

Revelation Ch1v1-8 - Revealed Blessings

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 04 September 2022

Preacher: Jonny Grant

[0 : 00] So, turn with me please in your Bibles. If you haven't got a Bible, there's plenty just at the stand there.

It will help you if you do have a Bible, and it will help you to see that what I am saying is also from the Bible.

So we're going to be looking at the letter, the book of Revelation. We're also going to be studying it in our home groups, and the way we're doing it in our home groups, we're looking at the passage that we're going to be looking at on a Sunday.

So, on Wednesday just past, we looked at the first part of the first chapter. So hopefully, if you came, some of these things will be fresh in your mind, and you'll understand them.

If you missed it, don't worry, all will be made clear. Thank you very much. Thank you.

[1 : 26] Now, I don't want anybody reading it. I want you to be listening. But there it is. If you didn't pick up your copy, there's plenty as you came in through the door this morning.

So let's read Revelation, chapter 1, verses 1 to 8. The Revelation from Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place.

He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John, who testifies to everything he saw. That is, the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ.

Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy. And blessed are those who hear it and take it to heart what is written in it, because the time is near.

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, and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead and the ruler of the kings of the earth.

[2 : 50] To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father.

To him be glory and power forever and ever. Amen. Look, he is 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. So shall it be. Amen. Amen. I am the Alpha and the Omega, says the Lord God, who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.

Let's pray. We are created.

You, Almighty God, are our creator. And we need you. We need your help. We need the power of your Spirit to take the words that we read and think about together and push them deep into our hearts and lives so that we are filled afresh with the vision of the Almighty God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit so that we live lives that are faithful towards you and honour you.

[4 : 43] Help us now, we pray. In Jesus' name. Amen. I recently received an urgent message from a friend in India.

Johnny, please pray for six young mothers who've been arrested at a birthday gathering in a nearby village. Their crime?

They were all followers of the Lord Jesus Christ. Imagine, for four weeks, they were denied bail, left in a cell, separated from their husbands and children.

Thankfully, I received another message to say they've all been released. But it's a reminder of what to expect in some parts of the world when you follow Jesus Christ.

Now, you and I may not fear arrest or prison this week. But if we are Christians and if we're part of this church, we do face an increasing opposition and persecution.

[5 : 56] Being a Christian today is tough. It's not easy. The voice of the church is silenced while a secular agenda is promoted.

Christianity, we are told, has had its day. It's finished. It's over. Our views of sexuality and gender are outdated. Our message of a gospel about repenting and turning in faith is completely irrelevant. It's time to move on. You see, it's hard, isn't it, to be a witness for Christ. It's costly. You may feel isolated at work, perhaps ignored by friends or even misunderstood by family. It can be lonely.

Christianity is for losers. Christ and his church are finished. That's the message we get.

[7 : 02] And of course, this is nothing new. As John, the author of this book of Revelation, as he wrote, Christians at this time in the first century were living under the rule of the Roman Empire and the emperor, Nero.

A great fire had broken out in Rome and Nero blamed it on the Christians. He found their beliefs anti-social and it was an excuse to get rid of them.

Hundreds were arrested and convicted for a crime they never committed. One historian at the time, a Roman historian, Tacitus explained it like this.

Mockery was heaped on them in their deaths. They were covered in the skins of wild beasts, torn to death by dogs, crucified or set ablaze, so that when night time fell, they lit up everything like torches.

Human street lamps ablaze. Nero opened up his own gardens for this spectacle and gave a show in the arena where he mingled with the crowd or stood in the garb of a charioteer in a chariot.

[8 : 22] Being a Christian is hard. And that's why we've been given the book of Revelation.

This book has been given to encourage believers today who are facing trials and struggles. Rather than a Christian manual to predict the future, it is a pastoral letter to strengthen the church.

That's an important phrase. We'll say it much through our studies. It isn't a manual to predict the future. It's a pastoral letter to strengthen and fortify the church.

So, let's get straight into Revelation and see how we can be strengthened and encouraged. Three things we're going to look at.

God's perspective revealed, God's servants blessed, and God's victory assured. God's perspective revealed, God's servants blessed, and God's victory assured.

[9 : 37] First then, God's perspective revealed. Now, I'll admit, if you've read it or flicked through it, Revelation can be confusing.

There's a lot of strange creatures. There's a lot of blood. There are colourful visions. And it can be hard to understand what's it all about.

In fact, some teachers, if you were to listen to them today and read their books, it's presented like they've been given a special code to unlock its hidden meaning.

And we're like, what's the special code? Well, Revelation hasn't been written to confuse or conceal. It was written to ordinary believers just like us.

And it's meant to reveal and unveil. Look at verse 1. The revelation from Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place.

[10 : 45] Revelation simply means to reveal. It's in the word itself to reveal or make known. It's like the pulling back of a curtain in the morning time where you just go whoosh and the sun comes blazing through.

Well, we hope it does anyway. It unveils what is hidden. Now, this unveiling comes to us through the word of God.

There's a chain of communication that helps us seize it. Follow with me in verse 1. Follow this chain of communication. The revelation from Jesus Christ, which God gave Jesus to show his servants what must soon take place.

He, that's Jesus, made it known by sending his angel to his servant John. So, we can follow the chain, can't we?

God revealed it to Jesus who revealed it to his angel who revealed it to John who wrote it all down to reveal it to God's servants.

[12 : 05] servants. That's us. Christians today are God's servants and he's made known his word to us. He's revealed, he's unveiled what was concealed.

That's how all scripture should be seen. It's God's word unveiled, revealed to us by him. So, what's the great revelation?

what is God revealing to us? What is being unveiled behind the curtain as it were? Well, we get a glimpse of heaven's perspective.

Let's look at verse 1 again. The revelation from Jesus Christ which God gave him to show his servants, that's us, what must soon take place.

Now, that little phrase, what must soon take place, is what scripture refers to as the end times or sometimes called the last days.

[13 : 10] It's the period of time between the resurrection of Jesus and the return of Jesus. Nearly 2,000 years ago, Jesus was raised from the grave.

He hasn't yet returned, but one day he will return. But it's that period of time, what must soon take place is this period of time between the resurrection of Jesus and the return of Jesus.

And we're somewhere along that line. We're living in that age today. Jesus has been raised, but he hasn't yet come, and we're living somewhere along that line, because we don't know when he's coming back.

Look at verse 2. John testifies to everything he saw. as we read through Revelation, we'll see that John receives a series of visions that enables him and us to see what is going on in the world and what we can expect to happen.

Of course, we're not given all the minute details. We aren't given kind of like what's happening next week or next year or in ten years' time or on such and such a date.

[14 : 22] But we are given a big picture. But this is where we need to be very, very careful. Revelation isn't to be used as a manual to predict the future.

It's not like kind of a Christian version of reading your cards or going to a palm reader and predicting what your future is. That's how many people do.

They flick through all kinds of things. Oh, a blood-red moon. Do you know what that means? Oh, a plague. There's been a virus. Will I tell you what that means?

No, it's not this kind of picture of the future and we know all the details of what's going on. No, it's showing us what is happening in history and in the world from God's vantage point because he's the maker of the world and he sees it all from the beginning to the end.

Sometimes John will see into heaven. Sometimes he hears a voice from heaven but each time God is revealing to us what is happening from God's perspective.

[15 : 34] You see, every time we turn on the television, every time we scroll through our social media, what do we get? We're getting a view, an opinion of the world from an earthly perspective.

Every news program, every tweet, every post, is just a commentary from somebody's limited, self-focused life. But when we read Revelation, God is inviting us to see the world from heaven's perspective.

It's as if God is saying to you, look, pull back the curtains, let me show you what is really going on. You think the world's leaders run this place? Putin and Biden and the UN and everybody else?

Well, you read this and let me show you who is really in charge. You think the church is insignificant, that the world has rubbished the church and there's no place for it?

Well, let me show you what's going to outlast every single kingdom. You think Christianity has had its day that it's for losers?

[16 : 47] Well, let me show you who's going to win. You think this world is all there is that we just live and we die and that's it, end of story?

You ain't seen nothing yet. Let me show you the new creation where everything is put right. You see, as we read Revelation, it's like one of those unveilings where somebody gets to pull the cord. I'd love to be the one to do that. You pull the cord and the curtains wish open, don't they? Well, this is what Revelation is. God is pulling the cord, the curtains unveil, what was hidden and concealed is now unveiled and revealed.

We are invited to come and see the world from God's perspective. and if you want to know what's going on in the world and what we can expect, well, come back next week and the week after as we continue to look through Revelation.

So, God's perspective revealed. Second, God's servants blessed. You see, the purpose of this unveiling, this revelation is to bless God's people who are under attack and feel they're losers and nothing's happening and nothing's working.

[18 : 19] Verse 3, blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy and blessed are those who hear it and take it to heart what is written in it because the time is near.

To be blessed, is to know and experience God's favour in our life. It's to enjoy all of his blessings.

In other words, reading Revelation is not to be used to speculate about the future. We are to go away, we are to leave this building blessed and encouraged.

As we see what's going on from God's perspective, yes, there will be parts that we will find difficult. But if we persevere in reading it and studying it, we're going to come away blessed.

We are going to experience God's favour in our lives. So rather than look at Revelation and go, you know what, I don't know what this is about, what's the point, I'm not coming next week.

[19 : 25] It's too complicated. Not getting into it. rather than ignore Revelation, see the promise of God.

Verse 3, blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy and we will read aloud the words of this prophecy each week so that we can be blessed.

blessed. But how this blessing is experienced is crucial. You see, it's not just a mechanical reading of Revelation that we kind of turn up, we read it aloud, we hear the words and we think, oh that's it, I'm blessed now.

No, look what it says. End of verse 3. Blessed are those who hear it and what? Take to heart what is written in it.

We're to take it to heart. It's another way of saying we're actually to reflect on it. Not just to listen to it on Sunday morning, but through the week, reflect on it, meditate on it, study it, come along to home groups and explore it a bit further.

[20 : 40] We are to obey the words of this revelation. And as we listen to it, it's going to shape our lives and transform us to help us to live life in God's world.

As heaven's perspective is unfolded before us, it's going to strengthen you. It's going to encourage you to live your life as a Christian, at work, in school, in your family.

It will enable you, when the hard times come, to persevere and to push on through. It's going to bless you. You see, reading Revelation is not an intellectual exercise to gain more information or to batter somebody over the head with some wonderful meaning of the future.

God's love. It's going to fill you with peace and grace and hope and confidence and assurance.

That's what I need today.

That's what the church needs today. We need the blessing of God and we have been promised it.

So, the revelation which comes to us is going to bless us because, number three, the big blessing is God's victory is assured.

[22 : 13] This revelation given to John has been written down. Look, verse four. John, to the seven churches in the province of Asia.

That's modern Turkey. Now, we'll get to these seven churches over the next few weeks. They're in chapters two and three. If you just turn a page, you'll see to the church in Ephesus, to the church in Smyrna and so on.

We'll look at these seven churches. But what was written to those seven churches then in the first century is written to the church today in all times and in all places, including Carigoline Baptist Church.

It's God's word to his church, to his believers. This letter then, from John, he wants us to see who is the ultimate author.

It's a letter from God to us to strengthen us. Look at the rest of verse four. grace and peace to you from him who is and who was and who is to come.

[23 : 30] It's a message, a letter from the sovereign father, from him, from God the father who is and who was and who is to come.

This is the self existing God. No one created God. Someone created you, God created you, but no one created God.

Nobody thought up God. He has no beginning and he has no end. Get your head around that one.

Verse eight. He says, I am the alpha and the omega. the A to Z, says the Lord almighty, who is and who was and who is to come, the almighty.

He is the first in history and he is the last in history. There was never a time when God was not there and there will never be a time when God is not there.

[24 : 38] He is, verse eight. The almighty. He owns all things. He rules all things. He endures over all things.

He is over every nation and every kingdom and he outlasts every person and ruler. This is my world, says God.

This is my universe. I am over your life and over every single thing that happens. you may feel it's out of control, but I am in control.

I know what you will face and I know what you will need. I am working out everything for your good and my glory.

I am your sovereign father. This is who it's from, but not just from the sovereign father.

[25 : 39] look at end of verse 4. Grace and peace to you from him who is and who was and who is to come, and who else?

From the seven spirits before his throne. Well, I thought there was just one spirit. Why are there seven spirits? Well, turn with me.

We looked at this, I hope you did in your home groups at least anyway, Isaiah chapter 11. Just have a flick back to Isaiah chapter 11. It's almost in the middle of your Bible.

Isaiah chapter 11. Here the prophet Isaiah is speaking about the coming servant of the Lord. and it tells us something about him. We'll pick it up in verse 2, chapter 11 verse 2.

[26 : 40] When the servant of the Lord comes, look at what we're told. The spirit of the Lord will rest on him.

The spirit of wisdom and the spirit of understanding. The spirit of counsel and the spirit of might. The spirit of the knowledge and the spirit of the fear of the Lord.

And he will delight in the fear of the Lord. In other words, the fullness of the spirit will be on this servant.

So it's not seven different spirits. It's the one Holy Spirit in all his perfection and completeness. let's go back to Revelation.

And that's John's point here. He introduces us to the one Holy Spirit in all his fullness to say to us that the Holy Spirit is for us.

[27 : 45] All his wisdom, all his understanding, all his counsel, all his might, all his knowledge, all his fear of the Lord, the spirit of the Lord, who knows all things, who sees all things, and is at work in all things, is for you.

You may feel alone, hopeless and helpless. You may struggle and lose heart, but I am the eternal spirit before the throne.

I am ensuring that God's rule in heaven will be done on earth. I will not abandon you in your struggle. I will not leave you in your suffering.

I am present with you in all my fullness and completeness. So this revelation is from the sovereign father, the eternal spirit, and third, it's from the, whoops, we missed out one, the conquering son. Verse five, it's from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth.

[29 : 03] Jesus is the faithful witness. He lived his life in perfect obedience to the father. Despite all his sufferings that he went through, he faithfully followed.

And through his work, he defeated the fear of death. He is the firstborn from the dead. He destroyed the powers of darkness.

He is the conquering son, who, look at the end of verse five, is now the ruler of the kings of the earth. He's the one in charge.

He's the one who sits on the throne. Now, says Jesus, I want you to know what I've done for you, and what I've called you to be.

This is what my suffering has achieved for you. Do you see what it says in the middle of the second part of verse five? To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood.

[30 : 08] Jesus has died for us and dealt with our sin once and for all. verse six, and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father, to him be glory and power forever and ever.

Amen. Jesus is the faithful witness and now he turns to his church, to people like us, and he says, I've freed you. I've dealt with your sin so that you today become a kingdom and priests to serve God and Father.

You are now my faithful witnesses. I know it's going to be hard for you. I know that as you be my faithful witness you're going to suffer.

I know that for some of you following me it's going to cost your life. But just as my suffering ended in victory, just as I was the firstborn to come through death, so you will follow me and come through death and your suffering will end in victory.

Building the kingdom of God will be costly, but it will end in glory. There's going to be blood, sweat and tears, but victory is assured.

[31 : 38] You might feel like your efforts are useless. You may feel you make little impact, not even a dint. You can think, what's the point?

We're on the losing side, nothing's happening. But remember Jesus, I am over death and darkness. I have won the battle and you are on the winning side.

I am the all-conquering son. You see, being a Christian is hard. Look at us for a minute.

Look around you. Go on, look around. We're just a tiny bunch, aren't we? We often say it, rattling around in a big hole.

Nothing special, grand. No one's making the headlines in the newspaper. Nobody's banging on the door saying, can I come in?

[32 : 44] Can I join too? No one's giving us a platform to say, would you please come and share with us the gospel? We're not flavour of the month.

We're not getting award for community of the year. In fact, in multiple ways every day, we are subtly ignored, quietly hushed.

The church has had its day. Christianity is finished. Go home. Do something useful with your life.

Well, says God, pull back the curtains. Let me give you my perspective. Verse 7, look, and I want us to do this.

You go outside through those doors and I want you to look and look up and I guarantee there'll be clouds. There's never blue skies. Look at the clouds and be reminded of this.

[33 : 50] Look, he, Jesus, is coming with the clouds. The all powerful, all-conquering, victorious champion is coming.

And every eye will see him. Every person. Even those who pierced him, his enemies. And all peoples on earth will mourn.

All those who opposed Christ and his church will bow down before the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords. and we will be on the victory side.

Revelation is not a Christian manual to predict the future. It's a pastoral letter to strengthen the church and what we read in Revelation will show us what we can expect to happen.

There will be opposition but let us not lose heart. Victory is assured. God is for you.

[34 : 57] He is with the church, the sovereign father, the eternal spirit, the conquering son. We are not losers.

We are winners. Let's pray. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Father, forgive us because we see life from our limited, self-centered perspective.

We busy ourselves with all kinds of things. We can't even see in front of the next day. and yet we pretend as if we are in control of everything.

Forgive us and cause us to lift our eyes to see the almighty God, Father, Son and Spirit.

[36 : 11] Help us to see his perspective, that he will and will and will ensure that we go to victory and to glory.

Encourage us today, fortify us and help us in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. There's a mystery about much of what we're looking at.

That mystery will be unveiled in part. But part of that mystery is