

The Story of the NT Lesson 4 (Part 1): The HOPE of the Kingdom

Welcome back to the story of the New Testament. We are continuing with lesson 4, which is called the HOPE of the kingdom. Let's do a brief summary of this course.

The period from the end of the Old Testament to the beginning of the New Testament is called the 400 silent years. These were called the silent years, not because God was inactive, because God is always at his work. They were called the silent years because there were no writing or speaking prophets during that period.

During that time, God was preparing the world for the coming of the Messiah. At just the right time, the Messiah would come. It would be the right time politically, culturally, and theologically.

As the pages of the New Testament begin, we meet John the Baptist as the one promised by the prophet Malachi and others to prepare the way for the Lord. The first lesson of the story of the New Testament was called the GOSPEL of the kingdom. The four different gospel writers, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John shared their story in slightly different ways.

There were some similarities between Matthew, Mark, and Luke, which is why we call these the synoptic gospels. Synoptic means to see things the same way. John's gospel begins in eternity past, making the point that Jesus is the eternal word of God, the second person of the Godhead.

The purpose of the GOSPEL of the kingdom is to communicate the coming of the king and the conquest or the victory of the king through the cross and the resurrection.

The story of the New Testament continues with the MISSION of the kingdom. This covers the book of Acts and the 21 epistles.

Following his ascension, Jesus established his new community called the church. He also commissioned this new community to fulfill God's global cause of making disciples and bringing God's kingdom to earth as it is in heaven.

This brings us to the final chapter of the story of the New Testament called the HOPE of the kingdom and the book of Revelation tells this part of the story.

This lesson begins on page 35 in your handout. You can see the review at the top of the page. The gospels announce the beginning of **Christ's kingdom work for us.**

Acts and the 21 epistles explain the continuation of **Christ's work through us.**

Revelation anticipates the completion or the consummation of **Christ's kingdom work with us.**

As we begin this lesson, turn to 1 Peter chapter 1:3-9. This is a great place to start as we talk about the **HOPE** of the kingdom.

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. According to his great mercy, he has called us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last times.

In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith, more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire, may be found to result in praise, glory, and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not see him now, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.” (1 Peter 1:3-9)

That's 1 Peter chapter 1 verse 3 to 9.

The hope of the kingdom is not a wishful hope, it is a sure and confident hope. This passage reveals that we have been given new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of the Lord Jesus from the dead and into an inheritance that cannot perish, spoil, or fade. This hope is protected by God and secure.

It is kept in heaven for those who place their faith in the Lord Jesus for salvation. This final chapter of the story of the New Testament is about our longing for the return of Jesus. Jesus will reign on David's throne as promised in the Davidic covenant in 2 Samuel chapter 7. It says, “On your throne David will rule a king from the tribe of Judah who will reign forever and ever.” This is looking ahead to the return of King Jesus to rule and reign as the King of kings and the Lord of lords.

At the end of that tribulation period, after all judgments are completed, God will recreate the new heavens and the new earth. There will be an eternal state for the righteous. There will be an eternal state for those who have died without faith in Christ in the lake of fire. They will experience eternal torment and separation from the presence of God.

1 Peter chapter 1 is a great reminder of the confidence that we possess as a present reality through the person and work of the Lord Jesus and his finished work of redemption.

Continuing to look at page 35, there is a short paragraph in the middle of that page that provides a short summary of the book of Revelation. Let me read that.

“The New Testament concludes with the book of Revelation which tells of the final glorious application of the new covenant. Revelation assures us that God is indeed sovereign and that he will fulfill his many promises to believing Israelites and Gentiles. Those people who have received eternal life through the new covenant will live forever with the Lord in a marvelous new heaven and new earth. However, those who have refused to enter into the new covenant through faith in the Savior and Lord Jesus Christ will face him as a sovereign judge and will be banished forever to the lake of fire which we call hell, the eternal hell.”

Here are a few points to consider as we begin this lesson.

First, the book of Revelation is a unique book. Let's read Revelation chapter 1 verse 1 to 3.

"The revelation of Jesus Christ which God gave him to show to his servants the things that must soon take place. He made it known by sending his angel to the servant John who bore witness to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ even to all that he saw. Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy and blessed are those who hear and who keep what is written in it for the time is near." (Revelation 1:1-3)

There are many unique things about the end of the story of the New Testament.

In Revelation chapter 1:1 we see that it is not revelations, it is the revelation of the Lord Jesus Christ. One single revelation. It is looking ahead to the apocalypse, the unveiling or the prophetic return of the Lord Jesus.

In verse 3 we are told that this is a book of prophecy. This book is a testimony of Jesus, the proclamation of Jesus and this proclamation is the spirit of prophecy. It is a prophecy or the foretelling of what is still to come.

It is also a book of blessing. The words are to be read and heard and obeyed. It's a practical book. The book of Revelation is not meant to be over spiritualized. It's not meant to be mystical. It was and is meant to be read, heard and obeyed and ultimately to give the original readers, and us, encouragement and hope.

Second, we must understand the context of this book. Most agree that this book was written by the Apostle John while he was in exile on the island of Patmos located off the coast of present day Turkey. In the second century, the historian Tertullian wrote about the Roman Emperor Domitian who reigned between 81 and 96 AD. Domitian ordered John to be boiled in water, but John was miraculously preserved by God. The act of boiling someone in water was a form of execution used in the Roman Empire intended to kill that person in a gruesome and a public way. John's survival would have been seen as a miraculous act of God much like the protection of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in the fiery furnace in Daniel chapter 3.

Exile was a common punishment for those who were seen as political or religious agitators. The exile was likely a punishment for John's faithful preaching of the gospel as Christianity was seen as a threat to the Roman Empire.

John would have been an old man at this time probably in his 80s. Most estimate the date of this writing to be between 95 and 96 AD. The church at that time was also facing severe persecution.

John wrote his gospel so that people would believe that Jesus is the Savior of the world and the promised Messiah. He wrote to give believers hope in the promised second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ and the triumph of the kingdom of God. This is the focus here in Revelation. This is actually the storyline of the entire Bible. God who is the just Judge will one day set everything right. He offers us confidence, hope and peace in the midst of the uncertainty of the times in which we live.

Third, the majesty of the Lord Jesus is revealed throughout the book of Revelation.

We get a glimpse of this truth in chapter 1 as John receives his vision of the glorified Jesus. Throughout the book the word “throne” is used 44 times. The words for “power” and “authority” are used almost 40 times. The words for “king”, “kingdom” or “rule” are used 37 times. John is presenting the picture of the majesty of Jesus as the King of kings and the Lord of lords.

Let me read the rest of Revelation chapter 1. Remember there is a blessing to reading the words of this book out loud.

“John to the seven churches that are in Asia. Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come and from the seven spirits who are before his throne and from Jesus Christ a faithful witness the firstborn of the dead and the ruler of the kings of earth.

To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood and made us a kingdom, priest to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him, and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him. Even so. Amen.

‘I am the Alpha and Omega’, says the Lord God, ‘Who is and who was and who is to come , The Almighty.

I, John, your brother and partner in the tribulation of the kingdom and the kingdom and the patient endurance that are in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet saying, ‘Write what you see in a book and send it to the seven churches to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamum and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea.

Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking to me, and I and on turning I saw seven golden lampstands, and in midst of the lampstands one like a Son of Man, clothed with a long robe with a golden sash around his chest. The hairs of his head were white like wool, like snow. His eyes were like a flame of fire, his feet were like burnished bronze, refined in a furnace, and his voice was like the roar of many waters. In his right hand he held seven stars, and from his mouth came a sharp two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining in full strength.

*When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. But he laid his right hand on me saying, ‘Fear not, I am the First and the Last, the Living On. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of death and Hades. Write therefore these things that you have seen, those that are, and those that are to take place after this. As for the mystery of the seven stars that you saw in my right hand, and the seven golden lampstands, the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches.’”
(Revelation 1:4-21)*

The Apostle John is attempting to put into words his vision of the glorified Christ. There is a focus on the majesty, supremacy, and the conquering nature of the Lord Jesus. No longer is

Jesus a baby in the manger, but he is the promised King of kings and Lord of lords. Throughout this book of Revelation, Jesus Christ is revealed in spectacular ways. Here are just a few of the references to the Lord Jesus as revealed throughout this book of HOPE.

- He is the risen glorified Son of God ministering among the churches in chapter 1 verse 10.
- He is the Faithful Witness, the first born from the dead, the ruler of the kings of earth in chapter 1 verse 5.
- He is the Alpha and Omega in chapter 1 verse 8.
- He is the one who is and who was and is to come, The Almighty also in chapter 1 verse 8.
- He is the Son of Man in chapter 1 verse 13.
- He is the one who was dead but now is alive forevermore in chapter 1 verse 18.
- He is the Son of God in chapter 2 verse 18.
- He is the one who is holy and true in chapter 3 verse 7.
- He is the Amen the Faithful and True Witness the Ruler of God's creation in chapter 3 verse 14.
- He is the Lion of the Tribe of Judah in chapter 5 verse 5.
- He is the Lamb in heaven with authority to open the title deed to the earth in chapter 6 verse 1.
- He is the Lamb on the Throne in chapter 7 verse 17.
- He is the Messiah who will reign forever in chapter 11 verse 15.
- He is the Word of God in chapter 19 verse 13.
- He is the Majestic King of kings and Lord of lords also in chapter 19.
- He is the Root and Offspring of David the Bright Morning Star in chapter 22 verse 16.
- And there are many more references to this majestic, supremacy, and deity of Christ.

The fourth and final introductory point is to consider the purpose of the book.

The purpose of this vision and message is to encourage the church to faithfully persevere with the assurance that the Lord Jesus Christ is coming again to judge, to reward, and to punish. We can know that the evil forces in this sinful world will not prevail. Christians are called to persevere in faith despite persecution, difficulties, suffering, and what seems to be a delay in the return of the Lord Jesus.

Isaiah chapter 65:17-25 is an Old Testament passage looking ahead to the new heaven and new earth and the sure hope of what's coming as presented in Revelation 21 and 22. This purpose is clearly seen as Jesus addressed the seven churches in chapters 2 and 3.

Similar to how Acts 1:8 provided an outline to understand the entire book of Acts, Revelation 1:19 serves as a possible outline for the book of Revelation as well.

Jesus tells John to write what you have seen then write what is happening now and then write what is going to come later. Many believe that chapter 1 summarizes “what you have seen”. This was the vision of the glorified Christ and the instructions that John received. “What is now” is described in what John will write in chapters 2 and 3 regarding seven real churches in present day Turkey. And chapters 4 to 22 are looking ahead and John is told to write about “what is still to come” or “what will take place later”.

We are still in the time of “what is now”. Chapters 2 and 3 speak about the church age as we wait for the still future events such as the rapture of the church, the Tribulation, and the reign of the antichrist leading up to the second coming of Jesus.

Just as the church then was longing for the return of Jesus to set things right, we also are looking, living, and longing for the appearing of the Lord Jesus Christ in all of his glory.

Turn with me to page 36 you'll see an activity to work through on your own. Jesus is addressing seven real churches in chapters 2 and 3. These churches are not intended to be just metaphors or symbolic of some deeper spiritual message. These seven churches: Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea were real churches in what we call present-day Turkey.

Jesus had something to say to each church. Each church had some form of commendation, something they did well. Five of the seven churches had issues to be addressed. Jesus was calling them to repentance. Only two of the seven churches, Smyrna and Philadelphia, received no negative comments from Jesus. In each case, Jesus said that if they had ears to hear they must listen, repent, and believe with the sure hope of eternal life and a secure place in heaven.

Take time on your own to read through chapters 2 and 3 and look for the problems that Jesus stated within each church as well as the promises that Jesus offered to those who continued to persevere through faith. There are some theologians who believe that the seven churches are meant to summarize a chronological and spiritual timeline of the church from its birth in Acts until the return of Jesus. Although these seven churches were actual historical churches in Asia Minor, they represent the types of churches that exist throughout the church age. What Christ says to those churches then is relevant in our time as well.

Many believe that the reference to the angel of each church is pointing to the pastor or the elder of the church that is noted.

Remember, a key message of this book is to offer HOPE for the followers of Jesus. This hope is reinforced through the promises that Jesus gave to each of the seven churches. These promises are true for every follower of Christ.

Let's review these quickly ...

1. The church of Ephesus: The promise is to the one who is victorious or the one who overcomes (we see that in 1 John 5:4, John says that to be an overcomer is to be a Christian) so to the one who overcomes or the one who is victorious we will eat from the tree of life which is really the promise of heaven.
2. To the church of Smyrna: The promise is to those who are faithful to the end (which is every follower of Jesus) we will receive the victor's crown and not experience the second death which is eternal separation from God.
3. To the church in Pergamum: The promise to the one who is victorious or overcomes (once again this is true of all Christians) we will receive a white stone (this white stone was given to victorious athletes as a ticket to enter the winner's celebration

after the contest) so the white stone may be a ticket to enter the victory celebration in heaven. We are also promised a new name that is written on each stone which is a personal message from Christ to each one that he loves.

4. To the church in Thyatira: The promise to the one who is victorious or overcomes we are promised positions of authority to rule and reign with Christ and his eternal kingdom. We will also receive the morning star which points to receiving Christ in all his fullness.
5. To the church in Sardis: The promise to the one who is victorious and overcomes we will be dressed in white signifying our righteousness in Christ and the assurance that our names are permanently written in the book of life.
6. To the church of Philadelphia: The promise to the one who is victorious or overcomes we will enjoy an unshakeable eternal secure place in the presence of God and eternal citizenship in heaven, and a new name by which all believers will know Christ for eternity.
7. And lastly to the seventh church of Laodicea: The promise was to the one who is victorious or who overcomes we will sit with Christ on his throne which means we will share the privilege and authority that Christ enjoys as we reign with him.

These promises are true for every believer because in Christ we are all overcomers because he has already overcome. This would be a message of HOPE to these seven churches just as it offers hope for us today.

Let's stop here as this mid-point for Lesson four on the HOPE of the Kingdom. When we return we will continue with the part 2 of this lesson as we continue discussing the two themes of Revelation: the King is coming again and the King's new creation.

God bless you,