

THE END_WEEK 3
SNAPSHOTS OF REVELATION
Craig Groeschel

Hey welcome today to all of our LifeChurches and all of our Network Churches and those of you all over the world at Church Online.

Today we're in the third and final week of the series called "The End", as we're looking at what the Bible says about the end of the world. If you thought the last couple of weeks were creepy or scary you haven't seen anything yet! I'm going to make you a deal, if I preach hard would you respond loud? At all of our churches would you give me a little bit of love because what we're going to do today is we're going to cover the entire Book of Revelation in 30 minutes or less. Is that impossible? Maybe so, but we're going to try anyway!

All of our churches, how many of you would say that the Book of Revelation is intriguing but confusing, exciting but sometimes scary, would you raise your hands up all over the place? Everybody always says, "Would you preach on this Book because it's a little bit scary, there's lots of weird stuff!" There's dragons and there's beasts and there's multiple heads and there's 666, and there's all sorts of numbers and symbols. You can read about twelve stars and ten horns and seven heads and six wings and four bowls of incense and two olive trees and a partridge in a pear tree! I mean, there's all sorts of different stuff!

And the challenge is, so many people when they think about it or try to read it, they get scared and they get creeped out. And the problem is, they don't know how to read it because the very beginning of Revelation One says that you are blessed if you read it and you're blessed if you hear it. And if you know how to read it, it won't make you afraid. What it will do is it will build your faith because God gives us the Revelation of Jesus Christ, that's Verse One of Chapter One and God is showing us what is to come, and if you're a follower of Jesus you should get excited about what God shows us in the Revelation or the unveiling of Jesus Christ. So I want to help you to read it in a way that builds your faith. And so, let me give you a little bit of the back story, some of the context and then we'll break it down in a way that I believe will help you to understand it.

It's written by John, who was the last living of the original Twelve Disciples of Jesus. And it's really interesting to me if you know about what happened to them after the resurrection of Jesus. Judas who betrayed Jesus, took his life. The other Ten besides John, actually died the death of martyrs. And so, if you're a skeptic of Christianity, it's really interesting to think about that ten of the original Twelve Disciples actually were willing to die for their faith because they were so sure that Jesus was raised from the dead.

Well, there was only one guy left living and his name was John. And it was about 62 or so years after the resurrection of Jesus, the year was about 95 A.D., and John was living when an emperor said, "I want all of you to worship me as Lord and God."

And John said, "I've seen the Lord and He ain't you and so I'm not going to worship you!"

And so John was exiled to the Isle of Patmos. And he was in a cave that you can actually visit today when an angel of the Lord visited John and gave him the vision of this revelation, the revelation of Jesus. And if you read Chapters Two and Three, you'll see where there's actually letters from Jesus to the Seven Churches of Asia Minor and the Book of Revelation was initially letters to these Seven Churches.

Now, what I want to do today is break this Book into five specific sections and then I want to encourage you to read it. Take out your Bible App and read it in light of these five sections. It will take you about 45 minutes or less to read it and I want you to read it in light of these five sections, the five main themes we're going to cover and then I want you to look at who Jesus is in each of these sections and remember it's really all about Jesus. And when you read it in light of who Jesus is in Revelation, you're not going to be freaked out, instead it's going to build your faith.

So, at all of our churches, if you're ready to dive in would you shout and cheer just a bit? That's not bad, get ready to listen fast, here we go! Let's dive into section number one. This will include Chapters One through Three, I want you to read One through Three and as you do:

Jesus is the Alpha and the Omega.

That's the theme of the first three sections and the overarching idea, if you want to jot this down, in Chapters One through Three is that:

Jesus is returning soon.

Let's look at what the Bible says, Revelation Chapter One, Verse Seven, John has this vision and says:

Look, He, Jesus is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see Him...

This is not the first return of Jesus that we looked at in week one, when He comes back like a thief, remember? Those who are left behind don't even know what happened. This is the second coming of Jesus, the first time He comes for His church, this time He comes with His church. 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.

Then it goes on to say:

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

He says, "I am the Alpha and the Omega." Alpha is the first letter of the Greek alphabet; Omega is the last letter of the Greek alphabet. In our language He would have said, "I am the A and the Z; I was there before the beginning of the world and I am already in the end. If you want to know what's going to happen you don't need to worry because I've written the last page of the book." And if you're a Christian, is it something you should be afraid of? Oh no, no, no; 'I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End and I will show you how it ends and it ends with good news because I am the Alpha and the Omega.'

John goes on with this vision of Jesus in verse 14 and 15 and says:

His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and his eyes were like blazing fire. His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of rushing waters...

It goes on to say this:

...In his right hand he held seven stars...

Now wait; no, no, no! How did He hold seven stars in His hands? When you read through Revelation, don't take everything literally, there's a ton of symbolism in Revelation. In fact, if you simply read on, John will tell you what the seven stars are. They're actually; they represent the Seven Angels of the Seven Churches that Jesus writes to in Chapter Two and Three of Revelation. He says:

In his hand he held seven stars and out of his mouth came a sharp double-edged sword...

Again, this is not a great circus trick; Jesus doesn't come out of Heaven and go, "Watch this, ready?" Okay, the double-edged sword is actually the Word of God according to Hebrews. Out of His mouth comes the Word of God, a theme we'll see over and over again:

...His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance...

It goes on to say:

...When I saw Him...

John says:

...I fell at His feet as though dead...

Now, this is really interesting because John was known as the beloved Disciple. Jesus loved them all but He had a very special friendship with John. And John even writes about how before and after dinner He would recline in the lap of Jesus, which was customary for friends to do, they'd kind of just relax together and it was a very, very close setting amongst friends. Now, when Jesus returns, He's not buddy-buddy, but He is the Alpha and the Omega. And in the presence of Jesus, the First and the Last, John falls on His face in awe in worship as though dead. But what does Jesus do? Jesus:

...Then placed his right hand on John and said (as angels have said throughout Scripture): "Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last..."

He goes on to say:

"I am the Living One;" (And here's the Gospel which we'll see over and over again in Revelation) Jesus said, 'I was dead, but they couldn't keep me dead I came back, and behold I am alive forever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades.'

'I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End; I am back and I hold the keys of death and Hades!'

If you see Jesus in Revelation, it will build your faith.

Section one shows us He is the Alpha and the Omega; He is the soon returning King of Kings for His Church the Bride.

Let's look at the second section, Chapters Four and Five, read these together. And when you read Chapters Four and Five, ask yourself, "Who is Jesus in Four and Five?" And the answer is:

Jesus is the Lamb of God.

Twenty eight times in Scripture in Revelation Jesus is called the Lamb of God. What is the main theme of this section? Jesus the Lamb of God is worthy to open the scroll. Now you may say, "What in the world does that mean?"

Well, read if for yourself in Chapters Four and Five and what you'll see is, that God is on the throne and in His hand He holds a giant scroll that is sealed with seven seals. And this scroll is kind of like a last will and testament. It's kind of like the declaration of all that is to come and all that is to happen to all the people of the

earth. And John is like, 'I want to see what's in this scroll.'

And so an angel says, 'Who is worthy to open up this scroll?'

And everybody looks around Heaven and they can't find anybody. And John gets really freaked out and he panics and he actually starts to cry because they can't find anyone who is worthy, when suddenly he looks and He sees a lamb. Read about it, it says it this way in Scripture, Verse Six of Chapter Five:

Then I saw a...

What? All of our churches say it aloud, then I saw a:

...Lamb, which is Jesus, looking as if it had been slain...

Remember Jesus was slain for the forgiveness of our sins:

...standing in the center of the throne, encircled by the four living creatures and elders...

Read on:

...and they sang a new song to Jesus the Lamb of God: "You are worthy to take the scroll and open its seals..."

Here again is the Gospel:

"...because you (Lamb of God, Jesus,) were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation..."

Jesus is the Lamb of God. Now some of us might go, "I don't get that imagery, Jesus, I don't get it!"

Well this would have been incredibly powerful imagery for John's readers because they would have remembered what John the Baptist said when he saw Jesus coming. Some of you might know when John the Baptist saw Jesus he said, "Behold the..." what? If you know it say it aloud. He said:

"Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world."

John's readers also would have been very aware of what was known as the Passover from the Old Testament when an angel of death would Passover all of the households and destroy everyone in the households unless they took an innocent lamb and sacrificed the lamb then took the blood of the lamb and put blood on the top of the door and on both sides of the door. And then when their homes were covered with the blood of the lamb, the death angel would pass over the homes and

everyone inside that home would be spared. And this to me is incredibly amazing to think all the way back in the Old Testament we see a foreshadowing of the New Testament cross of Christ, the Lamb of God. Because what would happen when you'd put blood on the top of the door? Guess what, it would drip and suddenly you'd see an Old Testament foreshadowing of the cross of the true Lamb of God. And when John says, "I saw the Lamb of God who was worthy to open up the scrolls," everyone there is filled with a sense of hope, "Yes, our Jesus is worthy, He is the Lamb of God".

Who is Jesus in Revelation? He is the Alpha and the Omega; He is the Lamb of God.

The third section is where it gets crazy, Chapter Six through Eighteen. If you were wondering, "Where is the stuff about the Mark of the Beast and the Antichrist and 666; read Chapter Six through Eighteen. If you want to freak out a little right before you go to bed, read a little Six through Eighteen and watch as you have crazy dreams all night long!

Who is Jesus in Six through Eighteen? If you're taking notes:

Jesus is The Righteous Judge.

When you read Six through Eighteen, read it remembering that Jesus is The Righteous Judge and the main theme is that Jesus righteously judges the earth. Jesus The Righteous Judge righteously judges the earth.

Now, if you ever watch TV shows where you've got the prophetic guy with the weird hair saying, "Let me tell you what's happening in Israel right now and Babylon is..." and all of that kind of stuff. He's going to be reading most likely out of either Daniel or Revelation Six through Eighteen. And so if you're interested in that kind of stuff, I gave you a few bonus thoughts, these aren't in your notes but you can jot these down of some of the high points, that if you like that kind of stuff you may be interested in; Revelation Eleven, One and Two shows us:

The Temple in Israel will be rebuilt.

We don't know for sure, but it shows that it is built there, and so it will be rebuilt.

If you're interested in the Antichrist, Revelation Thirteen and Fourteen through Sixteen:

The Antichrist, the Beast rises and institutes the Mark of the Beast. Now, if you're looking for the word Antichrist in Revelation you're not going to find it, the Antichrist is synonymous with the Beast. And if you read it carefully, you'll see a woman give birth to

a beast. And some of you ladies say, "Hey, I've done that two or three times!" No, no, no; not this kind of beast okay, not this kind of beast!

And you're going to see in Revelation Thirteen, Three and Four; the Antichrist is killed and raised to life.

You can also read about in Revelation Eleven about the two witnesses that God appoints to perform miracles and preached, they will be killed and also raised to life; these guys are cocky, you've got to read about them. When they prophesy, they can shut up the Heavens so that it doesn't rain. They can issue any kind of plagues they want at any time all over the earth. And if someone wants to kill God's two witnesses, they have a really cool trick to defend themselves and it's so cool I'm not even going to tell you! Why? I'm going to make you go and read it yourself, and when you read it you're going to read it you're going to be like, "Dude, that's cool! Don't mess with the two witnesses!"

Revelation Seventeen, Verse Twelve and Thirteen; Daniel Seven, Twenty-Four: Many people interpret this as the Antichrist being raised up to assassinate world leaders and moving toward a one-world government.

And then Revelation Sixteen, Sixteen through Nineteen shows us that the Beast, the Antichrist is defeated at the Battle of Armageddon.

As you read Six through Eighteen, remember Jesus is The Righteous Judge. And let me show you three different judgments that are issued upon the earth:

The first one is known as The Seal Judgments:

And that's where you'll read about the Four Riders of the Apocalypse. You'll see the moon turn to blood red. You'll see blood shed from war and about a quarter of the world's population will die from famine, plagues and wild beasts.

The second set of judgments are known as The Trumpet Judgments. You'll see hail and fire mixed with blood fall from the sky. You'll see poisonous locusts. Can we just pause right there and just for the record, that freaks me out more than anything else. Locusts freak me out; just their shell freaks me out when they go crunchy, crunchy! Poisonous locust, eww! Okay, just saying! A third of the vegetation is destroyed, a third of the water contaminated, a third of the sea creatures die, a third of the light is lost, a third of the world dies; this is a bad time.

Remember, all during this time, God still gives people the chance to repent of their sins. There is still grace even in the middle of these judgments.

And the third set of judgments are known as The Bowl Judgments; where sores will appear on people with the Mark of the Beast, water turns blood and everything and it dies. Sun scorches people, devastating earthquakes hit, and 100-pound hail falls from the sky. And if you're like a lot of people listening to this, you're going, "Well, I don't like this part! This is gross and this is stupid and this isn't fair! I don't like this part!"

And admittedly, you read about this and you go, "That's serious and rough stuff!" And a lot of people when they hear about this or read about it they say, "That's not fair!"

Now, this is important; if you missed last week, I want to cover again a really important principle. And the principle is actually that this is indeed fair. We talked last week and I asked the question, "How many of you know someone who did something wrong, something horrible, and got away with it; they weren't punished, there was no penalty, there was not reconciliation?" They hurt someone, something violent, something horrible and they didn't have to pay. Whenever that happens what do we really say? We say, "That's not fair!" Because we know inwardly that wrongdoing should be punished. My kids know this. If they do something wrong there's a punishment. Even if I do something wrong they think there should be a punishment!

Just like the time when Amy was running late and we were all in the car and I was honking and she didn't come and so I honked and then I started honking toward the theme of the song, "This is the Day The Lord Has Made, I will Rejoice and be Glad in it!" And she got in the car and she was not rejoicing and she was not glad in that day! And she was mad and I was mad and the kids were scared and we were driving, and then we were lost, and then we were really late. And so, I made a big u-turn on the middle of a street going about forty-five miles an hour for affect, van tires squealing, my kid's faces were up against the wall! And one of my daughters said, "Daddy, you need to pull this van over right now and Mommy needs to give you a hard spanking!" Even my kids know, you do something wrong, it should be punished. And this is the time in history where God says, "I am now through Jesus judging the world for its sinfulness.

And almost as if God knew we might be skeptical, is this really fair, an angel affirms it for John, Revelation Sixteen, Verse Five:

Then I heard the angel in charge of the waters say: "Jesus, the Righteous Judge, you are just in these judgments: you who are and who were, the Holy One, because you have so judged."

Who is Jesus? He is the Alpha and the Omega. He is the Lamb of God, He is the Righteous Judge.

And in the fourth section, we see in Chapters Nineteen and Twenty,

read these together:

Who is Jesus in section four? He is, say it aloud with me all of our churches:

He is the King of Kings and He is the Lord of Lords.

If you want to take notes to the main theme of this section is that Jesus returns with His Church.

Let's read the text together, Revelation 19:11, John says this, he had a vision:

I saw Heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse...

How many of you know that the good guys always return on a white horse? Okay anyway!

...there before me was a white horse whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice He judges and makes war. His eyes are like a blazing fire, and on his head are many crowns. He has a name written on Him that no one knows but He Himself.

The text continues:

He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and His name is the Word of God...

Remember John 1:1 says, In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God. And verse Fourteen says and the Word became flesh, Jesus, His name is the Word of God.

...The armies of Heaven were following Him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean. Out of His mouth comes a sharp sword...

Again, this is the Word of God:

...with which to strike down the nations. "He will rule them with an iron scepter." He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty (who is our Jesus). On His robe and on His thigh He has the name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.

He has the name written KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS; He is not a candidate that we elect in or out of office, He is the KING OF KINGS AND HE IS THE LORD OF LORDS!

And when you read Revelation and see who Jesus is it will build your faith. He is the Alpha and the Omega, He is the Lamb of God, He is the Righteous Judge, He is the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords.

And in the final section, Chapters Twenty-One and Twenty-Two, the last two chapters of the Book, we see Jesus is the Bridegroom and we are the Bride. And the Bible teaches us this principle that Jesus takes us, the Church, His Bride, to the Heavenly City. Let's read about it in Revelation Twenty-one, in Verse Nine:

One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues came and said to me, "Come, and I will show you the Bride..."

That's the church, that's those of you who are Christians:

"...I will show you the Bride, the wife of the Lamb."

It goes on to say this:

...And He carried me away in the Spirit to a mountain great and high, and showed me the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down out of Heaven from God...

This is the New Heaven and this is the New Earth that we read about last week. Jesus the Bridegroom comes back for us the Bride, and takes us to the New Heaven and the New Earth where there is no crying and no mourning and no pain. In fact, this New Heaven and New Earth doesn't even need a sun or a moon because in verse 23 it says:

The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp.

Jesus is the Bridegroom returning for us the Bride. Those of you who are chicks, you love this metaphor. "My husband's kind of a jerk, but Jesus is coming back for me and He'll be my husband!"

And dudes kind of look on going, "I've got to be a Bride?"

Yes, you get to be, you get to be joined together, you belong to the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords.

And what is this King saying today? What is He saying at the end of the Book of Revelation? The same thing He said from Genesis through Revelation. What is He saying to people today that do not know Him? Let me show you what the Spirit and the Bride say, the Spirit and the Bride say in Revelation 22:17:

"Come!"

Everybody say, Come! The Spirit and the Bride say Come!

And let him who hears say, "Come!" Whoever is thirsty, let him come. Whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life.

What does the Spirit and the Bride say today? The Spirit and the Bride say, "Come on, you thirsty? Let me give you some Living Water!" Jesus said, "I am the Living Water, if you taste of me you will never thirst again!"

And there are those of you today, even now, you're still spiritually parched, you're thirsty, you're searching for something and you know it! You've spent your lifetime searching, there's got to be something, somebody, somewhere, something that fills this emptiness inside. The Spirit says, "Come, whoever you are, wherever you are, taste of the Living Water and you will never thirst again!"

Some of you may say, "But I'm not good enough!"

The Spirit says, "Come now! Come as you are! Come and experience the grace of Jesus and all your sins will be forgiven and you will become new! Drink of the Living Water and you will never thirst again!"

Scary, freaky, what is the last verse in the Book of Revelation say? The Good News is this, Jesus:

He who testifies to these things says, "Yes I am coming soon."

Jesus says, "Yes, I am coming soon."

Maranatha, Maranatha our Lord returns soon amen! And we are to say this: "Come Lord Jesus, come Lord Jesus, we can't wait! We want to live for You!"

"I am coming soon." He says.

And we say, "Come quickly Lord Jesus!"

And how does the Book end? The grace, the unmerited favor, the grace of the Lord Jesus be with God's people. Amen.

"Come quickly Lord Jesus."

He says, "I'm coming soon."

And the closing words from the Book:

May the grace of our God be with God's people.

And that's why when you read the Book of Revelation in light of who Jesus is if you're a Christian, you don't need to be afraid because He's coming soon and He is good; the Alpha and the Omega, the Lamb of God, the Righteous Judge, the King of Kings, the Lord of the Lords, and the Bridegroom to take us His Church to be with Him forever. May

the grace of God be with God's people forever and ever. Amen.

Father, I pray today that you would bless those who hear the readings of your Words in the Revelation of Jesus Christ.

At all of our churches today as you're praying, there may be some of you, this is your first week in this series, others of you, you've been here for all three weeks. But even now, there's something happening inside of those of you that are followers of Jesus. And you recognize that perhaps you're living for this life, rather than for the life to come. Today, God is doing a work in you and building your faith and a sense of spiritual urgency. And if you would like to live with that as would I, I just want to ask you today to lift up your hands and say, "Yes, I want to live every day like He's coming soon, with that spiritual anticipation and faith!" and then I'll pray for you.

All of our churches, those of you who would say, "Yes, I am one of His and I want to live with this intensity, living for His soon return and living for His eternal glory." Would you lift up your hands high right now, all of our different churches.

God, thank you for those today who truly want to live a life on earth that matters for eternity. God I pray that your Spirit would do a work in us even now, that you would convict some of us God of sin, that we would turn from and turn to you and confess that sin before this day ends and be changed.

God for others, I pray that we would reprioritize our lives around that which lasts forever.

God, I pray for some that we would be burdened for a heart for those that don't know you and God that we would gladly be your light in this world. God I pray that we would live a life on earth worthy of your rewards in Heaven, that God we would truly live as if your Son is coming soon and our lives would make an eternal difference in this world.

As you keep praying today at all of our different churches, here's some really good news and I want to say it just as plainly as I can. There's some of you right now that some things happening inside of you that you can't quite explain. If you would be completely honest you'd say, "Hey, I'm not doing the God thing, I'm not faithfully walking with Him, I'm not even sure where I stand on this whole thing." But something is happening inside and you're feeling drawn toward Him. Let me just tell you what that is, that's the work of God through His Spirit reaching out to you. And His Spirit's saying, 'Come on let's do this deal okay!' Jesus is the Lamb of God, He was the sinless Son of God who shed His blood for the forgiveness of sins. And His Spirit is saying, 'Come on let's go, let's do this thing!' Confess your need for

Him. You thirsty? Give your life to Him. You'll experience His goodness, His grace.

At all of our different churches, there are those of you, you are very aware right now of your need for God. And today, you are going to call on Him and you are going to turn from your sins and turn to Him and call on Jesus. And when you do, your sins are going to be forgiven and you're going to be transformed, you're going to drink of the Living Water and you will be eternally changed.

At all of our churches there are many of you, you know it's you, you can sense it, that's why you're here. It's a divine appointment and you know it; it's your time.

All of our different churches those of you who would say, "Yes today I turn my life to Him, I give my life to God through Jesus, I need Him, I give my life to Him."

Would you lift your hands high right now, all over the place lift them up now and let me just meet you eye to eye. You'd say, "Yes, that's my prayer!"

Right back here, God bless you! And over here and over here as well. Up close to me right back here and sir, praise God for you here! Both of you back here in this section, God bless you guys!

Church Online you click right below me! Right here in this middle section, praise God for you! Others of you say, "Yes, Jesus take my life, I surrender to you!"

Right back over here on this side, "I need you, I need your forgiveness, I need your grace!"

Everybody at all of our churches would you pray aloud with those around you, pray Heavenly Father, forgive me for all of my sins. I believe Jesus is the Lamb of God who gave His life so I could live. Jesus, be my Savior, be my Lord, take my whole life, it belongs to you. Thank you for new life, mine is not my own; I give it to you. In Jesus' name I pray.

LifeChurch would you worship big today, would you worship the King of Kings, would you worship the Lord of Lords! Welcome those into God's family!