

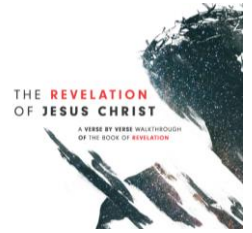
Title: Revelation, Part 3: Be Encouraged!

Speaker: Charles Stone

Passage: Rev. 1.4-8

Big idea: When you Believe and Apply the Effect of Jesus' Life, you will be encouraged in 6 Incredible Ways.

Memory verse of the month: Blessed is the one who reads 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. (Rev. 1.3)



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I'm going to start this morning's message with a short quiz. I'm going to place on the screen two often used and important words and I'd like you to contrast the meanings of these two words by asking yourself two questions.

[What root word do they have in common?](#)

[How do they differ?](#) I'd like you to take a few seconds to first answer the questions in your mind. Then, take about a minute to discuss your thoughts with the person next to you or behind you or in front of you if you can. We'll have some quiet music in the background.

Here are the two words:

[Discourage](#)

[Encourage](#)

What root word do they have in common and how do they differ?

So, what was the root word? courage.

What were the differences? I'd like to get some feedback.

Here's what I wrote. The first word is a negative one. When we feel dis-couraged, we lose courage, courage gets diminished that we need to deal with the stuff of life, to make a tough decision, or to face a difficulty. On the other hand, to be encouraged is to be bolstered in courage, to have your courage increase, to have more of the inner strength and motivation to deal with the stuff of life, make a decision, or face that difficulty.

In fact, the scriptures often command Christ followers to make a habit of encouraging others. It appears over 50 times in the Bible.

In the OT the word means to be strong, give strength, establish yourself firmly, or internal strength of character.

In the NT it can mean someone coming alongside to help, or to comfort, or to exhort. In fact the word is even used to describe the Holy Spirit as our helper, comforter, or encourager.

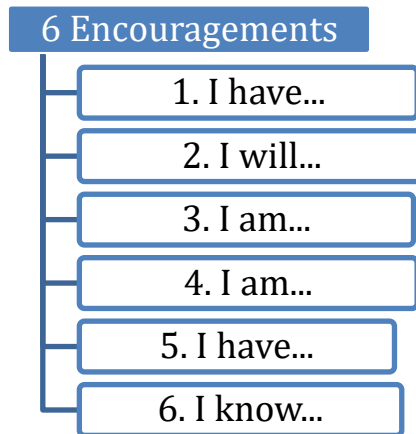
And, followers of Jesus are supposed to be encouragers.

[1Thessalonians 5:11 ... encourage one another and build each other up...](#)

We all need encouragement, especially in today's world, right?

Today, I'm going to show you that Jesus is your supreme encourager. We're going to see 6 powerful ways the work and ministry of Jesus encourages us.

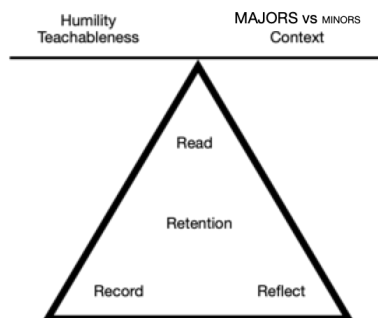
Big idea: When you Believe and Apply the Effects of Jesus' Life, you will be Encouraged in 6 Incredible Ways.



I'm going to give you these 6 encouragements as self-affirmations, grace centered mini-sermons you can tell yourself.

We'll see these 6 truths in Revelation 1.4-8. We began this deep dive into the book three weeks ago. Revelation is not just about future things, but it's also a book meant to encourage us today to more closely follow Jesus. We are meant to apply what it tells us, not merely be fascinated by it.

On a regular basis we will revisit a diagram that visualizes how to get the most from this series and explains the approach I encourage you to take. It's called the **retention** triangle.



**Read** means to read from the beginning of Revelation up to and through the upcoming passage, 5 days a week. This passage is in your message notes downloadable from our web site.

**Record** by taking notes. The research tells us that when you take notes learning gets imbedded more deeply.

**Reflect** mull over, chew on, ruminate as you read the scriptures, review your notes, talk about the discussion questions, do further study, buy one of the books I recommended (*Revelation Verse by Verse* by Grant R. Osborne; *Revelation: A Shorter Commentary* by G. K. Beale), and get in a group.

The line at the top is like balancing a sea saw. These four attributes should guide our hearts as we take a deep dive look into this book.

- **Humility**: Nobody has a corner on everything Revelation has to say. There are many valid views held by Godly Christians and biblical scholars that may differ from the one we hold.
- **Teachableness**: This is a cousin to humility. Teachableness means that you approach Revelation with a heart to learn, and even be open to being challenged about your current interpretation.
- **Majors vs minors**: Keep the big picture in mind and don't fixate on minor details that could be interpreted in various ways.
- **Context**: Context means two things. The Bible helps us understand other parts of the bible. In Revelation John alludes to the Old Testament over 500 times. Context also means that we must remember that this book was

written in a specific historical context to the early church that was facing persecution. If our interpretation would not make sense to the early Christians, it's probably not a very accurate interpretation.

No matter how you interpret this book, [we can all agree on this:](#)

[Jesus is coming again,](#)  
[sooner than later.](#)  
[We don't know when](#)  
[so we'd better be ready.](#)

Last week's big idea was. [Big idea: A blessed life in Jesus involves three phases.](#)

If you missed the message you can view it online.

I'm going to read [Rev 1.4-8](#)

**Rev. 1:** <sup>4</sup>John, To the seven churches in the province of Asia: 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, <sup>5</sup> and 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, <sup>6</sup> and 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. <sup>7</sup> Look, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him; and all the peoples of the earth will mourn because of him. So shall it be! Amen. <sup>8</sup> "I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty."

As we unpack these verses, see if you can pick up on these truths that would encourage us.

#### **1:4 John, To the seven churches in the province of Asia:**

John the Apostle wrote the book and it's addressed to 7 churches in what is now modern day Turkey. If you traveled to these cities in the order John mentions them, you would go in a circle. They were all on major Roman roads so a courier could easily get to these churches to drop off letters to them.

We don't know why he chose these seven because other churches existed in the area at the same time. Probably he chose them because their experiences typified the kinds of problems and challenges the Church has faced throughout the ages. So, the message of this book is really a book to all Christians and all churches, although it was written in the historical context of real events in history.

The number **seven** is significant because it was the number in the Bible used to picture completeness or fullness and was originally derived from the 7 days of creation. So, John may have used the seven churches to illustrate that his message was to the whole, or complete Church.

7 is one of John's favorite words, mentioned 55 times. His other sevens include things like 7 seals, 7 bowls, 7 trumpets 7 angels, and many others.

#### **Grace and peace to you from him**

This was an ancient greeting. Every culture has their own kind of greeting. In the west what do we usually use as a greeting today? Hi or hello. In those days grace and peace would be their greeting. Grace was the regular Greek greeting and peace or shalom was the Jewish greeting.

For the Christians this was much more than just a perfunctory hi or hello. They needed grace in this time of persecution to resist the pressure to compromise and they needed God's peace. Maybe today you need an extra dose of grace or peace because you are going through some tough times.

### **who is, and who was, and who is to come,**

This is a way John stresses that God is the Lord of history. This is what in the book of Hebrews so beautifully became: 'Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever' (13:8).<sup>1</sup>

The order here is significant. They know God controlled the past. The entire OT reminds them of that. They know he controls the future as the book of Revelation reveals. But some may have waffled a bit about His control over the present. At the time it sure seemed that evil had the upper hand and that the Roman empire was in control. So John addresses what some people were probably thinking by reminding them that the God who controlled the past and the future, is in charge now.

We face that same temptation today. It's often easier to say that God had things in control in the past and that He will have things in control in the future rather than to say He currently is in control. Why? When we are in the midst of really difficult times and it seems that God is distant or not listening, that's when we need to be reminded that He really is in control right now.

### **and from the seven spirits before his throne,**

This refers to the Holy Spirit, not angels. Then why did he use 7 spirits instead of simply saying the Holy Spirit? I've mentioned a couple of times that the Bible helps interpret the bible. John alludes to the OT over 500 times. He is doing that here as well.

He borrows from some imagery in the OT book of Zechariah and Isaiah (11:2–3). Isaiah describes seven modes of operation of the Spirit.<sup>2</sup> So another translation could be "the sevenfold (or perfect) Holy Spirit, because 7, again, represents perfection or completeness.

### **<sup>5</sup> and from Jesus Christ,**

With this phrase, we see the trinity, the Father, Son, and the Spirit: Him in verse 4 is God the Father, Jesus Christ is right here, and we just read about the seven spirits which is the Holy Spirit.

John now describes three identities of Jesus.

### **who is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth.**

#### **who is the faithful witness,**

Jesus credibility is shown by his life of obedience. He faithfully witnessed to the truth of God by his exemplary and perfect life. His witness and obedience even extended to the point of suffering death on the cross. That is an encouragement to us and a challenge to be loyal to him even a world that can turn against us.<sup>3</sup>

#### **the firstborn from the dead,**

He was firstborn from the dead means that he is the only person resurrected from the dead who didn't die again. Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, but he died again. Jesus is also firstborn in the sense of importance, having supreme authority over life and death.

And because of that, he promises to give us a new life, resurrection from the dead. Revelation stresses throughout that Jesus' faithful followers will share in His resurrection.

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<sup>1</sup> Barclay, W. (2004). *The Revelation of John* (3rd ed. fully rev. and updated, Vol. 1, p. 35). Louisville, KY; London: Westminster John Knox Press.

<sup>2</sup> Morris, L. (1987). *Revelation: an introduction and commentary* (Vol. 20, p. 54). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

<sup>3</sup> Osborne, G. R. (2016). *Revelation: Verse by Verse* (p. 26). Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

and the ruler of the kings of the earth.

Jesus encouraged the early believers by reminding them that He is the supreme ruler over all rulers of the earth. To those early believers, these kings were the tyrannical emperors persecuting them. He reminds them that although he is not physically present and that these rulers appear to have the last word, he is actually the one who rules over all. Jesus will have the last word.

We see these three identities of Jesus and John now tells us three indications of his saving work in us. All six of these themes continue in the rest of the book.

**To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood,<sup>6</sup> and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father**  
**loves us**

Jesus' love is like three cords twisted together: His love rooted in his past loving sacrifice on the cross, his present love for us, and his future love for us seen in the final defeat of satan on our behalf.<sup>4</sup>

His love results in two incredible truths. The first is our forgiveness.

**And has freed us from our sins by his blood,**

To be freed means release from control. We know Jesus cares for us because of the unmistakable love he showed in going to the cross. As a result, we have overcome satan and his power. The central event in Revelation is Christ's atoning, redeeming, forgiving work on the cross. The end time battle is simply a culmination of what Jesus did through His life, death, and resurrection. He has freed us from sin.

The second result of Jesus' love is this...

**<sup>6</sup> and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father**

What does that mean?

Jesus often talked about the Kingdom of God, his rule and reign. It's not like an earthly kingdom like the kingdom of England in the middle ages. It's a kingdom composed of those who have been freed from their sins and now serve God. He's saying here that His followers make up that Kingdom. And Kingdom implies royalty of those in that kingdom. We don't merely live within a kingdom; we exercise its kingly power as royalty under Christ's authority.

The kingdom consists of *priests*. Ordinary Christians who are now called *priests*, not just some privileged hierarchy. Under the old way only priests had access to God.

When the Jews entered the Temple, they could pass through the Court of the Gentiles (non-Jew), the Court of the Women and the Court of the Israelites (men only)—but then they had to stop. The next section was the court of Priests where only priests could enter. And the further you went, only the high priest could enter the holy of holies where God dwelled, and that only once a year to atone for the people's sins.

But now, because this huge thick dividing curtain between the people and God had been torn when Jesus died on the cross, every believer is now a priest and can enter God's presence personally. That's amazing.

As a natural outpouring of joy for these blessings, John writes a burst of praise.

**—to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen.**

**<sup>7</sup> Look, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him; and all the peoples of the earth will mourn because of him. So shall it be! Amen.**

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<sup>4</sup> Osborne, G. R. (2016). *Revelation: Verse by Verse* (p. 27). Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

This pictures a scene of divine majesty when Jesus returns to earth in triumph. It will be supernatural and in some way will be seen by everyone because His return will be very public.

When he says that the people will mourn, he's probably referring both those who rejected Christ and mourn from their regret and those who turn to Christ and mourn as they repent.

He uses the word amen twice. Have you ever wondered why we say amen at the end of a prayer?

It really means so shall it be (I this verse). It originated in the OT Hebrew Scriptures as an affirmative response by the people. Today we use it without thinking about it after a prayer, but the OT form of it occurs over 100x and it means to be faithful, reliable, or to believe something. So, the idea of something that is faithful, reliable, or believable lies behind the use of amen. So, we end our prayers with amen, so be it.

Here it speaks to the trustworthiness and dependability of what has just been said in the preceding part of the verse.

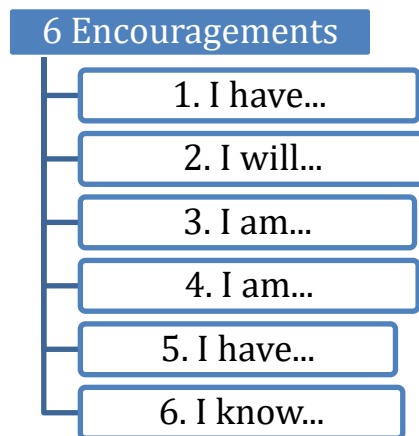
**8 "I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty."**

Alpha and omega are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet. They depict God as Lord over all history and active in it, who created the world, will end and recreate it, and is in control right now. God was before all things and he will outlast all things.

This is actually the major title for God in Revelation and it reminds us that God is in charge of today's events and that He is present with us in all our circumstances.

Back to our big idea:

**Big idea: When you Believe and Apply the Effects of Jesus' Life, You will be Encouraged in 6 Incredible Ways.**



So How does Jesus encourage us by the truths in these few verses.

First, He obeyed His Heavenly Father and was witness to His truth by his life of moral strength and purity and righteousness and goodness that is available to us as we trust him.

**Encouragement 1: I have the perfect pattern to model my life after.** He shows us how to live in the face of opposition and persecution. His life is the perfect pattern and model for us to follow. But His life is more than just a good example.

Second, He rose from the dead. He was called the firstborn from the dead which means he was first to be resurrected and stay resurrected **and** because he is ruler over life and death, he promises to resurrect His followers.

**Encouragement 2: I will defeat death.** When your body wears out, it's not the end. Jesus says he will give us new resurrected bodies that will live forever in a perfect place called heaven, a place of perfect joy and peace and happiness.

Third, Jesus is the ruler of the kings of the earth. We know who's really in charge, someone with our best interests in mind is in charge.

**Encouragement 3: I am confident that the one in charge knows what to do.** Ultimately, God is in charge but now, he gives freedom to world leaders, who can really make a mess of things. But behind the curtain (we will through Revelation) God is firmly in charge. I know that raises questions. We'll deal with those.

Fourth, Jesus death on the cross freed us from our sins.

**Encouragement 4: I am forgiven of all my sin.** Think about that, every cruddy, low, sick, hidden, base, gross, shameful thing I have every done or ever will, has been forgiven. That's grace.

Fifth, He made us priests. That means that we don't need somebody else to give us an audience with God. We have the authority to come into his presence.

**Encouragement 5: I have access to God at any time for any reason.** God's never preoccupied or too busy to give you His full undivided attention about anything at any time.

Finally, He will come again and every eye will see Him. Because of that, we must keep the long horizon perspective, live with eternity in mind.

**Encouragement 6: I know how things will turn out. Jesus wins!** That gives us hope in a really messed up world. God will restore his creation to its intended perfect beauty.

Folks, those are **6 Encouraging Truths** that should build you up. Say these out loud with me as I put them up.

1. **I have the perfect pattern to model my life after.**
2. **I will defeat death.**
3. **I am confident that the one in charge knows what to do.**
4. **I am forgiven of all my sin.**
5. **I have access to God at any time for any reason.**
6. **I know how things will turn out. Jesus wins!**

I hope these truths encourage you this week. We have a little card with these 6 Encouraging Truths for you to take as you leave a bit later. At the exits you'll see this cards on tables. Pick one up and put it in a place that you will often see this week to be encouraged. It is also available on our website.