

GATEWAY CHURCH NORTHUMBERLAND

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Revelation Chapter 1- Part 2 – Joss Bray

Last week we looked at the first part of Revelation chapter 1. John introduces some big themes here and sets the rest of the book in that context.

So we saw that it is a Revelation given to Jesus by God who then showed it to John. The Greek word for revelation is “apocalypsis” - and in the book we get to glimpse events around the end of the world as we know it. But before the end time revelation, Jesus has some things to say to the church at the time - which we can all learn from today.

We will start looking at the messages to the seven churches next time and we will need to be ready to have a good hard look at ourselves to make sure we don't fall into the same traps as some of them did.

But first, we get more of a sense of the awesome glorious majesty and power of the risen Jesus. The first part of chapter 1 lifts our eyes to the “things as yet unseen” – to things that will happen. It lifts our eyes Jesus who is coming again in glory – who is the Alpha and Omega. He had the first word and he will have the last word in eternity. He “was and is and is to come” - Jesus is a lot more than his 33 years on earth – as we noted, history itself is “His Story”.

If we want to know Jesus better and worship him appropriately then we have to try and grasp better who Jesus is in the context of eternity and the heavenly realms – we need to lift our eyes from our often limited earthly view to where he is now – the ascended Jesus – King of kings, Lord of lords, awesome and glorious, seated at the right hand of the father, surrounded by the mighty power of the Holy Spirit and a huge cloud of angels worshipping day and night – and that is only a tiny fraction of what is going on right now in the kingdom of heaven!

As we said before – we will not be able to understand the exact meaning of all we read in Revelation – after all, God is God and we

shouldn't expect to – unless we have made God in our image! But the message is clear and this book wasn't included by accident in the bible – God wants to tell us some important things here.

So – let's look at the second half of chapter 1.

Verses 9-11

REV 1:9 I, John, your brother and companion in the suffering and kingdom and patient endurance that are ours in Jesus, was on the island of Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. ¹⁰ On the Lord's Day I was in the Spirit, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet, ¹¹ which said: "Write on a scroll what you see and send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea."

So here John starts by trying to make sure his hearers don't get the wrong idea that he was somehow set apart for amazing heavenly visions and was therefore elevated beyond the rest of us. He makes sure we know that he was one of us – a brother and companion. What is more, because of his testimony about Jesus, he knew suffering and had to endure it patiently – indeed he was in exile and/or possibly prison on Patmos at the time due to the gospel.

This underlines for us the truth that being a witness will bring suffering at times. We cannot expect it to be easy being an active Christian – indeed we should expect problems and difficulties – there is a spiritual war going on for the people around us and we are soldiers of Christ! But however much God gifts us with – we are brothers and companions together in the same battle.

So this happened "on the Lord's day" – probably a Saturday or Sunday – it doesn't really matter – it was one day a week set aside "for the Lord" – the original Sabbath. He was clearly spending time with God and "in the Spirit". He doesn't elaborate on this, but later in Revelation he talks about being in the Spirit when he gets taken to other places and times to be shown things. There is something here about being so open to the Holy Spirit that he can take you wherever he wants – something we can certainly learn from.

So the first thing that happened was he heard a voice like a trumpet – strange – but this was the way he described it. So it would be distinct, clear, musical, loud and difficult to ignore. There were clear instructions as well – so it was understandable. These instructions were: write it down! This wasn't an event to be

forgotten or half remembered – it was to endure and be useful for the churches – it was something with lasting importance that needed to be taken seriously. We noted before that these churches would have been well known to John and in fact there were at least 2 more in Asia. Seven is a number used biblically to symbolise completeness and we can assume that in the same way as we can learn from Paul's seven letters to churches, we can learn from the letters that John receives for these seven churches.

Verses 12-16

REV 1:12 I turned around to see the voice that was speaking to me. And when I turned I saw seven golden lampstands, ¹³ and among the lampstands was someone "like a son of man," dressed in a robe reaching down to his feet and with a golden sash around his chest. ¹⁴ His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and his eyes were like blazing fire. ¹⁵ His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of rushing waters. ¹⁶ In his right hand he held seven stars, and out of his mouth came a sharp double-edged sword. His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance.

So John turned round – as you would! He sees several things and a person. The things he sees are explained later to him. The person he sees was Jesus – although he did not seem to have realised this at first. The “son of man” was actually how Jesus often referred to himself when he was on the earth. But John may have just meant he looked like a man.

He had a long robe and a golden sash – this vision has strong similarities to references in the book of Daniel in the Old Testament in particular. These are robes that impress – the gold of purity and great value and significance – the long robe full of material - the sort of things a king may wear.

His head and hair were white as wool or snow – pure and with wisdom and stature. His eyes were like blazing fire – powerful, looking right into your soul, purifying and terrifying. His feet like molten metal – radiating heat and light – remember the rest of his body was covered with the robe – what would that have looked like!

His voice was like the sound of rushing waters. We see that John had difficulty describing this person – his voice was like a trumpet – but also like raging torrents of water – ready to sweep away all in its path. And out of his mouth came a sharp double edged sword – remember in Hebrews it says:

HEB 4:12 For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.

The very word of God was coming out of this “son of man’s” mouth – dynamic, living, exposing and judging. That must have been pretty impressive – but pretty frightening.

All this from a face that shone like the sun – radiating so much power and light and energy – impossible to look at without feeling as though you would burn up.

It is little wonder then that we read –

Verse 17-18

REV 1:17 When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. Then he placed his right hand on me and said: "Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. ¹⁸ I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades.

It was too much for John – as it would have been for us. That was it – he could not stand in the holy awesome presence of this being – he was as good as dead.

Then – an amazing thing happened – this being actually touched John and introduced himself. It was Jesus! Do not be afraid! The fear of the Lord is different from being afraid. Being afraid means expecting bad things to happen. The fear of the Lord fully recognises his mighty holiness and awesome power – but also hears Jesus say “do not be afraid” – because he is with us.

Jesus reiterates – “I am the first and the last” – his credentials are his existing in everlasting eternity from the beginning to the end. He has been everywhere at all times – he has even been dead. Nothing is outside his experience or knowledge. He lives for ever and his is the authority over death and hell now. So John got the picture – he understood who was telling him these things and he then received this explanation and instructions –

Verses 19-20

REV 1:19 "Write, therefore, what you have seen, what is now and what will take place later. ²⁰ The mystery of the seven stars that you saw in my right hand and of the seven golden lampstands is this: The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches.

The rest of Revelation is John following those instructions. There are things that were taking place then – for example the letters to the churches – and things that are yet to come - later in the book.

Remember that John saw seven golden lampstands and in Jesus's right hand there were seven stars. Jesus explains that the lampstands are the 7 churches and the stars were the angels of the churches – one for each of the 7 churches.

It is worth noting that the lampstands are also golden. This is how the church is viewed in the heavenly realms – with great value and standing as Peter says:

¹PE 2:9 But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood,

The church in general and each church in particular is really important to God – it is the lampstand on from which the light of God shines – that is what lampstands are for. The church is not just a convenient way for Christians to socialise – it is God's plan for impacting the world!

It seems that each of the churches had an angel assigned to it. We know from the bible that angels are created beings that, amongst other things, God uses as messengers to tell us important things from him. So for example, the angels told the shepherds about Jesus's birth, and had things to tell Moses, Peter and Paul and others.

Here, Jesus is telling John to write down this message for the angels to deliver to the 7 churches. Quite how the angels would do this is a bit of a mystery, but since it was written down, we would expect it to be read out in the churches involved. I think we can be pretty sure that angels are a lot more involved in our lives than we realise – but I also think that we are not to get preoccupied by the messengers – rather we need to be preoccupied on the One who sends the message.

Chapter 1 of Revelation gives us just a taste of the heavenly kingdom and lifts our eyes up to bigger things. We need to get a sense of Jesus as he is now – his majesty and authority and awesome power and completely worthy of our worship. And next time we will look at what Jesus wanted to tell the churches and through that, what he wants to tell us.