

Revelation 1:1-3

Hymns 27, 516

March 5, 2022

Preached during the Russian invasion of Ukraine - 2022

Intelligence Reports

“Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy. . .” Rev
1:3

INTRODUCTION

A few weeks ago I mentioned Operation Barbarossa in my introductory remarks. This was the German offensive into the Soviet Union launched in 1941. I spoke of it at that time more from the German perspective. But in light of current events, I thought it might be interesting to consider it from the Russian perspective. You see, what’s fascinating is that this invasion attempt took Russian intelligence by surprise. Hitler staged the operation by invading Russia with 3 million German troops who poured in from the Arctic Circle all the way to the Black Sea. Now I am sure you are aware that was no way to hide the massive buildup of German forces along the Soviet border. The Russians had plenty of information about troop movements eastward by the Germans, and couldn't help but notice the increased number of aerial surveillance flights Hitler was sending over Russia. U.S. intelligence had already informed Russian intelligence of Hitler's plans to invade Russia the previous year - 1940. The British told them the same thing. But Russia was convinced that all this was really counterintelligence. To explain the buildup of troops along the Soviet border, Hitler told two lies.

First he said that the buildup of his troops on the Russian border *was for training purposes*, (SOUND FAMILIAR?) to prepare for the invasion of England (Operation Sea Lion). When that explanation stopped working, he pivoted to explain them as being contingency forces against possible hostile Soviet action (IN OTHER WORDS - HE PORTRAYED THEM AS A PEACEKEEPING FORCE - AGAIN - ANYONE LISTENING?). Unfortunately, Stalin bought all this because his own intelligence led him to believe that Hitler would not dare try to fight a war on two fronts. By ignoring the obvious facts plus sound intelligence reports, Stalin made the wrong decision, and his people paid a terrible price for this failure to take the messages he had received seriously. I wonder if anyone thought to consider this history when analyzing the leadup to the invasion of Ukraine a few days ago?

But friends, as important as the tragic events unfolding in Eastern Europe today are, we have an even more critical set of intelligence reports to consider. These are the reports that come to us from the headquarters of God Himself in the Sanctuary in heaven. Our Scripture reading this morning shows us exactly how those intelligence reports come to us, and what their significance for us is. Let's take a moment to reread this passage -

Rev. 1:1 ¶ The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show His servants—things which must shortly take place. And He sent and signified it by His angel to His servant John,

Rev. 1:2 who bore witness to the word of God, and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, to all things that he saw.

Rev. 1:3 Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written in it; for the time is near.

GENERAL OBSERVATION

It is interesting to me that the Revelation begins, not with the vision of the dragon and the woman, not with the beast rising up out of the sea, not the mysterious trumpets or the terrible plagues. Rather it begins with the foundational, doctrinal concept of revelation and inspiration. Here we have a model of how the prophetic word came to the prophets of old. I should point out that the concept that we see here is very different from what other religions teach. Joseph Smith claimed that an angel named Moroni handed him essentially a three ring binder full of gold leaf pages engraved with strange characters that he had to translate using translucent stones. If that sounds pretty weird, its because it is. Muhammed wrote that the angel Gabriel essentially forced him to receive the revelations that later became the Quran. Now I think you will agree that neither of these claims square with the experiences of prophets in the Bible. Though the Biblical prophets did not always understand the meaning of what they wrote, it was always written in the language that they spoke every day. And in the Bible, we never see an angel forcing a prophet to cooperate. Rather we see angels showing tender compassion to the prophets who were to receive the divine message. I point all that out just to say that as we test any alleged manifestation of divine revelation, we should consider the manner by which it comes. God has been consistent throughout the Bible in this regard. Any deviation from that pattern is an indication that the alleged prophet's message is invalid.

POINTS TO CONSIDER

The first thing that we must consider in this passage is the fact that God cares enough to reveal things to fallen human beings. Apocalyptic prophecy is not given to create bad dreams. On the contrary, if it is presented that way, it is being misrepresented. God has given us these visions to consider because we are in a time of war, a time of conflict, and this conflict is coming down to its final battle. We need the intelligence reports that God gives us in the book of Revelation. Faithful men of God from the past knew this. John Knox launched the reformation in Scotland with a powerful sermon at St. Andrews Church taken from Daniel 7 of all places. In that sermon he elaborated on the great love of God for His people in giving them the prophecies so that they would know what was to come and how the devil would work. Yes, my friends, God has given us the prophecies of Daniel and the Revelation because He loves us. He does not want to see us taken down by the enemy of our souls, so He gives us the devil's battle plan ahead of time so that we can understand how he will seek to deceive us. What condescension! What great love!!

But we should also consider that these revelations are not geared toward everyone. He reveals things to "His servants", but not to the world at large. This is a critical point. If we fail to grasp this, we will also fail to understand the interpretive keys for this book - the book of revelation. Here's why I say that. You see, there are many who believe that the book of revelation should be interpreted merely by reading the newspaper or by surfing the internet news sites. What such people fail to see is that the Revelation is a tapestry of OT references and allusions to things that have happened in the past. Because of this, Revelation can only be understood by those who read the rest of the Bible carefully. But, I will also go a step further than this to make another assertion: The book of

Revelation can only be truly understood by people who actually serve God, that is, those who are willing to put into practice what Scripture teaches, and to act on the intelligence that these prophecies provide. We see this clearly stated in verse 3. Who are the blessed in verse 3? It is those who read, hear, and *keep* the things written in the prophecy.

But we must also recognize that God's revelations are of a practical nature. These revelations tell us of things which pertain to real decisions that we need to make concerning and real issues with which we will be confronted. This, by the way, is why the Bible remains the most relevant book in the whole world. In fact, I would argue that the Bible, and the Bible alone, is truly relevant to the inhabitants of earth, and especially to the servants of God. Any ideas or messages that are true are merely reflections of the truths that God has already spoken in His word. But we should be more specific. God's revelations have to do with HISTORY. They pertain to events which were to take place - to happen. God does not dazzle our imaginations with revelations that are of a mere esoteric nature. There is an infinite breadth of subject matter, even in the created universe, from which God could reveal things to us. God could reveal to us the nature and interrelationship of time and space. He could reveal to us the mysteries of life in regards to the complexities of cellular design and function. He could reveal to us all kinds of details regarding the other intelligent life in the universe, the biology of angels, the populations of other worlds and their locations in relation to earth. All these things would be intensely interesting, of course, but God has chosen to reveal very little about such subjects. Rather, He reveals what is practical for us. He reveals the historical trajectory of events that pertain specifically to the battles that His people must fight. This is why I chose the title I did - because these things that God reveals to us are, in their

very essence, intelligence reports. They pertain directly to the progress and outcome of this great conflict - the Great Controversy.

So we find, as we have so often in our study together, that the doctrine, the stories, the prophecies contained in the Bible remain the most relevant preparation we could ever want for living in the world at any time, but especially for living in the world at this present time. Many don't see how a book as old as the Bible could be of any practical value today. Here's my question to you, if you are thinking like that - Have you read it? Have you read it? Do we not see the remarkable coherence in it? Do we not see how it addresses the issues of the heart today?? Have you not seen how it speaks to the challenges that we face in these closing hours of earth's history? Friend - although we have more to consider today, can I ask you - what are you doing with this practical book? What are you doing with these intelligence reports?

It is also important to consider HOW God goes about revealing these intelligence reports to us. I want to suggest that God chose a method that would safeguard the message from corruption. There is a chain of custody of the message here that is remarkable. We note, first of all, in verse 1, that the message originates in God the Father. This is an important thing to consider. So often we think of God the Father as somehow disconnected from us, an absentee dad, as it were, and that the Son of God is the only one who has concern for the lost race. But this is not so! Here we have the Father collaborating with Jesus, the One we call the Son, giving Him this special message to show something to His servants.

But we also see that the Son is not merely passive in this, for the Revelation is called "the Revelation of Jesus Christ." The original language here most likely refers to the idea that the message is coming

FROM Jesus Christ. It is not that the Father is giving us a message with which Christ is unconcerned - no, rather it is His message as well. He is 100% in harmony with this message, and wants us to have it as much as the Father does.

Now I want to point out one more thing, and this comes from verse 2. Let's read it again - Rev. 1:2 who bore witness to the word of God, and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, to all things that he saw. Note that there is a distinction here between the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ. The meaning of the phrase word of God cannot be mistaken - it refers to those writings of the prophets from the past which had been compiled in the volume we refer to as the OT. The testimony of Jesus Christ is explained right here in the verse by the phrase that follows it. The testimony of Jesus is defined as "all things that he (meaning John) saw." In other words, it refers to the manifestation of the prophetic gift in a contemporary prophet. Now I have to point out that the things that John saw came from God by the same process that He had used to reveal His word to the OT prophets. The testimony of Jesus is not less inspired than the word of God. It carries no less authority than the word of God. What John wrote was authoritative even though it was not yet part of what we now call Holy Scripture.

APPLICATION AND APPEAL

The real question to which we are brought today is the one that is brought to view in verse 3; and it is this - Do you want to be among the blessed? That's really the question. Verse 3 tells us that those who read, hear, and keep those things written in the words of this prophecy are blessed. Does that include you, my brother? Can you affirm that you are among this group? To claim this blessing, we must do all three - read, hear, and keep.

Most adventists read this book, but that is not true of Christians generally. Many have the idea that Revelation is a scary book. It is not, if we read it correctly? The fact is that it is one of the most Christ-centered books in all the Bible. Jesus is at the forefront of the book as the slain Lamb, as our High Priest in the Heavenly Sanctuary, and as our coming Deliverer and King! Listen to these potent comments from an inspired source - "To John were opened scenes of deep and thrilling interest in the experience of the church. He saw the position, dangers, conflicts, and final deliverance of the people of God. He records the closing messages which are to ripen the harvest of the earth, either as sheaves for the heavenly garner or as fagots for the fires of destruction. Subjects of vast importance were revealed to him, especially for the last church, that those who should turn from error to truth might be instructed concerning the perils and conflicts before them. None need be in darkness in regard to what is coming upon the earth. Why, then, this widespread ignorance concerning an important part of Holy Writ? Why this general reluctance to investigate its teachings? It is the result of a studied effort of the prince of darkness to conceal from men that which reveals his deceptions. For this reason, Christ the Revelator, foreseeing the warfare that would be waged against the study of the Revelation, pronounced a blessing upon all who should read, hear, and observe the words of the prophecy." GC 341-342.

And this one - "When the books of Daniel and Revelation are better understood, believers will have an entirely different religious experience. They will be given such glimpses of the open gates of heaven, that heart and mind will be impressed in regard to the character all must develop in order to realize the blessedness which is to be the reward of the pure in heart. The Lord will bless all who will seek humbly and meekly to

understand that which is revealed in the Revelation. This book contains so much that is large with immortality and full of glory that all who read and search it earnestly receive the blessing to those "that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein."

[Revelation 1:3.]

One thing will certainly be understood from the study of Revelation –that the connection between God and His people is close and decided."

Letter 16, 1900

A personal note - if God knows all the events of history, then He also has a perfect knowledge of the events that pertain to each of us personally. Do we take the time to pray to Him about the things that perplex us? Can He also show us things? OF course He can!