

Seeing Jesus Christ in Heaven

SCOTT HOEZEE

The Bible's final book of Revelation has long been a source of mystery to Christians across the ages. Preachers sometimes shy away from it. The differences among whole denominations and theological traditions sometimes center in large part on different interpretations of Revelation. When the great theologian John Calvin wrote commentaries on the books in the New Testament, he curiously enough skipped Revelation. Today on *Groundwork*, we are going to begin digging into this curious and apocalyptic book. Stay tuned.

DARRELL DELANEY

Welcome to *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Darrell Delaney.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I am Scott Hoezee; and Darrell, this is the first of a planned six-part series on the Bible's final book, the book of Revelation. In our next program—the second one—we are going to be joined by a guest, Dr. Jeff Weima, who will walk us through the letters, or the sermons, to the seven churches; but just in general in these six episodes, we really hope to cover the breadth of this rather large and interesting book.

DARRELL DELANEY

I cannot wait until we have Dr. Weima on. It is going to be amazing. He teaches this stuff; he preaches it; he wrote a book about it; and it is going to be exciting to hear him dig into scripture. Today, we are actually excited to begin this scripture, and we are going to pick up right here in Revelation Chapter 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, ²who testifies to everything he saw—that is, the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ. ³Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it, because the time is near. This is the only book that I know in the Bible that says: You are blessed for just reading it and hearing it.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; so, as we get rolling on this book, though, just a little preliminary background: The Greek title of this book, Darrell, is *apokalupsis*, and you can hear in that already, that is where we get our English word apocalypse. Now, today, when most people hear the word *apocalypse*, we associate it with events associated maybe with the end of history. In fact, years ago in the original version of a movie called *Ghost Busters*, there is a large rash of ghost sightings in New York City; and at one point, the ghost busters tell the mayor of New York City they think that this is all tying in with the event of what they call *biblical proportions*; and when the mayor says: What do you mean “biblical proportions”? They say: Well, real Old Testament wrath of God stuff. You know, fire and brimstone coming down from the sky; seas and rivers boiling; forty years of darkness; earthquakes and volcanoes; the dead rising from the grave; human sacrifices; dogs and cats living together; mass hysteria. Okay, so this wasn't a religious movie; and the dogs and cats part was just funny; but you know, Darrell, the rest of that stuff...it is in the Bible.

DARRELL DELANEY

When people hear the Revelation of Jesus Christ, first and foremost, I hear people saying: *Revelations...*

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DARRELL DELANEY

And I think that we just need to remember that this is all one revelation, even though there are many things going on; and the very fact that there are a lot of images...and when they hear the word apocalypse...you hear in pop culture that word apocalypse, and people infuse many different things, but we can set the record straight on what it really means based on what the Greek translation is.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; we think apocalypse is, you know, a meteor striking the earth...something horrible...something terrible...something catastrophic; but in Greek, apokalupsis just means *revealing*—the revelation. That is why we call it Revelation in English. It is the revealing...the unveiling of something; and in this book, God is unveiling something...revealing something to this man named John. John is going to see what is going on in heaven right now, and he will see things that will be true for the course of history, however long history goes. So, it is a revelation, and apocalyptic things are not scary things. God is going to reveal good things.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, when I taught this in middle school youth group, I would have a plate and I would have a, you know, napkin covering the plate, and then explain that revelation is basically removing the napkin so they can see what is under there. It is a good and valuable thing; and God is revealing it. In our Reformed theology...you know this, Scott...we cannot know anything unless God reveals it to us.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, he is actually revealing what is going to happen, and what is going to take place to his apostle John...the only apostle who was not martyred. He was alive to be able to get this vision; and now we are being encouraged by it; but sometimes we get nervous, we get upset, we get afraid and anxious when we see all the images going on; but this was designed to be a word of comfort to us from John the Apostle's revelation from Jesus Christ.

SCOTT HOEZEE

There has been some question in scholarly circles: Is this John the Apostle, as you just said, Darrell; or is John of Patmos somebody different? For the sake of this series, we are just going to call him John; but there is certainly some evidence...and Dr. Weima will actually mention this in the next program, too...that this is the same John who wrote the gospel and three epistles in the New Testament.

But let's go back, Darrell, to Revelation 1 and just hear how this John introduces himself.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, picking up at verse 9, it says: 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. ¹⁰On the Lord's Day I was in the Spirit, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet, ¹¹which said: "Write on a scroll what you see and send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea."

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, it is not said directly here, but John here, Darrell, more or less says he has been exiled to Patmos. He is here because of the Word of God and the testimony of Jesus; in other words, the Roman Empire exiled him. They didn't like his preaching; so, to shut him up, they sent him away to an island. Here is the great irony...the delicious irony, Darrell...you cannot shut up God. The Romans didn't know that. You cannot throw John out of the reach of God. So, they threw John far away so that God couldn't talk to him and he couldn't talk, and guess what happened on the island of Patmos? God made John his megaphone after all! You gotta kind of love that; God doing an end-run on the persecution of his Church.

DARRELL DELANEY

And maybe the Greco-Roman people believed because their gods were localized to different cities...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, right.

DARRELL DELANEY

And different locations, that they thought: Okay, this God they are talking about; he is just like one of ours, so he is literally localized. His jurisdiction ends and he cannot be in Patmos; but what they understand now, and what we understand now, is that God is everywhere; and we have always known his omnipresence is there, and he uses this to even overwhelm John with this vision, and he can speak anywhere.

SCOTT HOEZEE

That is exactly right. He will get this message across. The seven churches that you read just a minute ago: Ephesus and Smyrna and the rest, they are specifically addressed in seven letters, or probably we could actually call them messages or sermons, to these seven churches, which we believe were real churches at that time. They also stand for all churches and all congregations. So, in Revelation 2 and 3, in the next program of this series, we will unpack those specific letters; but right, as you said, for now, John is definitely not beyond the reach of God and of Jesus, and of his Holy Spirit, because here on this remote island, God is going to show John things no one has ever before seen; and you know, Darrell, in Psalm 2 we get this reference, you know: The nations conspire; they make all their plans, and God in heaven laughs...

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

I've got to think God had to laugh here a little bit, you know; that the Romans tried to make John deaf to God by, as you said, maybe if he moves far enough away, God won't find him. Well, that is not how the God of Israel and the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ operates; but, in just a minute, Darrell, we are going to dig into some of the very first specific things that were apocalypsed...that were revealed to John. So, stay tuned.

Segment 2

DARRELL DELANEY

I am Darrell Delaney, with Scott Hoezee, and you are listening to *Groundwork*.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And let's get right back into Revelation Chapter 1, Darrell, in this first of a six-part series on the Bible's final book, and listen to these words that open the book to the seven churches in the province of Asia: ^{4b}Grace and peace to you from him who is and who was, and who is to come, and from the seven spirits before his throne, ⁵and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, ⁶and 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. ⁷

“Look, he is coming with the clouds,” and “every eye will see him, even those who pierced him”; and all peoples on earth “will mourn because of him.” So shall it be! Amen. ⁸“I am the Alpha and the Omega,” says the Lord God, “who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty.”

DARRELL DELANEY

So, we see here, Scott, we have a greeting that comes from God, and it is reminding us of who he is. It also reminds us, the believers who read this message that is revealed, it reminds us of who we are. It sounds familiar, doesn't it Scott?

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; how many of us in the tradition of the Church, we begin with a greeting from God and we close at the benediction or parting blessing from God; and in a lot of churches down across the ages: Grace and peace to you from him who is and who was and who is to come. That blessing has opened so many worship services along the ages and around the world.

DARRELL DELANEY

That is it; it is really powerful because those words come directly from scripture; and what is really powerful to me as well is the fact that, not only do we get the revelation of who Jesus Christ is in that greeting, but we get a revelation of who we are...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DARRELL DELANEY

Because when Jesus was here walking on earth, he inaugurated the kingdom of God; and in that kingdom, we have citizens.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And how do we become citizens? Well, that is in here, too: By his blood, by his sacrifice, by his atonement work on the cross; and because of that, now we are a kingdom and priests to serve God, and God the Father through Jesus. So, yes; we are reminded that the kingdom of God has come through Jesus. It is still coming, this book will make clear. The full inbreaking of the kingdom won't come until the very end, but in the meanwhile, who are we? We are the people who have benefited from Jesus' sacrifice on the cross.

DARRELL DELANEY

And so, as kingdom citizens, we are called to live a certain way. I was thinking about how, as believers, Jesus often encouraged us to live according to that kingdom, to be the ones who the shalom comes through; it will be the ones who the love and the peace and those things come through. Paul, in his letters, usually starts with some sort of greeting like this, where he says: Hey, look; remember who God is; remember what he has done for you; in light of all of that, live this way. And so, we are often encouraged to do that, and then we see that in this book, not only does it talk about what has happened, but it talks about the things to come and the end times.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; so, he has died...he did die...he has made us a kingdom and priests. Now, fast-forward to the end of history when Christ will return on clouds of glory, just as Jesus predicted also, Darrell, in the gospels; but the line here that always strikes me is almost a little bit of an ouch line here. It is that when he returns, everybody will see him, even those who pierced him...ooh...even those who chalked Jesus up as a blasphemer and a pretender and an imposter, and so killed him and crucified him. Even the people who drove the nails, both physically and metaphorically, they are going to see him, too; and they are going to realize they made a little mistake...

DARRELL DELANEY

Oops!

SCOTT HOEZEE

But not so little.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, it is really interesting that he points out that everyone who hated him, everyone who lied on him will see him; and Paul picked that up when he was doing Philippians Chapter 2, when he says that every knee will bow and every tongue will confess. So eventually we are all going to see the truth of who he is, in all of his glory; and that is the part where Christians will become comforted, but those who didn't and those who opposed him, it is going to be kind of a rude awakening for them.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right, yes; and then we get those wonderful words that have rung down and echoed all through Church history: Jesus is the Alpha and the Omega—the first letter and the last letter of the Greek alphabet. Jesus is our A to Z. He is our beginning, he is our end, and everything in between. He made the original creation; he will make the new creation that will become his kingdom. So, Jesus is our everything.

So John hears all this. He hears this speaking, and eventually he wants to know who is talking; so now we get *this* starting in Revelation 1:12. He is going to turn around to see who is talking, and boy, what does he see? I turned around to see the voice that was speaking to me. And when I turned, I saw seven golden lampstands, ¹³and 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. ¹⁴The hair on his head was white like wool, as white as snow, and his eyes were like blazing fire. ¹⁵His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of rushing waters. ¹⁶In his right hand he held seven stars, and coming out of his mouth was a sharp, double-edged sword. His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance.

DARRELL DELANEY

You know, Scott, when I hear you read that, I think about how the Bible usually does allusions and echoes in other places. I call them Easter eggs because you look and you find something that is a treasure. It is hidden in the allusions and John often refers back to scriptures in the Old Testament and time periods. This one actually does remind me of Ezekiel...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DARRELL DELANEY

Because Ezekiel struggles with this same kind of language to try to explain the magnificent glory that is blowing his mind. He says: It is like this... it is an image... it is as that... it is like this... and he cannot find the words to encapsulate what he is seeing; and John is doing that to try...he is struggling to explain the glory of what he sees.

SCOTT HOEZEE

For a couple thousand years artists have tried to capture this, and maybe they have approximated it a little bit, but probably not. We are never quite going to know the mind-blowing, spine-tingling vision that John actually saw, but it is indeed amazing. It reminds me, too, Darrell, of the Transfiguration of Jesus in the gospels, where Peter, James and John up on the mount of Transfiguration were given a glimpse of this, that the humble carpenter's son from Nazareth really was this! And they saw it briefly in shining effulgence in the Transfiguration. And here we get the full Monty. This is who that humble carpenter's son was all along, and is and always will be. He is the ultimate cosmic Almighty God. He holds all the power that ever was, and that ever will be. You know, I think you could ponder what John saw for the rest of your days and you would never quite get to the bottom of it.

DARRELL DELANEY

It is true because I feel like the Word of God is often something that is inexhaustible, and we know that; but we also want to talk about, as we wrap up this program, what the implications are for us today. So, stay tuned.

Segment 3

SCOTT HOEZEE

You are listening to *Groundwork*, where we are digging into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Scott Hoezee.

DARRELL DELANEY

And I am Darrell Delaney.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Let's get back into and dig into Revelation 1; and Darrell, now we get to the final words of this chapter.

DARRELL DELANEY

Picking up at verse 17, it says: When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. Then he placed his right hand on me and said: "Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. ¹⁸I 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. ¹⁹Write, therefore, what you have seen, what is now and what will take place later. ²⁰The 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."

Man, it seems like John was overwhelmed. He fell as though dead. I mean, wouldn't you?

SCOTT HOEZEE

He passed out. Yes; I would. He fainted dead away, which we have seen before in the gospels when angels appear and so forth. John's brain short-circuited. He saw something that almost no mortal could endure; and yet, what I really like here, Darrell, is that despite all of this cosmic imagery and feet glowing like hot bronze and a sword out of his mouth, it is still the same tender Jesus whom we saw on the dusty roads of Palestine in the gospels, right? Just like he did with Peter, James and John when they were stunned at the Transfiguration, so here Jesus just gently comes up and lays his hand on John. John doesn't burst into flames as a result, right? He gently lays his hand and says: Don't be afraid. That is just the Jesus we know and we love. All the resplendence doesn't take away his gentleness and his grace.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, in this verse right here, we see two things that we talk about quite often when we are teaching God's Word. We see the transcendence of God, who is the Almighty One—the Alpha and Omega—the First and the Last. He is above us and other; but then we see the eminence and the intimacy of him touching the shoulder of John and saying: Hey, I am still the Jesus you know and love. I am still him. I am still him; and don't worry; don't be afraid. So, he also reminds us in this passage that this powerful revelation is one of comfort; and John, I need you to be comforted first.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And just to further prove that there is continuity with that Jesus of the gospels, he says: I was dead, but now look; I am alive forevermore. That is a great summary of the good news right there, Darrell. I was dead, but now look! I am alive forevermore. That is Easter.

DARRELL DELANEY

That's right, that is the resurrection.

SCOTT HOEZEE

That is the resurrection right there; and I hold the keys of death and Hades; and that is such good news, right? In our world, Darrell, death usually seems to have the last word. Here, Jesus is saying: Well, no; not so fast. I have the last word, and the last word is going to be life.

Now, we talked about is John of Patmos the same as John the evangelist, and a lot of people think they are the same; and here is something that would argue for that again. What Jesus says here is so reminiscent of the opening of John's gospel: ^(1:4) In him was life, and that life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

DARRELL DELANEY

I love that the darkness has not overcome it. It is actually the theme that starts this book of Revelation when Jesus says: I am life; and he has the authority...and there is an old African song that says: Who has the final say? It says: Jehovah has the final say; and Jesus' name in this book is The Amen...the Last Witness; and he will have the final say. So, when you are discouraged, when you have challenges, remember that it is not over until God says it's over; and also, the other thing that I like to point out is that Jesus talks about the seven churches, and we will have an opportunity to get into that. When Dr. Weima comes, we are going to talk about the seven churches, but there is also the so what of what these passages mean for us, Scott.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; one of the things we know is that although the name of my church might not be included in these seven of Ephesus and Pergamum and Thyatira and Laodicea. By implication, my church, your church, all churches are located here. This message comes to all of us; and so, you know, I think if we look at the bottom line of the so what, Darrell, I think one of the things we see here is what all of this means is that also today we as Christians in the Church, we are right to live with a profound hope, you know. I mean, the world is pretty challenging, Darrell...

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

I mean...you know, it reminds me of the old Beatles song: *A Day in the Life*. I read the news today, oh, boy! The news is pretty depressing. It is easy to get distressed. It is easy to drop into despair, because what we see around us is usually not encouraging; and yet, Revelation is here to say: Have hope, right? You should have profound hope.

DARRELL DELANEY

Time and time again, all over in scripture, this isn't the only place where there are people talking to God about, hey, the world is broken; and it seems like evil is winning. You know, in Psalm 37 we are reminded to fret not ourselves because of evildoers, and it looks like they are winning, but God eventually will address that situation with the appropriate justice, with the appropriate shalom, and that has not happened fully in the world that we currently live in. It is something that we lament and we look forward to, but we do serve a God who promises that he will address that situation in his wise time; and that is something we hold onto as hope.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; and one of the things we are going to see in probably the third episode of this series is that, again, as we said at the beginning of this program, Revelation... *apokalupsis*...it means the revealing of something; and one thing that is going to get revealed to John is what is going on in heaven right now; not in the future, but John is going to see worship in the heavenly throne room right now; and it is God's way and Jesus' way of saying: Look, don't just look around you. That can be pretty depressing. Look up! Stuff is going on right now that is beyond normal human sight. Only the eyes of faith can glimpse it, and maybe only fleetingly; but Jesus comes and says: Look up. I am you're A to Z. I am the Alpha and the Omega. I am your everything. Grace is everything. I am in charge. I got your back. So, that, I think, Darrell, is the enduring message of this sometimes strange looking book; and yet, that is the message for the seven churches, to whom the book was

originally addressed, but to the who knows how many...seven million churches today...I don't know; but it is still the message of hope and encouragement.

DARRELL DELANEY

And when John is told to look up, he is given a different perspective than the current situation that he is in. Remember, he is exiled, he is on the island of Patmos by himself. It could be a lonely and desolate place for him, but he is told to look up and see what is happening; and gains a fresh perspective on that. That could be something that we could learn from to get God's perspective on our current situation and circumstance that would give us encouragement, strength and hope; knowing that we serve a God who is in control, who has not fallen asleep at the wheel, who is not going to forget about us, but definitely is going to help us in our times of need.

SCOTT HOEZEE

I know all of us as Christians have the experience that, like John, when we are lonely and alone and isolated, in the dark night of the soul, in the dark moment in the hospital room, sometimes that is when the Holy Spirit comes through...

DARRELL DELANEY

Powerfully.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And reminds us: I have your back. Surely I am with you always. Thanks be to God.

Well, thanks for listening and digging deeply into scripture with *Groundwork*. We are your hosts, Scott Hoezee and Darrell Delaney. Join us again next time as we study Revelation 2 and 3; the messages John receives for the seven churches; and we will discuss the meaning of those with our special guest, Jeff Weima. Connect with us at our website, groundworkonline.com. Share what *Groundwork* means to you. Make suggestions for future *Groundwork* programs.

DARRELL DELANEY

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