

Final things

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[0:00] Interestingly, it says in verse 7, these have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith, of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire, may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.

And it struck me last night that for those of you who were there, when Sammy asked that question about Job, it does strike me that God is really interested in what sort of people we're becoming. And he is even prepared for us to be unhappy in order to get to the point that we are the people that he wants us to be.

So he allowed Job to go through those terrible sufferings in order that in the end he might be somebody who's learned some things, has been changed, his character deepened, his faith deepened.

And here it says that you go through all sorts of trials so that the proven genuineness of your faith may result in praise and glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.

[1:12] And the Lord can say, look at what I've done with those people. They were pretty rubbish when I got them. But I've put them through all sorts of things.

I've put faith in them. I've put within them faith. And look what I've done. I've produced people whose faith, whose forged character is to the praise and glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.

And then he also has this emotional dimension to it. Even though you have not seen him, you love him. And even though you do not see him, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy.

Inexpressible means you can't quite put that into words. I was having a little chat with Seren's friends this morning who came along. And like some of us, he'd been studying John's Gospel. And I said, what do you think of the Jesus who's there in John's Gospel? And the answer was, I don't know. It's difficult to put into words how great he is.

[2:33] And I think there's something of that in this text, isn't it? That you love him. Even though you do not see him, you believed in him. And you are filled with a sort of joy about Christ that you can't quite put that into words.

There's something of glory there. Or at least that's how Peter sees it. For you are receiving the end result of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

So I thought it was worth looking at those two texts because they have the same orientation as the book of Revelation. And let's read now Revelation chapter 1 verses 1 to 8.

And perhaps Jack could kindly read that to us. Revelation chapter 1 verses 1 to 8. Can you have the mic for the purpose of the recording that might be happening?

It was chapter 1, wasn't it? Chapter 1 verses 1 to 8. Thank you. The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place.

[3:52] 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 the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take 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. 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 the 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 the peoples of the earth will mourn because of him.

[5:17] So shall it be. Amen. I am the Alpha and the Omega, says the Lord God, who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.

Amen. Thank you very much. The words almost send a shiver down one's spine, don't they?

This description of Jesus Christ. Grace and peace to you from him who is and who was and who is to come, and 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.

This says something about his magnitude and his supremacy and his glory. So, let's pray.

Lord, we thank you for these words as we meditate upon them and help us to take to heart the things that are written in this book. For Jesus' sake, amen.

[6:34] Amen. Would you like to sing something? Those were the suggestions. So, last time we actually got to the end of the book, and really I want to simply spend not too long just looking back over it, and taking it, asking what have we learned?

What do we take away from this study? So, I will introduce it the way I've usually done. It's a book in the Bible. It's for our edification, for our survival, and for our progress as Christians.

Oh, sorry. Yep, I was looking at the wrong bit. It's an unveiling. It shows the truth behind the appearance. It is in the form of a letter.

So, like the other letters in the New Testament, it addresses a particular situation and has relevance to the hearers. It's to a certain number of churches. Well done.

Letters are relevant to the hearers, so it makes us think any interpretation that says, oh, it's really all about the war in Iran, which has nothing to do with the original hearers, makes you think that's probably a little bit suspect.

[7:54] It is in the form of a prophecy. It tells them what's shortly going to happen, and that idea of soon, quickly, permeates the book.

Whatever in God's dealing shortly and quickly is, and soon is, that's God's soon, not necessarily our soon. It gives behavioral implications.

This is how you're supposed to live. And it has a horizon from the time of Christ's ascension into heaven through to his coming, his appearing, his coming.

So I'm going to ask, what are the takeaways? I don't really like that word. It sounds like fast food, doesn't it?

But people use it to mean, what do I take away from this study? What have I learned? What's going to stay with me? And I thought we could think of truths that the book asserts.

[9:05] So there are certain truths that the book asserts. There are certain warnings that the book gives. It does have warnings in it. There are certain encouragements that the book holds out to us.

And then there is a sort of, what are you going to do about that today? You know, in Hebrews it says, today if you hear his voice, harden not your hearts. And there's always a sense of today in the Bible.

It addresses us where we are now. What is our response today? So, would you like to, I'm going to flip that back.

Would you like to find your next door neighbor or a couple of next door neighbors and ask them what they, if anything has struck them, I hope something stayed with us, any truths that you think the book has emphasized, that we hang on to as true, any warnings that we need to take heed to or hearken, as he said this morning, any encouragements that we need in order to fight the fight and run the race, and then, I mean, we can think about today, but I'll perhaps tie that up at the end.

So, would you like to have a little think about that for five minutes and then you'll see whether I thought the same things as everybody else thought. Yep. Five minutes to look at that. I'm trying to remember the many things we were chatting about.

[10:50] I think someone was saying about God's control over evil, like what we see in the news at the moment.

Yeah, God's got control over it. And another thing I was saying, I don't quite know what category it fits under, just seeing that we're not waiting for any particular event before the Lord's coming. We're waiting for the Lord's coming, which has been incredibly helpful, like on the book table, when the other day someone said to me, oh, well, you know this Iran war, it's leading to Armageddon and the rapture and whatnot.

I was like, oh, well, funny you say that. Yeah. Yeah. Well, I like what you said, David.

So a central thing in, I can't remember the place you quoted, was it 13 or 14, speaking about that it's the facts of a spiritual battle.

[12:25] So I can't remember which passage you said. I'll mention a passage. Oh, okay. I thought, yeah. Anyway, but it's in there. What else did we, we talked about.

I think we talked about warnings not to walk away or fail to listen to what the Spirit says to the churches.

Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Let's see whether that corresponds to anything that I've talked about. I've talked about here's my microphone.

Here's my microphone. Switch it on. You turn it down.

I didn't know. Okay. Yeah. So I put something about the risen Christ that is who he says he is and has conquered.

[13:36] The book spends a lot of time depicting various scenes and scenarios but probably, surely the big message is not about politics or history or controversy or Israel but about Jesus.

The line of Judah has conquered. So it might be helpful to think about Jesus as being central to that. I am the Alpha and the Omega the beginning and the end.

I thought of this one we're in a spiritual battle and the enemy will be defeated. So I thought the seven churches were all in some degree of conflict and challenge.

The morality of the culture doctrinal deception intimidation and the book shows us doctrinally the false prophet sorry morally the prostitute doctrinally the false prophet in terms of intimidation the beast and behind it all the dragon and we actually face the same challenges.

They might look different they're different clothing but we still face these challenges to our faith. And what did I think of next?

[14:49] What did I think of next? Ah Okay warnings Let's Do you want the next who's the next group?

Did you think of any warnings? Warnings or encouragements? I was thinking about the seven churches about the truths of that and then the warnings of what happened what was said Yeah Yeah the seven churches are warned about deviating morally doctrinally and each time there's a repent isn't there or nearly each time you can't go on that way so that would fit as a sort of warning Yeah Anything else?

Mark? Sorry restoration everything what we lost in Eden in chapter 20 it talks about the river and the tree Yeah You know we've lost a lot we don't really know what it is to really live as God intended but all that will be there Yeah Thank you Yes Yeah Yeah And my favourite verse which is 1714 These shall make war with the Lamb and the Lamb shall overcome them for he is Lord of Lords and King of Kings and they that are with him are called and chosen and faithful Thank you They will wage war against the Lamb but the Lamb will triumph over them because he is Lord of Lords and King of Kings and with him will be his called chosen and faithful followers Yeah Who is on the Lord's side who will serve the King who will be his helper other lives to bring The chosen called and faithful is in that isn't it What I put there let's see so I went for warnings We face basically the same enemies temptations distractions and oppositions it's essential that we overcome that's one of the themes isn't it to him who overcomes so I don't know whether you call that a warning or encouragement or an exhortation but it is that we've got to keep fighting we can't afford to give in we've got to keep fighting the fight of faith and I sort of pulled that thread a little bit and said how do we how do we take that warning and I've got two or three thoughts on that one is by holding the revealed words so it said that in 1.3 didn't it blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it

I thought that's worth taking to heart because what does the Lord leave us with these are the various things but one thing is words blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it that's what an evangelical Christian is isn't it it's a Christian who holds to the gospel as revealed in scripture and so important that we continue to be Bible people so I think one of the things that I think we've often said to people about coming to the church here you'll hear the Bible might not necessarily have a smoke machine and beautiful music but you will hear the Bible and I think it's really important that we hold to the words that are written in this book you can see all the way that people have deviated from that without being too partisan you can see the way some portions of the church of England have drifted away from holding to scripture and it leads to a weakened church there's a blessing in holding on to the words

[19:24] I thought it may seem a bit of a tame recommendation but it's a healthy one isn't it to hold on to the words Bible people knowing his word deploying his word in our lives Jesus when he was tempted he quoted scripture didn't he I think we could follow his example on that so how did they overcome chapter 12 11 says chapter 12 11 says they triumphed over him which is the same sort of thought as Pete's verse how did they triumph by the blood of the lamb by the word of their testimony they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death how did they overcome they overcame by the blood of the lamb they had as my

Scottish accountant says they had recourse I have to fill in on my tax form to how many rooms in the pastoral house do the public have recourse we have recourse to the truths of the we go there we spend our time there we're in that space if you like the truths of the atonement the atonement doctrines the blood of the lamb which is great we can remember that when we have the communion service isn't it pushes our noses up against the fact of the blood of the lamb the finished work of christ the problem with the galatians was that they didn't think that that was enough and that led to all sorts of deficiencies and diseases so spiritual diseases i mean triumphed by the blood of the lamb and it says they triumphed by the word of their testimony so they didn't become ashamed of christ they were prepared to witness to him to say what what they believed about him i wasn't mercy a brave girl last night giving her testimony of how the lord had taken her life and changed her around blessings on her for doing that they prevailed by the word of their testimony and not being ashamed of christ and radically prioritizing christ in our lives they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death it's a bit challenging that isn't it but i think what it guards against is treating christianity as a sort of hobby or treating christianity as a leisure pursuit or a consumer activity that you fit into all the more important things in your life when you have time he says here this is life and death jesus talked about taking up a cross and following him didn't he if you don't take up your cross you can't be my disciple for the persecuted church that literally might mean!

for us it probably won't mean that we're going to be persecuted to death but it does mean that every day we offer up our lives totally to the Lord whatever that might mean in whatever walk of life we're in but it is totally serious being a Christian being a disciple of Christ being a follower we take up a cross and follow!

and that's how we triumph we overcome! now then where did we get to?

let's think of encouragement so I think really what you were saying was encouragement of the holy city and the future did Brenda and Julia have any thoughts?

[23:42] did you get as far as that? I was encouraged by the lamb being at the very centre of heaven that was an encouragement to me and that he is a victor that was an encouragement and the lamb is all the glory of Emmanuel's land yeah yeah I think they were the main two encouragements and I guess yeah our future going to Emmanuel's land yeah that was an encouragement and I think also it's a sort of encouragement but it encapsulates everything that the whole book is sort of an unveiling so it encourages us when there's lots of things going on and bad things and all that you know you can actually look under the sheet if you like and think oh it's alright

God's in control under there yeah it's all we know all about that and it sort of is an encouragement and takes the fear out of things a bit isn't it wonderful to have that if you didn't have that you'd be all

over the place wouldn't you here's the ruler of the kings of the earth it's the lamb who unfolds the seals on the scroll of world history he's in charge of everything it doesn't necessarily seem like that on the surface but as we hold to the words of this book we believe that is the case yeah I was talking to somebody the other day was saying they were quite worried about the world and I can really understand that but as Christians we can hang on to the fact that the lamb is on the throne any any encouragements from over here something that we spoke about yeah thank you it says encourage one another with these words in a slightly different context but I think we do need to encourage one another with these words yeah thank you very much let's see what I thought about here encouragements Christ hold us in his hands and seize our hearts which is what it says in the early part where he visits the churches and walks among the golden lampstands and he says I know!

Christ presides over all the turmoil and tribulation the lamp upon the throne opens the scroll of world history and I put this we will receive a surprisingly generous reward in the heavenly city and we thought about those rewards the other time the end chapter says his reward is with him and just I thought it was rather lovely to think of the things that are explicitly said will be rewarded and it just gives us an idea of what God values the father rewards secret prayer the father who sees what is done in secret will reward you openly a cup of cold water there will be a reward for that kind and loving acts to his people there will be reward for that and to all his people to enter into glory unspeakable that idea of getting to the heavenly city and probably thinking why on earth am I here how on earth did I manage that and the

Lord says I've had you in my hand all the way through I've brought you through and it's all to the Lord's glory and you think hasn't he done well to look after us and bring us through the idea of being trophies of grace that it will show how wise and good and powerful and gracious is our triune God to elect sinners for Christ to save them through the sprinkling of his blood as it said for the Holy Spirit to be at work within people and that he should lose none of those that the Father has given them but raise them all up at the last day and bring them safe into his heavenly kingdom which is a wonderful success for Jesus Christ isn't it in the sense that that bit of praise isn't completed until it's seen that he's achieved it but when he's achieved it it's a wonderful success for him isn't it brought all these people to glory how brilliant

[29:15] I think that's pretty much where I got to but just to say where are we today and there's always this sort of existential impact of God's word where are we today taking his invitation let him who is thirsty come to the waters and drink I think is pretty much what it says in that last chapter and I think it's a good question are we still drinking at the fountain are we still feasting upon Jesus Christ and coming to him he who is thirsty come let the one who wishes take the free gift of the water of life are we still fighting I guess we are because we wouldn't be here if we weren't but it's a good question isn't it that we're still fighting are we holding on to his words let's not let them go I don't know do you find there's a pressure to not read your Bible I don't know what your habit of

Bible reading is I think reading the Bible every day is a really good habit some days get very busy some days you're not feeling very well some days your brain isn't up to it but meditating on the law of the Lord is an important discipline for us Christians isn't it and we need to take ourselves to task if we've lapsed on that worshipping God alone is God the object of our worship remember that's one of the things that's mentioned in the last chapter excuse me and one of the commentators says that's the whole book summed up I hadn't thought of it like that!

but let's try on that thought are we worshippers of God or do other things loom larger in our lives and God sort of gets squeezed out into a little concavity somewhere where he doesn't take too much bother I mean let's be worshippers of God let God be the great one in our vision and in our lives and testifying to Jesus testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy which I still haven't got to the bottom of but I think it's saying the essence of the work of the speaking spirit is to testify to Jesus and if we're testifying to Jesus we're walking with the spirit we're being carried along by the spirit and are we waiting for his appearing as it says even so come Lord Jesus right at the end even so come

Lord Jesus and do we say amen to that amen to that thank you very much for all your involvement and attention we've come to the end of the book it's been more than a year that we've been looking at it and my the thing on my to-do list would be to write it out as a book please pray that I have the self discipline to do that because I think it has the potential to be helpful to Christian folk right by God's grace okay so the question was can we sing who is on the Lord's side is it in the book