

What Jesus Wants You To Know

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[0 : 00] So, let's begin by thinking about why we need and why the world needs the message of revelation. Here are three reasons among many. First, because we live in the day of the 24-hour news cycle.

And we know this so well from this week. We get swept up into the dramas and into the disasters of events all around the globe. So, whether that's a presidential election or whether that's flooding caused by climate change, whether it's attacks and acts of war. But something we never hear in the media cycle is, let's ask God for wisdom, how to interpret these events.

Let's stop and think about what the Bible says on this matter, with the result that it's so easy for us, to lose sight of the fact that God is ultimate reality, that He is active in history, and that He is in control, and that He is the King who is building a coming kingdom. That's one reason.

A second reason is because of that great sense of fear and anxiety that seems to be spreading in our world. I don't know if you had the same experience as me, but so many of my conversations this week were dominated by fear, anxiety, uncertainty of many kinds. And so, we need to pull back from that to hear these great themes of revelation, that there is the certainty of final justice, of the end to chaos, of a kingdom of peace, of a new creation. We need these truths. A third reason is because this is Jesus who is speaking to us from the throne of heaven.

Again, we're living surrounded by fake news, questions about integrity. Well, here is direct truth from the King of heaven. In the context of the reality of the rise and fall of nations and kingdoms, we are invited to listen in to hear from the King whose rule will never end, who is establishing His kingdom of peace and justice and love. And so, the message of revelation comes to each one of us as a gift. That's how it came to those first-century Christians who received it from John as he received it from Jesus. They were being confronted by the force of the Roman Empire, living in this very small, Christian group surrounded by alternative worship, alternative morality, Caesar claiming to be

[2 : 56] Lord. They are being persecuted. They are seen as, at best, weird, at worst, as being dangerous. And this message comes directly to them, saying to them and saying to us, keep the faith, trust me, trust me, my kingdom will outlast Rome and every other human kingdom. The reward of following me is absolutely worth it. And that's still the message that we receive as we get into this book.

So, let's listen in together, chapter one, to what Jesus wants you and I to know about history. Here's the first thing. And it really sets us up for understanding the whole book. Jesus wants you and I to know His words. The word of the King can be trusted. First three verses are the prologue. Just three words from that prologue, but they're all helpful. The first is the word revelation. It's the title of the book.

It's our opening words, the revelation from Jesus Christ which God gave Him. This word revelation has an emphasis on the revealing of spiritual realities. We used the image last week of pulling back the curtains to see God. That Jesus is unveiling for us the spiritual reality of the King who is on the throne, who is building His kingdom. And so, we're getting a glimpse of this future kingdom.

We're discovering the victory of Christ Jesus. And the emphasis is that these words come with authority.

And so, we can trust them. There's a chain of logic. So, the revelation comes from God, comes to us from Jesus Christ. Verse 1, He made it known by sending His angel. And then it comes to His servant. And so, it's coming straight from heaven to John. And John emphasizes that the words that He has now written are trustworthy. Because John, verse 2, He testifies to everything He saw. So, what we have as a record, John says, of the Word of God, of the testimony of Jesus. So, there is authority, and these words can be trusted. And so, when it speaks to us of these things that are

coming, and the time is near, when we're being told that this is a revelation about what must soon take place, we are invited to trust King Jesus. That He is revealing truth about what is to come, what will come in the future. And as we will see in a few moments, this isn't some guru speaking. This isn't some political pundit speculating. This is the King of the Universe revealing. So, that's a really important first word. The second key word that helps us to understand Revelation is the word servants. This is a way of describing the followers of Jesus. He made it known by sending His angel to

[6 : 23] His servant John. And this revelation was given to show His servants what must soon take place. Jesus, Jesus in His kindness giving a word to His servants, to His followers. There's more details in verse 9 about the experience of these servants in the first century. They are suffering because of their faith. They need patient endurance as they live for Jesus, declaring He is King. Some are being targeted by the authorities. John is one of them. He's been sent in exile to this island called Patmos.

So, we're getting a little window into the fact that life is incredibly difficult for a first century Christian. When within the Roman Empire, life was centered on the idea that Caesar is Lord, when the gods of Rome dominated all of life, whether you were going to buy your meat in the market or whether it was any of the great public festivals, the gods were everywhere. And now there are Christians who are saying, Jesus alone is Lord. And we only worship the one true God, and that's marking them out as different, regarded by society as rebels and a negative influence. And so, Jesus in His kindness wants to say to Christians who struggle and who suffer, remember, I am on the throne. The suffering Savior watches over His suffering church. The victorious Savior will ensure the victory of the church. Final key words in our prologue is the word blessed. Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what's written in it.

So, some of you, maybe if you're Christians, you've been reading your Bible for a long time, you might have some views about Revelation. It might be one of those books you avoid, because it can seem terrifying sometimes. It can seem confusing. Perhaps, like me, you grew up hearing weird and wonderful ideas and interpretations about Revelation, and you've concluded, I can't make head nor tail of this, so I'm going to put it to one side. But what does Jesus say about this book? He says there is blessing from God to read it, to hear it, to take it to heart, to obey it, to live out its truth. Why? Because the time is near. There is blessing as we understand that history is coming to God's appointed conclusion.

[9 : 06] It's a blessing, as we remember with this book, that there is a king who rules. It is King Jesus. His reign is good, and he is building his kingdom. It is good. It is a blessing to remember he will return in glory, that he will end all evil, that he will establish, establish his perfect eternal kingdom. There is blessing in here.

So, Revelation comes to us, as we say, as a gift. Here is a word from the king, and it's a word that you and I can trust about history and about where history is heading. Because often, don't we find the world seems dark, confusing? We struggle to see where sense can be found, where hope can be found. And we have the answer in this book. If any of you, like me, like reading spy thrillers, you'll know that in real-life spies and also spy novels, there is often a book that is used as like a cipher, and it will become the way to understand these secret messages. So, I just started reading John Buchan's wonderful book, Mr. Standfast, and the main characters there use Pilgrim's Progress to send these messages.

And if you don't know the book, and you don't know the reference, then the message, which just seems like nonsense, and it's confusing. And sometimes, our world can seem like chaos and confusion until we remember that we have the book. We have this message, this message that comes from the king with the king with the authority of God, revealing that God is on the throne. He is in control. That Christ will return. The kingdom will come. Now, whether we hear that as promise or warning, well, that depends on our response to Jesus today, doesn't it? Whether we're worshiping Him and serving Him or not. But Jesus wants us to know His Word can be trusted. Here's a second thing in this introduction. Jesus wants us to know the God of grace and peace. So, as this book acknowledges, and as we recognize in our world, it can be hard to live. It can be hard to live the Christian life.

How can someone find the grace to endure? How can we live with inner peace surrounded by chaos and conflict? There are many of us and many in our world who would love to know the

answer.

[11 : 56] Well, here is Jesus. In verse 11, we're told that He is delivering this message that to be written and sent to the seven churches. The book of Revelation uses numbers in a symbolic way. Often seven is the language of perfection and completeness. So, it's saying, send this message to the whole church.

And the message of verses 4 to 8 is, know your God. Know the God of grace and peace in order that you would persevere. Notice, first of all, verse 4 and 5, that this grace and peace that's promised comes from the three-in-one God, the triune God. 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, and from Jesus Christ. So, here is the Father, and He's being represented as the unchanging one, the eternal one, the great I Am. Here is the Spirit.

Remember that symbolic language in the numbers? The seven spirits saying to us, here is the perfect Spirit, the Spirit of God, the Holy Spirit, and here is the Son. And listen to how the Son is described, this one who gives grace and peace. He is the faithful witness. This is emphasizing the fact that Jesus faithfully endured His life on earth, His bringing in the kingdom, His mission, despite opposition and persecution. He is the firstborn from the dead, reminding us of His death and of His resurrection victory. And He is the firstborn. What happened to Jesus will happen to us.

When our faith is in Jesus, we too die to sin, and we experience resurrection life. And Jesus, this one who gives grace and peace, is the ruler of the kings of the earth.

Here's where we find grace and peace. Jesus is Lord. His kingdom has come and is coming. The second thing that John emphasizes is that this grace and peace comes from the eternal God over history. So, we see it as the book ends there in verse 4 and verse 8. Verse 4, from Him who is and who was and who is to come. Verse 8, I am the Alpha and Omega who is and who was and who is to come. And so, he begins and ends this theme with the incomparable greatness of God.

[14 : 36] This God who rules over history. This God who is eternal. This God who created all things and who will wind up creation before establishing the new heavens and the new earth.

And so, we're invited to see that grace and peace comes from this one. There is no Caesar, there's no emperor, there's no king, there's no president that's ever had, will ever have this kind of rule. Indeed, there is no one who governs outside of God's permission and rule.

But the church, the people of God, we're invited to see beyond earthly rulers, to see the sovereign rule of Almighty God. And it's this king who supplies grace so that we can live as citizens of his kingdom.

He supplies peace when we understand that the God of power and glory rules over us and is with us. And recognize, too, that this grace and peace comes from Jesus, the Savior. So, in verses 5 to 7, as John is writing his letter, we get that sense that he bursts out in praise.

As we know truths about God and his salvation, there is that instinct towards worship. And so, John is led to worship as he remembers the cross of Christ. First of all, middle of verse 5, to him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood.

[16 : 25] John reflects on the ultimate demonstration of God's love in the sending of his Son to be our substitute, our sacrifice, our Savior, our Savior, delivering us from slavery to sin, giving us freedom to become the people of God. There's grace and peace in salvation. He then turns to think about the kingship of Christ and has made us to be a kingdom and priest to serve his God and Father, to him be glory and power forever.

So, the Bible tells us Jesus is a priest king. Jesus serves God. Jesus offers himself as the perfect and the final sacrifice to cover sin, to bring people into relationship with God.

And Jesus comes as the king who brings in the kingdom. So, in Mark's gospel, first words of Jesus, repent for the kingdom of heaven is near. But now we're discovering as well that Jesus in his kindness invites the church to share in that role. Just like Old Testament Israel, set apart by God to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation, so the church today is called to represent God, living to worship him, living to obey him, living to make him known in all our weakness, with all the opposition that we face.

And then John stops to think about the wonderful reality of the coming of Christ. In verse 7, look, he's coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him, and all peoples on earth will mourn because of him. He draws on a couple of different texts, Daniel 7, Zechariah 12, to say that Jesus is returning, and that return will look like two different things. He will judge those who reject him and his rule as the somber reality of the judgment of Jesus. But he will

also welcome to himself those who mourn over their sin, those who have repented, and those who are now trusting in him. And so Jesus here invites us to reframe reality, knowing the God of grace and peace. That above those situations in your life and in our world that cause us anxiety sits the Almighty Lord of heaven on the throne, ready to supply grace and peace in our weakness and our fear. That beyond the chaos of the here and now, beyond all that can cause us fear and uncertainty in the 24-hour news cycle stands the certainty of Christ and his kingdom. And when we see through that lens, it allows us both to find hope and to offer hope. That God alone rules. His Word is final. He is at work patiently building a kingdom that endures for eternity. And Christ Jesus is key to that kingdom. As he forgives sin, as he transforms our identity, as he brings us to know personally this God of grace and peace, so that we can have peace in troubled times as we trust him as our King.

And the third thing that we need to see Jesus wants us to know about world history is really about himself. He wants us to know that he is the King of victory and of comfort. Maybe a surprising combination. When we hear good news, maybe it's a common reaction to ask the question, is this a message and a messenger I can trust? We hear, you know, great pronouncements, promise of a new day, new age. Can that person deliver?

[21 : 08] However, is this going to be one more thing that's just too good to be true? Here is John the apostle. He's an elderly man. He's suffering for his faith.

He's stranded on the island of Patmos. The authorities will not let him come back to the mainland. But the Spirit is at work. And he's been sent these visions. That he's been called to write and share and deliver. That God is on his throne. He is bringing history to a close. And his people will enjoy this everlasting kingdom of perfect peace and perfect justice. That the longing that we find in our hearts, not just for peace in our time, but peace for all time, the ending of suffering, just as to come on all evil and abuse, the restoration and renewal of creation, the establishment of a world and a society of perfect, unbreakable love.

That's the message of revelation that Jesus will bring. But can we trust the message? Can we trust the messenger? These are massive claims. And to help. John's been hearing certain things, but then in this vision he's invited to see the one who speaks. Verse 12, I turned round to see the voice that was speaking to me. And he sees a vision of the King of glory, Jesus Christ. And the whole of Revelation is saying to us, listen, you and I, we can have real hope.

And we can live with peace. And there is security despite uncertainty. And there is joy beyond present suffering when we see and we know this King. In his beauty. In his victory. In the comfort that he comes to bring.

So, let's look very briefly, first of all, at the King's portrait. It's common in the UK, isn't it, when somebody takes to the throne, or perhaps after a certain number of years of being the King or the Queen, that a portrait is commissioned. Well, here is the portrait of King Jesus. And it draws on Old Testament imagery. Some of it we saw last week in Daniel 7. But let's just hear it and get a flavor of what's going on here. When I turned, verse 13, I saw seven golden lampstands. And among the lampstands, someone like a son of man. So, son of man, Daniel 7, this one who's in the presence of God, who's given all rule and power and authority to set up a kingdom that will last forever. So, that's the description of Jesus. And then we hear some more. He's dressed in a robe, reaching down to his feet with a golden sash around his chest. It's a picture of honor and glory. The hair on his head was white like wool, as white as snow. And we're being reminded that this King, he is holy and he is wise. His eyes were like blazing fire.

[24 : 59] Here is the one who sees and knows all things and will bring perfect justice to bear. His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace. Jesus presented as a warrior king, and these feet will move with purpose and with strength. His voice was like the sound of rushing waters. Authority, ultimate judgment.

In his right hand, he yelled seven stars, and coming out of his mouth was a sharp double-edged sword. Again, here is his power to bring justice and salvation. Here is protection for his people. And his face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance. Here is a glimpse of the glory of Jesus, the Son of Man, who is the Son of God, who rules and reigns.

Well, having given the king's portraits, John is then given a vision of the king's victory. But note first how awesome the glorified Lord Jesus is. John says, when I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. And then remarkably, this king speaks to comfort fear.

He placed his right hand on me and said, do not be afraid. What do we learn about the victory of this wonderful king? Notice first the titles.

I am the name of God, the first and the last. He is the eternal one. I am the living one. I was dead, and now look, I am alive forever and ever. And we're being reminded again that what's central to this kingdom that is established is the cross of Christ. Jesus who died but then rose to everlasting life because death, it had no claim on Jesus because Jesus is the sinless one. And the resurrection displays to you and I and to the world the victory of Jesus, that sin and death have been defeated at the cross.

[27 : 36] End of verse 18, and I hold the keys of death and Hades. In simple terms, in simple terms, reminding us that King Jesus holds the power over all dark forces.

And so the church in weakness is given this portrait of a king who is glorious, of a king who is victorious.

Here is our warrior king who will complete that victory at his return. And he wants us to know that and to know him.

But there's one last little detail, and it's a beautiful one, and I think brings hope when we see it. Back to verse 12 and 13, just as the description begins, So these golden lampstands were told in verse 20, they're a symbol of the church.

What is the role of the people of God? We are to shine the light of Christ in the darkness. But you and I know that we can't do that by ourselves, and this world can be a fearful place for us.

[28 : 59] But what are we told? Where is the king? This victorious, glorious king, he is among the lampstands. Christ Jesus today, right at this very moment, is with us as his people.

He is in us. He is for us. He is among us, blessing us, now and forever.

There is great hope for the people of God. Our final destiny, our eternity is secure.

Our great champion, the Lord Jesus, has won a victory on our behalf. And by his grace, when we are trusting in him, we will share in that victory and in that kingdom.

This is what Jesus wants you and I want to know about history. When we switch on the news or read the newspaper, when we see the events of our lives play out, He wants us to know that we should not lose hope when we trust in him.

[30 : 17] That we should fix our eyes on Jesus and his kingdom. And we can trust his word. A word that comes from Jesus who is on the throne, who will return to judge and to save.

And so he says to us, be ready. Trust me. Live today in the grace and peace that only our God provides.