

REFRAMING THE FUTURE

Revelation 1:1-3

INTRODUCTION

- A. It is a Saturday afternoon, holiday time for all boys, except Tom Sawyer, who has been sentenced to whitewash thirty yards of board fence nine feet high. Life to him seems hollow, an existence but a burden. It is not only the work he finds intolerable, but the thought of all the boys who will be coming along and making fun of him for having to work. At this dark and hopeless moment, writes Mark Twain, an inspiration bursts upon him! Nothing less than a great, magnificent inspiration. Soon enough a boy comes in sight, the very boy, of all boys, whose ridicule he had been dreading most:

“Hello, old chap, you got to work, hey?”

“Why, it’s you, Ben! I warn’t noticing.”

“Say—I’m going a-swimming, I am. Don’t you wish you could? But of course you’d druther work—wouldn’t you? Course you would!”

Tom contemplated the boy a bit, and said: “What do you call work?”

“Why, ain’t that work?”

Tom resumed his whitewashing, and answered carelessly: “Well, maybe it is, and maybe it ain’t. All I know, is, it suits Tom Sawyer.”

“Oh come, now, you don’t mean to let on that you like it?”

The brush continued to move.

“Like it? Well, I don’t see why I oughtn’t to like it. Does a boy get a chance to whitewash a fence every day?”

That put the thing in a new light. Ben stopped nibbling his apple. Tom swept his brush daintily back and forth—stepped back to note the effect—added a touch here and there—criticized the effect again—Ben watching every move and getting more and more interested, more and more absorbed.

Presently he said: “Say, Tom, let me whitewash a little.”

What Tom Sawyer has done, of course, is *reframe* his situation. Without changing anything about the situation itself, he has offered Ben a different view of reality.

Whitewashing is not a chore—it’s fun!

- B. Now watch the apostle John as he takes the reality of the church near the end of the first century—persecuted, ridiculed, disenfranchised—and reframes the situation in a way that brings hope and encourages perseverance.

I. WORDS TO THE SEVEN CHURCHES.

A. Time Has Passed.

1. This revelation was probably given to John either 69 or 96 A.D.
2. Enough time has gone by since the days of Jesus to allow:
 - a. The church to be established throughout Asia.
 - i. Most of these churches are not mentioned in Acts.
 - ii. Probably established during a later period of evangelistic activity.
 - b. The faith of these Christians has begun to cool.
 - i. 2:4 “*You have forsaken your first love*” (Ephesus).
 - ii. 3:1 “*You have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead*” (Sardis).
 - c. False teachers have entered the church and gained a foothold.
 - i. The Nicolaitans (2:6, 15).
 - ii. Jezebel (2:20ff).

B. The Situation is Changing—a period of intense persecution is coming.

1. There are hints of this in the letters to the seven churches.
 - a. 2:10 (Smyrna) “*Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer.*”
 - b. 3:10 (Philadelphia) warned of “*...the hour of trial that is going to come...*”

2. There are direct references to it in the rest of the book.
 - a. *"Those who had been slain because of the word of God"* (6:9-11).
 - b. *"They did not love their lives so much..."* (12:11).
 - c. *"The blood of the saints..."* (17:6).
 - d. *"The souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony of Jesus"* (20:4).
- C. Through the revelation of Jesus a flagging church is encouraged to remain faithful in the dark days to come. He tells a story. He paints a picture. He reframes their faith and suffering in a wider perspective.

II. THE GREAT PERSPECTIVE.

A. Revelation 12:1-10, 12, 17.

1. The Tale of Two Beasts.

- a. A beast will arise from the sea, 13:1.
 - i. That great dragon—Satan—will work through the beast.
 - ii. The beast will utter proud words and blasphemies. He will blaspheme God, heaven and those who live there.
 - iii. The beast will make terrible war on the saints, to conquer them.
 - iv. All the world will worship the beast, and the dragon who rules through it.
- b. Then another beast will arise from the earth, 13:11.
 - i. He will continue and expand the work of the first.
 - ii. He will perform great and miraculous signs and will deceive the world and reinforce their worship of Satan.
 - iii. He will mark all worshippers of Satan on the right hand or forehead with the name of the beast . . or his number. 666.
2. *Do not be alarmed, church of Jesus. God is in His heaven and all is right with the saints.*

B. Revelation 14:1-7, 9-11

1. The Tale of Judgment.

- a. There will come upon the earth, then, a terrible time of judgment.
 - i. And the anger of God will pour out on the earth and those who have worshipped the Beast, 16:1.
 - ii. Ugly and painful sores will break out on those who bear the mark, 16:2.
 - iii. The sea and the rivers will turn to blood, 16:4.
 - iv. The sun will scorch people with fire, 16:8.
 - v. Men will gnaw their tongues in agony and curse God for their pain, 16:10.
- b. And the angel of God will proclaim: **Revelation 16:5-6.**
2. *Do not be alarmed, church of Jesus. God is in His heaven and all is right with the saints.*

3. The Tale of the Second Fall, ch. 18.

- a. Then will all the kingdoms, powers, authorities of this world quake with fear!
 - i. All those who used their power to serve the beast and oppress the saints . . all the corrupt kings and merchants who amassed their wealth and raped their people . . . all those who encouraged sin and lived in luxury and counted life cheap, 18:2-3.
 - ii. They will weep and mourn and cry out. The kings, princes, generals, mighty, 6:15.
 - iii. They will hide in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains, 6:15.
 - iv. They will call to the mountains, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of Him who sits upon the throne and from the wrath of the lamb," 6:16.
- b. For the great day of judgment will have come . . . and who can stand? 6:17

4. *Do not be alarmed, church of Jesus. God is in His heaven and all is right with the saints.*

C. Revelation 19:11-16, 19-21; 20:1-2a, 10b

1. The Tale of the New Church.

- a. Then there will be a new heaven and a new earth, 21:1.
 - i.. And there will be a new Jerusalem, a bride beautifully garbed, 21:2.
- b. And a loud voice will announce: **Revelation 21:3-4.**
 - i. The New Community will not be like the Old.
 - ii. Before (Old) After (New)
 - iii. Before – Suffering; After – Rejoicing.
 - iv. Before – Poor; After – Rich.
 - v. Before – Weak; After – Strong.
 - vi. Before – Ruled; After – Ruling.

D. Revelation 21:22; 22:3-5

III. THE ROLE OF THE SAINTS IN THE MEANTIME.

A. What is our responsibility during this period of cosmic conflict?

- 1. What it isn't.
 - a. Devising strategy by which Satan can be subdued.
 - b. Bulking up for the great conflict ahead.
 - c. Undermining the Beast, or unmasking its ugliness, or raising an army to combat its hordes.
 - d. Determining exactly when and where the beast will arise.
- 2. What it is: Persevere . . . hold on . . . be faithful (letters to the churches.)

B. The Perseverance theme in Revelation.

- 1. Perseverance commended in the Seven Churches. [Note occurrences chapters 2&3]
- 2. “Overcoming” is not linked to power or knowledge but to perseverance.
- 3. Perseverance and the beast.
 - a. In the context of the Beast who blasphemes and deceives and kills . . .
 - b. Rev 13:10b.
- 4. Perseverance and judgment.
 - a. In the context of outpouring judgment . . .
 - b. Rev 14:12.

CLOSING:

- A. When things look bleakest, it is time to reframe. When the situation seems hopeless, it is time to reframe. God is in his heaven and all is right with the saints.
- B. When we learn to see this life through the lens of the Spirit, suddenly it becomes possible to persevere. When we learn to view the world around through the eyes of faith, hanging on makes sense. Luke 9:62
- C. The message of John to these struggling Christians is the same as Paul’s to the church in Corinth: *“Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day. For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, while we look not at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal”* (2 Cor. 4:16-18).