

Revelation: Lesson 2

I want to recap the major discussion points from Revelation lesson 2 (chapter 1). I could have been clearer through some key discussion points.

The over all structure of the lesson was building to the ultimate revelation that John wrote chapter one in such a way to encourage the people of the seven churches he will address next (chapters 2-3). He did this by reminding them of who they were and who Jesus was. This was important because when someone is suffering greatly and having a crisis of faith and trying to decide if “this Christianity” is really worth it in the teeth of persecution then that person needs to be reminded their worth and certainly the worth of Jesus.

Our Identity:

First: We are a Kingdom:

There are a few descriptors placed in chapter one about who John's recipients, and by extension us, identity is truly. They are loved by God, they are slaves, they are a Kingdom, and they are priests in that Kingdom.

I really focused on the role of Kingdom and less on Priests. In saying, “He made us to be a Kingdom, priests to His God. . .” in verse 6, John is drawing his readers back to Exodus 19:6 where God is speaking to Moses about who these Israelites will be in relation to God, “and you shall be to me a Kingdom of priests and a holy nation.”

Aside: When we talk about Kingdoms the elements that make that possible are: a King, subjects, servants, laws, rules, expectations, The king protects the people, etc. To live in a Kingdom means those who are not the King have to do what the King requires.

Now, the reason for this significance is that John (in Revelation 1) is attributing to the Christians in AD 90 the same identity that belonged to the Israelites in 1446 BC. Those who have faith in God are now the chosen people of God and they possess the identity of Israel. Paul does this very thing in Romans 9-11 when he says, “those who are Israel are not all Israel” and when he drives the point home in chapter 11 of Romans using the olive tree description. Israel is not decided upon by ethnicity or lineage. Rather it is decided by those who do the will of God.

John is reminding them that to be in the Kingdom of God means they do what the King requires, that they remain faithful to him, that they continue to spread the King's kingdom by making disciples, and that the King will protect them when attack comes.

Second: We are Priests:

The idea of being a holy nation, one of priests, mean that we as members of this different kind of Kingdom mean we are held to higher ethical and moral standards than the rest of the world which sets us apart from everyone else. Just as Israel was to be set apart from the world, so too the church is to be set apart.

Priests are also a class of people who have direct contact with the deity of the people. We have a direct relationship with God because of the Holy Spirit inside of us and the Son being our High Priest with the father.

Finally: They know who they are

In chapter one, John has reminded his readers who they are; a priestly class in the Kingdom of God, and the fulfilled Israel – chosen people of God who carry out God's will on earth as it is in heaven.

Jesus Identity:

Just as we listed out the descriptors of John's readers, so too we listed out the descriptors for Jesus. There are a bit more and that was pointed out to you in the handout.

Jesus is: Alive, the alpha and omega, the living one, the Christ, the lover of people, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, ruler of the kings of the earth, the son of man, coming on the clouds, etc.

I only really had time to focus on two, Son of Man, and High Priest.

Son of Man:

In Revelation 1, John makes three allusions to Old Testament texts. We already looked at the first one in Exodus 19:6. The next one we looked at was in Daniel 7:9-14. In this particular passage we get some scriptural clues as to what John is trying to say about who Jesus is.

- (1) The Son of Man title is used about 100 times in the Old Testament and the vast majority are found in Ezekiel. This is a way to humble Ezekiel while he is in the visionary presence of God. Ezekiel was a contemporary of Daniel who wrote just before Daniel. So it is quite natural for Daniel to pick up the language of Ezekiel. However what is weird is that in Daniel, the language of Son of Man takes on a new meaning.
- (2) In Rev. 1:7 he describes Jesus as the one who is coming with the clouds. In the text of Revelation it sounds like Jesus coming to earth in the second coming. However, in the original text of Daniel 7 it is just the opposite. The Son of Man that is coming on the clouds is a man who comes into the throne room of the ancient of days, another name for YHWH. So it's not actually an image of advent to the world, but rather ascension into heaven.
- (3) This reference in vs. 7 follows the reference to us as a Kingdom of Priests in vs. 6 as a source text for Jesus establishing his Kingdom. Therefore, John is claiming that Jesus established his new Kingdom in his ascension into heaven.

The other reference that comes from Daniel 7 is found in Revelation 1:14, "His head and his hair were white like wool, like snow; and his eyes were like a flame of fire." This is like Daniel 7:9, "I kept looking until thrones were set up, and the ancient of days took his seat; his gesture was like white snow and the hair of his head like pure wool. His throne was ablaze with flames . . ." So in the description of what John sees here in Revelation 1

is what Daniel saw when he was taken into the throne room of God and saw the ancient of days, or who we might typically call “God the Father.”

What I see happening here is that John is blurring the lines between the “Son of Man” - the fleshy character who comes to the throne room of God after establishing the Kingdom of God on earth as it is in heaven, and “The ancient of days” – the Old Testament way of referencing the one true God. Now we are familiar with calling Jesus God, however we are unfamiliar with calling Jesus and the father the exact same thing. Yet here in Revelation (and in the entire Bible) we get one of the clearest pictures of how they are both one God. We typically focus on the part of the trinity that stresses the three persons. John here is stressing the part of the trinity that says, “yet they are one God.” The lines between Jesus and the Father’s personhood is being blurred here.

This begs the question, why is John doing this? We will discuss that in a minute.

The High Priest:

I did not focus on this as much because in the class it felt like I needed to focus more on the Son of Man reference and what all John was doing there. It is natural for us to think of Jesus as the High Priest. Here we see Jesus dressed like a High Priest was dressed. He is standing among lamp stands which were found in the temple and tabernacle. Jesus is the High Priest, just as the Hebrews author tells us. That is all I really want to focus on right now. We will discuss this idea further in the next lesson.

Finally:

John has further revealed to his readers who this Jesus truly is, he is all these descriptors found in chapter one. Revelation 1 is a great place to study Christology: the study of the Hebrew Messiah. So John has reminded his readers and further expanded their minds as to who this Jesus is.

Interpretation:

So why would John begin an odd book with so many symbols to talk about the identity of his readers and Jesus? The answer is found in all that his readers are facing. They are facing great persecution and pressure from outside, from within, and the community is being tested in great tribulation.

When we experience these terrible moments and tests where we begin to question our faith and/or identity what we need most is to be reminded. I used the Lion King as an example of this. Simba, while in exile, receives a vision like experience from his deceased father Mufasa. His father is encouraging him to do the right thing, to return home to Pride rock and take his place as King. He says to him, “Remember who you are. You are my son and the one true King. . . Remember. . . Remember.” The creators of the Lion King are, in a way, recreating the scene here in Revelation 1. John is reminding his readers of who they are, God’s chosen people and a Kingdom that is set apart to do the will of their King. He is reminding them of who Jesus is and that he is absolutely worth all the trouble they will experience because of him.

Now he will look closer at each church challenging them to be better in Chps. 2-3.