil villain. And now, I am very much like that boy, exhilarated and holding my breath as we approach the last chapter because this is not just the end of yet another exciting book, instead it is the last word of the story of redemption of all humanity, including you and me! Yes, some chapters of human history and our daily lives get pretty scary. Perhaps you can’t take it anymore. But before you give up, I invite you to come with me to the last book of the Bible, the last chapter in the story of salvation. And guess what! TA-DA! JESUS WINS!