

A Future Journey with Christ

Biblical Context

Revelation 1:1-3

INTRODUCTION:

We are continuing a voyage through the book of Revelation. Last week laid down some groundwork on how to study and interpret Revelation by looking at the historical context of the book. We must remember that this book is written to a real group of people, at a real time, and a real place. The Christians were in conflict with the Roman government, the Jews, and Roman society in general. This morning we are going to lay some more groundwork on how to study and interpret Revelation and by considering Biblical context.

All Stand and Read Scripture

Revelation 1:1-3 (NASB)

1 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, 2 who testified to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw. 3 Blessed is he who **reads** and those who **hear** the words of the prophecy, and **heed (or obey)** the things which are written in it; for the time is near.

Prayer

BODY:

I. WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF REVELATION?

What is the purpose of Revelation? Is it supposed to be a mystery that only those who are smart enough can break the code? Look into My magic ball! Is that what it supposed to be? Or is it supposed to be something so scary that it will make us shake in our boots and drive us to submission? Is that what John intended to do? Does God play coy with us? In the rest of the Bible does He do this? Have fun little games that are hidden in the mysteries of the Bible?

Paul talks about a mystery, Yeah! It is called Christ's death on the cross and His resurrection. That is what the reference to. And it is a bit of a mystery even today. How exactly **does** the shed blood of Christ free us from our sin?

The book can be used for much more than scaring people. It can actually challenge us to stand firm in our faith even if we are facing persecution or even death. It can lead us to a level of faith that we have never been called to before.

(Reread the scripture emphasizing the purpose.)

This is a book that the church messes up the most and it is the book that the church needs the most.

Three principles for the study of Revelation.

1. Principle of Humility. Don't claim to know everything. Disagree with respect. Why do you disagree? Are we in this together to build each other up or do you just want to be right? Am I just trying to win or am I trying to draw closer to Jesus? I don't care if you win. I don't care if I win. I want to know the truth that shapes my life. I want to know Jesus inside and out.

2. Principle of Submission. I am committed to let the Bible to tell me what it has to say instead of forcing the Bible to tell me what I want it to say. I am concerned about what the Spirit is telling me through the Word and as a result I want to submit my life over to Him so I can be who He wants me to be. When it comes to Revelation it is very easy to make it say what you want it to say and not allow it to speak at all.

3. Principle of Context. Without context you can pull out of the scriptures anything you want.

II. UNDERSTANDING CONTEXT.

ILLUSTRATION:

Political debates.

Most of the time the bombs that are being launched across a political debate often deal with context. They will say this person said this or they voted for this. And the person comes back and says you need to understand the context from which I said that. Or actually in that bill there were broader things that were being voted on. In order to vote **no** for the broader item, I had to vote **no** for this item also. I would have voted **yes** for this item if it were by itself. They are constantly arguing over context!

When it comes to the Bible, the same rules apply.

You have heard this before, but I can take four passages and string them together and tell you something very disturbing.

Matthew 27:5 (Judas) went away and hanged himself.

Philippians 2:2 make my joy complete by being of the same mind,

Luke 10:37 "Go and do the same."

John 13:27 What you do, do quickly.

Is this what the Bible is telling us to do? Why? Because we are shattering the context of each of these verses!

I can make the Bible say anything I want to. All I have to do is be willing to ignore context.

Like...

Matthew 18:20 (NASB)

²⁰ For where two or three have gathered together in My name, I am there in their midst.”

Who is speaking there? Jesus! If you have a red letter Bible, you will see that it is in red. This is a verse that is often taken out of context.

The context that you often hear this verse is when you come to a program or a bible study and you are waiting and waiting. It time to start and only three people have shown up. Then you wonder "Should we do the Bible study or should we just go home? Then someone in the group will invariably say "where two or more are gathered in My name, there I am also". Usually this verse is used to justify poor attendance at our studies in our churches. That is what it is used for right?

It is as if His omnipresence only kicks in to action when two or more are gathered together.

ILLUSTRATION:

It would be like a little girl who is sitting alone and she wishes that someone would come join her so Jesus would come in. Because you must have two or more and there is only one.

Is that how this verse is supposed to be used? No!

What is the real context of this passage? Church discipline!

No wonder we are ignorant of the context! Most churches do not believe in church discipline. We are scared of lawsuits. If you do ask someone to leave they just go to the next church because we don't call their previous church to see if they have been church disciplined for a real reason and we have invited a wolf in.

I'm not bashing the churches, but I am pointing out some of the weaknesses that we commonly function under.

Let's look at the passage preceding this verse for context.

Matthew 18:15-20 (NASB)

¹⁵ “If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother. ¹⁶ But if he does not listen *to you*, take one or two more with you, so that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every fact may be confirmed. (That is Jewish law in Deuteronomy. In order for an accusation against a Jew to be valid, there had to be at least two or three witnesses to verify it.) ¹⁷ If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. ¹⁸ Truly I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven. (That is authority language there!)

¹⁹ “Again I say to you, that if two of you agree on earth about anything that they may ask, it shall be done for them by My Father who is in heaven. ²⁰ For where two or three have gathered together in My name, I am there in their midst.”

Now was that about attendance? No. It has nothing to do with attendance. It is all about discipline. But if you take the Bible out of context, you can make it say anything you want.

Let's look at another passage.

Philippians 4:13 (NASB)

¹³ I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.

Mark Moore who is a professor of New Testament and Hermeneutics at Ozark Christian College, where I graduated, related this story...

ILLUSTRATION:

Mark said that he was at a Christ in Youth conference several years ago. Mark keeps fit. When Mark travels, he tries to work out somewhere. He was in Colorado at a workout place and noticed two "scrawny" guys, as he called them, come in. One weighed a buck twenty and the other around "one-o-five". They were really small guys. He said he looked at them when they were at the bench press. He noticed that they put on 215 pounds on the bar. He decided he would wait and watch this! He might have to rush someone to the hospital. The smallest one laid down under the bar and his friend helped him lift it up. As soon as the friend's hand let loose of the bar, it crashed on the smallest one's chest. He is grunting and doing everything he can to lift it.

Then you hear his friend yelling, "Come on buddy!", like that is going to help! And then he said "You can do **all** things through Christ Who gives you strength!"

Here's the problem. If he can't lift the bar there is at least one of four things happening here.

- Maybe his faith is just not big enough. Have you ever heard that before? Remember Job?

Job 2:7-10 (NASB)

⁷ Then Satan went out from the presence of the Lord and smote Job with sore boils from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head. ⁸ And he took a potsherd to scrape himself while he was sitting among the ashes.

⁹ Then his wife said to him, "Do you still hold fast your integrity? Curse God and die!"

¹⁰ But he said to her, "You speak as one of the foolish women speaks. Shall we indeed accept good from God and not accept adversity?" In all this Job did not sin with his lips.

- Maybe Jesus just doesn't have the power to help him. He gives them the promise, but He really can't deliver, because He is really not that good.
- Maybe Jesus does have the power, but He just doesn't care.
- or Maybe the verse doesn't have anything to do with someone on a bench press!

My point is this...Pulling things out of context can be fun to make a point, but it can do a lot of damage to a lot of people's faiths. It is not just fun and games. It is not who can come up with the coolest puzzle solution when it comes to Revelation or the scriptures. We are trying to make sure we are teaching correct doctrine so people's lives are not

destroyed when they do not have enough faith to lift a bar. Understand what I am saying?

Is that how this verse is supposed to be used? No!

What is the real context of this passage? All you have to do is read three verses earlier.

Philippians 4:10-13 (NASB)

¹⁰ But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly (who is the "I" here? Paul), that now at last you have revived your concern for me; indeed, you were concerned *before*, but you lacked opportunity. ¹¹ Not that I speak from want, for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. (See! What is happening here is that the Philippian church had not been able to help Paul monetarily. But now they are able to. And Paul says "Thanks, but don't think that I am totally relying on you. Because I have been able to be content regardless of the circumstances". Then he goes on and explains...¹² I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need. ¹³ I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.

What is the context of the passage? Riches in poverty.

Regardless of whether I have had plenty to eat or if I was hungry. I have still been able to spread the Gospel. I am thankful that you are supporting me, but don't think that I have been waiting on you to make my mission complete. Because it is Jesus that I rely on! In Him, I can do what He has called me to do, no matter what obstacles are in front of me to spread the Gospel.

It is not about lifting a heavy weight or jumping off of a cliff. It is about being content with whatever you have so you can spread the Gospel.

If you take the Bible out of context you can make it say whatever you want.

(Judas) went away and hanged himself. Make my joy complete by being of the same mind. Go and do the same, and what you do, do quickly.

III. ASKING THE RIGHT QUESTIONS.

Here is what I really want you to hear. The is danger when coming to Revelation and ignoring the context. Because when you do not have context in place, whether it is Biblical context or historical context, as we talked about last week, then you will even ask the wrong questions.

When it comes to Revelation you might be asking questions like...

- When is the world going to end?
- How is the rapture going to occur?

You can ask all these different questions and you WILL find answers. But my question is "Are you asking the right questions?" We can **make** the Bible answer any question, especially if we take the scripture out of context.

Shouldn't context dictate even what questions are being talked about? If we are being honest it should. Revelation should tell me what questions should be asked. Not me going to Revelation with predetermined questions to answer. Revelation should ask the questions and answer for me. Make sure the questions that are being answered are the same questions that the churches of Asia Minor were asking themselves.

I am going to recapitulate.

Historical context tells us that the books were written to real churches in Asia Minor by a real man, John, who had been their pastor. We must look at Revelation through that lens! Why? Because the book starts off in the first three chapters by saying that it was written to the seven churches in Asia Minor. That they are going through real problems, at a real time, in a real place, with real people! Too many people read the remainder of the book and say it has nothing to do with the seven churches. They insist that it is only talking about events that are going to happen at least two thousand years later.

I would ask, "Why write the rest of the letter?" What value would it have for the seven churches? How would it help them cope with the Roman empire staring them in the face and telling them that they must worship their emperor? It would be easy to ignore the first three chapters, but if you do that you will lack the historical context you will need to understand what is really being written. There are not 19 chapters in Revelation, there are 22! The first three tell me the questions I need to be asking.

CONCLUSION:

What John is telling us that behind the veil there is a cosmic war that is raging. You must keep it in context. Don't come to Revelation with a preset list of questions. Otherwise you will not listen! Let Revelation ask the questions it wants to answer and then allow Revelation to answer THOSE questions.

Revelation DOES have an agenda. It wants to impact your life in the same way that it impacted the lives in the seven churches nearly two thousand years ago.

But to come to the book Revelation and say that it must tell me when the world ends, you must tell me the timeline of the future, you must tell me when the tribulation is coming, you must tell me when the rapture is coming, you must tell me when the millennium will occur, then you are asking questions that Revelation was not trying to answer.

Just remember. Despite how confusing Revelation may seem to you, trust Jesus when He says that those who endure to the end WILL WIN! Who can stand at the judgment? How can you overcome Satan?

Revelation 12:11 (NASB)

¹¹ And they overcame him because of the blood of the Lamb and because of the word of their testimony, and they did not love their life even when faced with death.

Revelation leaves the Christian with only have one option. Accept Christ's free gift of salvation and die to yourself. Do not be ashamed of the Gospel and share it with others. **Be faithful to death** even if that means captivity, banishment to an island, or even death itself!

He is Lord!