

Revisiting Revelation

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[0 : 0 0] Well, why should we study this book? Well, one reason is it's in the Bible. And we're told that man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.

So that must include this book. You might say, well, it's very difficult. It is a difficult book. But actually, if God's given it to us, it shouldn't be so difficult that we can't get some blessing out of it. I think the main points are plain enough. And you might say, well, it's just people disagree about it. Well, that shouldn't stop us reading God's Word. It is God's Word.

He's given it to us. And I say, if you go too much on the internet, you just confuse yourself, just listen to what God says.

And if you've got masses of footnotes in your Bible, just don't take so much notice of them as what God says. And if you've got your favourite preacher, don't take so much notice of what he says, but what God says in the book of Revelation.

[0 : 5 9] And God has given you real live teachers to open the Bible together, which is what we do. So there's a blessing in that. And then you can make up your own mind. Now then, if you've read the book of Revelation before, you will say, but pastor, what approach are you bringing to this?

Are you pre or pan or post or fade or, I don't know, all sorts of things? And are you going to be, as you read this book, are you going to come to it as a historicist, an idealist, a preterist?

I don't even know what the word means. I had to look it up on the internet to see how to spell it. It might not even have got it right. Or are you a futurist? And I say, I'm a bit baffled by all that. But I'm not going to approach it as any of those things.

I'll just listen to what the Bible says. And I'm not going to come with any preconceived ideas. I'm going to squeeze it into this mold or make sure I give a lot of emphasis to this.

I'm just going to listen to what God says. And let's listen to what God says together. And let's let John tell us how to interpret him. And we'll get to know, it is an unusual book.

[2 : 0 9] He's put ever such a lot of effort into constructing it. It has sevens of things and 24s of things and 144s of things.

For example, blessings. We read that blessing at the beginning of verse 3. Did you know there are seven blessings in the book of Revelation? That's not by accident. He's constructed it meticulously. And we will get to know how it works by just listening and observing and watching and listening. And I think it would be true to say that John has a particular accent or a particular way of speaking. Now, of course, I don't have an accent. It's everybody else who has an accent. But that's not quite true, is it? Everybody has their own way of speaking. And you have to listen to work out, ah, that's why they say it that way.

So my example of this is my good friend who was the pastor of Holland Road Baptist Church, Stuart McNary, who was from Northern Ireland. And he would preach about fiat.

[3 : 1 7] Justification by fiat. Fiat. And for months, there were people sitting in this congregation wondering, what is this stuff? Fiat. And of course, it is his way of saying faith.

That's just the Northern Ireland way of saying faith. Fiat. He told me this joke himself, so I'm not getting at him. But you have to listen to get the accent, to get the way of speaking.

And my other example of it is I taught this in Sri Lanka. And if you've been to cities, particularly, I guess, India, but certainly Sri Lanka, if you've been to Colombo, the traffic there is just mind-blowing.

The way they drive. So you have these little tuk-tuks, tiny little things, sort of three-wheeler things. And they drive like madmen.

And they're always going, beep, beep, beep, beep. And when I watched it, I thought, this is, it's so aggressive. But actually, as I watched, I worked out why they do it.

[4 : 27] If they come up behind somebody, they go, beep, beep, which means, it doesn't mean I hate you. It means, I'm behind you. I might overtake you. So just look in your mirror.

And then when they go past somebody, they go, beep, beep. And that's not aggressive. It just means, I've passed you. Okay. And then when they get in front, they go, beep, beep, which says, I've passed you.

So it's just the way they do it. And when you get to understand it, you think, oh, that makes sense now. So John has his way of doing things.

And if we just watch and observe, we'll find out some of his accents, some of his ways of speaking. So I'll give you one clue. He uses symbolism.

He uses signs which point to something beyond themselves. And he uses symbols that come from the Bible, mostly from the Bible, not all of them.

[5 : 25] That's just one clue. And that just set us up for thinking about this. So studying it this morning, it's like we used to have different students staying with us, as some of you know.

And who was the student at Olivet from Spain? Igor? Ivor? Do you remember? Ivor.

He was very keen on football. We still get letters for him. We still get his bank statements. I presume that's what they are. Because it says, postmark HSBC.

And it says, if the person's no longer here, you send it back. So I don't open it. See how much money he's got. But we just say, look at the outside of it.

And we don't open it. We send it back. And you would look at a letter to see whether you're going to open it. Is it junk mail? Is it for somebody else? Is it a parking fine?

[6 : 27] Is it the tax office telling you that they're going to give you a check for all the money that they're giving you back? If only. So let's look at this letter this morning and see reasons for opening it.

So I'm going to look at, number one, the postmark. Number two, the signature. Number three, the writer. Number four, the mystery. Because there is a mystery to this. And number five, the message.

So that's what we'll do this morning. We'll just look at this first chapter, asking ourselves, this is the letter worth opening. We'll look at the postmark, as it were. What you see on the outside.

The signature from who sent it. The writer who's writing it. The mystery. Because it says there's a mystery. There's a surprise in this. And the message of the whole thing. So those five things we'll try and do.

They won't be ever so long. But I did actually. I have to say. I did look inside. I did actually open it a little bit. And I could see some things. And I wonder if you can identify any of those.

[7 : 31] So it's got two of those. Any boys and girls? Or grown-ups? Let's put another one. We've got those. And we've got one of those. Beautiful lady.

And we've got one of those. Another beautiful lady, but not so nice. We've got one of those. It's a city with a tall thing. We've got one of those.

A city that's very splendid. We've got one of those. Just notice how many candles there are on it. We've got one of those.

We've got one of those. We've got one of those. And there's a lot of that. So can any boys or girls or failing boys and girls, grown-ups, just tell us any of those things that we've got there?

A lamb. Yeah, that's right. Yep, we have a lamb. The lamb is a very special symbol in this book. Anything else that we have? Yes.

[8 : 35] A witch? A drone. A drone. Throne. Oh, right. A throne. Yeah, the throne is a really important one. So I put a chair that a king sits on.

Well done. Thank you. A throne. Anything else that you... Wait a minute. Over here. Trumpet. Yeah, there's a trumpet. Does anybody know how many trumpets there are?

Seven trumpets. Yes. Well done. Anything else? A dragon. A dragon. Yeah, I was particularly pleased the way I drew that dragon.

So, yeah, a dragon. Whoever said that, well done. There was a dragon. Anything else? Tower.

Yeah, we've got a tower. Tower. Now, then the tower is to do with a particular city in the Bible that crops up.

It's well known for something. Babylon. Yeah. Babylon. Babylon. Yeah. And anything else? What haven't we done?

[9 : 38] Yeah. There's another city there. Pardon? Pardon? Pardon? Pardon? Pardon? Oh, right.

Yeah, that's right. Yes, the seven candles. I'm not... Is it in Hanukkah? Do they have eight? But it's like that, isn't it?

Like... Now, what's the... Is it the... Is it the... Something rather? Minora. Yeah, that's right. Yes. Where would you find that in the Bible?

The seven-branch candlestick. Martin? In Exodus? Yes. In which building would you find it?

In the tabernacle. Yes, it was the light in a dark place, wasn't it? In the tabernacle. Any other?

Pardon? Fighting. Fighting. Yes. Conflict. Fighting.

[10:37] A lot of these things are conflict. So, the dragon makes war against the lamb. And these two... Horrible creatures.

No? Beasts. Yes, there's two beasts. There's a beast from the earth and a beast from the sea. Or the beast and the false prophet. These two. I think probably representing political opposition to Christ.

And doctrinal or spoken opposition to Christ. Yep. Anything? Oh, yeah. We haven't done these two ladies. One is the bride.

Is that what you said? Yeah. The bride of Christ. The beautiful lady. And there's another lady over there. She is. She is a prostitute.

She gets paid to be intimate with people. And you think, oh, she's such a beautiful lady. But when you look up close, she's drinking something. And when you look up close, do anybody remember what she's drinking?

[11:40] The blood of the martyrs. Yes. So, there's a little sketch. I'm sure there's things I missed out. But that gives you a flavor. I did just peek inside and see some of those pictures. So, thank you, boys and girls and grown-ups for identifying those.

Oh, did we do the city? Did we do that? The New Jerusalem. Yes, the New Jerusalem. Yeah, let's give ourselves a round of applause for getting as far as that.

Well done. And what sums up this picture? It's difficult to sum up something. There's lots there. But anybody would say at the heart of it, there is something.

Conflict. Yeah, I would say it's all about conflict. And it isn't an unresolved conflict. It is a conflict. But at the end of it, it's a conflict between the lamb and the dragon.

It's a strife, a battle, a conflict. And the book of Revelation actually makes this one big point. Who wins? Do you know who wins? Have you read it and worked out who wins?

[12:46] The lamb. Yeah, Jesus wins. Jesus is victorious. And that idea of his victory is one of the threads that goes through it.

Yeah, we'll see a bit more about that this evening. But the idea of victory is an important one. Okay, so we just had a little look inside. So let's look at the postmark then, which is what I said we'll do.

A postmark on the outside of an envelope tells you the sorting office it's been through. You know, it was posted in Guildford and the sorting office was in Godalming and then it came to Portsmouth and then da-da-da-da, etc.

So let's look at what it says in verses 1 to 3. 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.

[13:51] And then there's that blessing for the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy.

Blessed are those who hear it and take to heart or keep what is written in it. So that's just taking that apart.

It's a revelation. The Greek word is apocalypsis from which we get apocalypse. People use that word in English, apocalypse. And they think it means the end of the world.

But actually what it means is unveiling. Unveiling. An unveiling. That's why it's translated revelation. It's a little bit like if we had a curtain here and we've got this hollow, I think it's probably MDF behind it.

But if we had a curtain here and you could only see the curtain and I said, look, let me unveil what's behind here. A beautiful piece of MDF. But it's an unveiling.

You can see what's on the surface. But if we unveil it, you'll see what's really going on behind. And that's what this book is doing. It's an unveiling. It shows us what's really going on behind.

[14:59] You can see the surface. But John says, I'll show you what's really going on behind. And the message has come through a sort of chain, hasn't it? So it says, God gave it to Jesus Christ.

And Jesus Christ shows it to his servants. And he does it using, let's just see, where is it? He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John. So it's actually gone through quite a few stages. God gave it to Jesus Christ to show us. That's his servants. And he did it by sending an angel to John. And the angel signified it. Now, in my version here, it says, let's just see, he made it known by sending his angel. But it means a little bit more than that. To signify it is to use signs to do something. It uses a word which means signs.

[16:07] And, of course, that puts us on the alert, doesn't it? A sign points you to something outside itself. So if you have, I think maybe Steve used this illustration.

As you come into Brighton, there's a notice which says, welcome to Brighton. But please don't park there and think, this is Brighton. It's only this thick and it's quite wide.

I thought there was much more to Brighton than this. No, that's just the sign to tell you that it's Brighton. Brighton is all the rest of it. It points to something other than itself. And we notice also there's angels as messengers.

And, as I said, there are signs that point beyond themselves. And John says he is testifying to everything he saw.

Let me just get it right here. He testifies to everything he saw. That is the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ. And you notice the beginning of something.

[17:09] Seeing and seeing sights and hearing words. Just notice that he says he testifies to what he saw.

The word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ. There's an interesting thing going on with seeing things and hearing things. That will come up later, but it's just something going on there. And there's a blessing. So, let's just make sure we know who the blessing was for. Any of the boys and girls tell us the blessing was for who?

Those who? Grown-ups, the blessing was for who? Somebody who reads it and? Hears it. And hears it. Yeah, thank you. Takes it to heart. What it actually says is keep. So, you know, if you've got it and you keep it. So, don't forget it when you go home.

[18:05] Keep it. We pray that we will keep it because we're so good at forgetting things, aren't we? Hearing it one minute and then acting as if we'd never heard it later. So, blessed are those who keep it.

And it says the time is near. And in verse 1 it says things must soon take place. So, from that we gather that it must certainly have been relevant to the original hearers.

It isn't just about everything that hasn't even happened yet. It must have been relevant to the original hearers because it's things that they need to know that are shortly going to take place all those centuries ago.

Right. Let's now move on. Are you okay with that? That was, as it were, the postmark. So, the signature. Now then, boys and girls, I don't know if you've ever written a letter.

Do people write letters these days? Send emails and texts. Have you written a letter? How do you begin your letter? Dear so-and-so. Great. How do you end it?

[19:10] From Bethany. I would never end a letter like that. But you would. Yeah, of course. Yeah. Is there a more formal way of ending it?

All the grown-ups, how would you end a letter? What would you? Yeah? Yeah, there's a way of saying yours sincerely. I think if you put the person's name, you say yours sincerely.

Or? Yours faithfully. Yours faithfully. If you put dear sir or madam, da-da-da-da, yours faithfully. There's little conventions about how we write letters. When they wrote letters, they put the yours sincerely, or from Bethany, at the beginning.

That's just the way they did it. So we'll find out. That says we put a signature at the end if we are writing a letter. And so the from goes at the beginning.

That's what this bit is in verse 4 and 5. John, to the seven churches in the province of Asia, grace and peace to you from him who is, who was, 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.

[20:27] That's just fantastic, that last little bit. I'm getting ahead of myself. Let's just calm down, calm down. Right. So it's from him who something and something and something.

Boys and girls, him who? Grownups? Is and was and is to come.

Yeah. So God who is and was and is to come. In other words, if you got into a time machine and went, I don't know, you go back in time and God's there waiting.

I was here all the time. Well, if you got into a time machine and you go far into the future, God is there saying, well, I was here all the time. He is and was and is to come.

So that's, we would say, God the Father. And the sevenfold spirit. Later on, it talks about the seven lamps burning before his throne.

[21 : 28] Seven. Seven. I think we will find that it's John's accent or his way of speaking that if he wants to say the whole of something, he will say the seven of it. So he will say to the seven churches, not meaning he doesn't care about any of the other.

There must have been many other churches. But the seven means the whole, the whole thing. And when he talks about the seven spirits, he's meaning the spirit in all the completeness of all his varying, wonderful, multiple ministries, the sevenfold spirit.

So there's a thing about numbers which I've got ahead of myself on, you see. And from Jesus Christ. What does it say about Jesus Christ?

He is, in verse five, the faithful witness. Now again, our English language doesn't help us with this because witness, in the original, witness, testimony, testify is all the same word.

And he's already talked about the testimony of Jesus, hasn't he? And we'll find out that he is on the island for the testimony of Jesus. And here we learn that Jesus is the best person to testify.

[22 : 49] When he tells us stuff, it's true. He doesn't change his mind. He doesn't make a mistake. He tells it like it is. Jesus Christ, the faithful testifier, the faithful witness.

And he is the firstborn from the dead. The firstborn from the dead. You should never say to people things are amazing and expect them to be persuaded.

You have to show them why they're amazing. I think this is amazing. Why is it amazing? Because death kills everybody, doesn't it? And people stay dead.

That's what death is. And here's the one person who has risen from the dead. And he's the first among many brothers. And his risen power, if we belong to him, will raise us from the dead too.

Here is hope beyond the grave. Jesus Christ, the faithful witness and the firstborn from the dead.

Well, yes. Amen. And he is the ruler of the kings of the earth.

[24 : 04] The kings of the earth is a little phrase that comes up. I think it's probably in Psalm 2, isn't it? The kings of the earth take a plot against the Lord and his anointed. I'm not too sure about that.

But the kings of the earth is a little formula for the opposition to Christ and his kingdom. The international opposition to Christ and his kingdom.

And they think they're in charge. But the book of Revelation says, actually, Jesus is in charge. He is the ruler of the kings of the earth.

So, bottom line, it won't be Donald Trump or Kamala Harris. It will be the Lord Jesus who gets his will done. And this signature gets turned into praise, doxology.

Doxa meaning glory. And there's little voices that crop up in the first chapter. There's little voices that crop up in the last chapter. I'm not quite sure where they come from.

[25 : 11] But here's one of the voices. I suppose it's us, is it, saying this? 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. And there's wonderful sort of doxology there, isn't there? And it's looking forward to the victory, which will certainly take place, but not necessarily just yet.

So, I was thinking about this last night and I didn't put on there the reference to his blood.

And let me just make sure I have mentioned that. He loves us and freed us from our sins by his blood. So, Jesus hasn't just exercised raw power.

It isn't just about having a throne. It's about having a cross. And the victory that he has won is not just that he is stronger, but that he made a bigger sacrifice.

[26 : 17] And he won his greatest victory when he shed his blood for the forgiveness of our sins and the redemption of our souls and the resurrection of our bodies.

Now, let's, I can't dwell on every point, I'm afraid, but let's go on to look at John in verse 9.

He says, he is our brother and companion, which means a sort of fellow fellowshipper, in these things. The suffering, the kingdom, and the patient endurance that are ours in Jesus.

It's an interesting mixture, isn't it? The suffering is the word *thlipsis*, which might otherwise be translated tribulation. I think it's a mistake to think that there is only one tribulation in the book of Revelation, which possibly hasn't happened yet.

It now is tribulation. And people come out of great tribulation. That's the word is there. Suffering in the tribulation and kingdom and patient endurance that are ours in Jesus.

[27 : 35] Interesting that he can put together suffering and kingdom. We suffer and we rule.

We're in his kingdom and we're under the cosh, if you like. But he says, you are a believer. You just keep going.

Patient endurance. Long suffering. Keep on going. And that's something that comes through. And he's in various places.

He's in Jesus. He's in the island of Patmos for the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. No, just testimony there. Now, is he there because he's in prison?

Or is he there on a mission trip? I don't know if it's exactly clear. I mean, people would tend to say he's there because he's in prison. But I don't think we're told. He's in the island and he's in the spirit.

[28 : 34] And he's in the lordly day, the lord's day. So that's where he is in all those places. And in verse 10, he says, Behind me I heard a loud voice like a...

Boys and girls? Grown-ups? Like a trumpet. I heard a loud voice like a trumpet. And the trumpet voice says, Write on a scroll what you see and send it to the seven churches.

And here they are. Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea. So there's the scroll he's going to write on. Send it. How many churches were there? Seven.

That's right. And now here's the thing. He says in verse 12, I turned round to see the voice that was speaking to me. Does that strike you as an odd way of putting it?

Because you can't see a voice. It's another one of these things where you've got seeing and hearing or vision and word. And they're sort of...

[29 : 47] It's, oh, how do you do that? I turned to see the voice. And we'll find more of this. But you might not be convinced about that. But I think there is actually a thing going on there. There's an accent thing.

And he turns round and he sees this. Any idea what we've got here? A menorah thing. Yeah. Lamps.

How many? Seven. Yeah, I've drawn it as if it's all on one branch. But I think it probably looks as though it's seven separate ones. And so he turns round and he sees this vision.

Seven golden lampstands. And let's just whiz through quickly the person who's in the lampstands. Someone walking among them.

Now, is the word walking there? I always thought it was walking. But I can only find among. Can anybody see walking? No.

[30 : 49] It just says among. I always thought it was walking. But anyway, I put walking. Right. So doing this quickly. You've got the text in front of you. He's like a son of man.

And his robe is what? Down to his feet. And he has a sash made of gold.

And the hair on his head was white like wool. And white as snow in his eyes are like blazing fire.

And feet like burnished bronze. Because you know it from the song. But we've got bronze glowing in a furnace.

I think it's one of those words that only occurs once in the Bible. Yeah. But it's a hot, hot looking bronze. Yes. Voice like. The sound of rushing waters.

[31 : 48] Have you ever been near a waterfall? And you've got that. Of water pouring down. And he's saying this is what the sound was like.

Like water pouring down. A voice like the sound of rushing waters. In his hand he held. Seven stars. And coming out of his mouth was.

A sharp double-edged sword. And his face was like. It's like the.

Sun. Yeah. Shining in all its buildings. I looked it up this morning. Just the sun in its power. You know like full power sun. And here's this description.

Which way am I going with this? Yeah. Those are the description. I mean let me just say. It is a theological description. Isn't it? He's.

[32 : 54] When Jesus rose from the dead. What he actually looked like. Was a human being. So much so. That they even mistook him for other human beings.

That's right. Isn't it? He wasn't ten feet tall. He didn't glow like neon. He didn't have feet made out of hot metal. He's human.

But this description. Is a theological description. Because he's calling on. All sorts of bits. From other bits of the Bible. And saying. You know what that bit of the Bible says? That's Jesus.

You know what that bit of the Bible says? That's Jesus. You know what that bit of the Bible says? That's Jesus. You know what that bit of the Bible says? That's Jesus. That's what he's doing with this. And I'm not going to stop.

To pull all that out. But it's meant to be dramatic. It's meant to make people say. Wow. Isn't Jesus amazing?

[33 : 50] Isn't he amazing? Let's move on. Otherwise I get stuck. So he's quoting from the Hebrew Scriptures. I've given the game away. Haven't I? So I can ask.

Just in case anybody was asleep. So who is this picture of? Boys and girls? They weren't listening. I don't know. Who is this a picture of?

It's Jesus, isn't it? Yeah. And what did he do? And what can he do? Let me just go on a little bit. I'm also going to ask. What is it like to meet him?

So. And where is he to be found? Verse 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. Excuse me. I am the living one. I was dead. And now behold, look, I am alive forever and ever.

[34 : 46] And I hold the keys of death and Hades. So there's some questions. Who is it? Well, it's Jesus.

And what does it say he did? And what can he do? What does it say? His past experience, as it were.

He died. He was dead. He was dead. And now I am alive forevermore. So he's the life-giving person. What's it like to meet him?

Terrifying. Yeah. Terrifying. I mean, let's just keep a balance on this. You're my friend and you are my brother, even though you are a king, is what we sang.

And it's true, Jesus is our great friend. And it's true he is our brother. But it's also true that he is this majestic, awesome king.

[35 : 50] And at first sight, seeing him in his glory, we would all fall at his feet as though dead. We would just have the stuffing knocked out of us.

But such is the grace of the Lord Jesus. He puts his hand on us and says, no, I don't want you just lying down there, knocked out. Do not be afraid.

Get up. And we have a conversation, as it were. But he is a knockout person. And we shouldn't forget that. End of verse 18, last section of it.

What can he do? End of verse 18, what can he do? Or what do you deduce he can do?

He holds the keys. What are they the keys of? Death and Hades.

[36 : 51] I don't know whether that's death and the grave or death and hell. But if he has the keys, what can he do? Unlock. Yeah. He can unlock death. Brothers and sisters, isn't that such a tremendous thing?

I mean, we all, we probably don't all, but many of us will have known what it's like to go to the creme or to go to the graveside or to be at a funeral.

And how different for a believing person to know that even beyond the grave, Jesus has the keys to unlock the grave, to unlock death.

And to make people stand up even though they had been dead. I mean, that's our saviour, isn't it? That's the Lord Jesus.

I am the living one. I was dead. Now I am alive forever and ever. And I hold the keys of death and Hades. And where is he to be found? Boys and girls, where is he to be found?

[38 : 00] Where is he in this vision? Grown-ups, where is he in this vision? Walking amongst the lampstands. He's walking amongst the seven golden lampstands.

I'm probably getting ahead of myself again. But the lampstands are what? The churches. Yeah. If you yourself are looking for Jesus, among the churches is the place to find him.

Don't go looking for him in a Ouija board. You don't have to go looking for him on the internet. You find him amongst the assemblies of God.

Amongst the people where God is worshipped. Where his word is heard. And said and taken hold of. That's where Jesus is.

And each week we pray, don't we? As we gather that the Lord Jesus would be here. What an awful thing it would be if the only people here were the 40 or 50 or however many of us this morning.

[39 : 16] And the one person who really we need to meet wasn't here. Jesus walks among the seven golden lampstands.

And if you're looking for Jesus, this is the place to come or somewhere exactly like it. Jesus Christ, he is awesome. He gives life. He shed his blood. He lives beyond death.

He can open any door. And he walks amongst his churches. Right, let's move on. So I told you that in this letter there was a mystery. A mystery prize.

A mystery. And it's in verse 19. Write therefore what you have seen. What is now and what will take place later.

The mystery of the seven stars that you saw in my right hand and the seven golden lampstands is this. The seven stars are the angels or perhaps messengers or somehow representatives of the seven churches and the seven lampstands are the seven churches.

[40 : 21] So here's the mystery of it. Stars in the Bible often associated with rulers. We saw his star in the east. The king has been born.

We saw a star in the east and have come to worship him. So the idea of associating stars with rulers. I won't go into that. The lampstands, like in the temple, in the dark place, when you go through into the tabernacle or into the temple, it didn't have windows.

It just had a lampstand. And that gave light in a dark place. Peter says of believing people, you are like lights in a dark place. And in the prophet Zechariah, I think I've got that right, the believing community is like a lampstand, shining light.

I mean, Jesus said, let your light shine, didn't he, into the world so that people may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven. The lampstands sort of shine out, a community shedding light.

But there's a mystery. It's not actual stars. It's not astronomical stars. It isn't oil-burning candles. It's churches. And here they are with their light-giving role and the message that they have and the influence that they have, the stars and the lampstands.

[41 : 49] And we're going to stop now. Run out of time. There's lots of questions that this poses.

I mean, it's just the beginning, isn't it? I think, you know, if you're anything like me, you think, oh, that's quite interesting. I'd like to read a bit more of this. It poses lots of questions. You know, what does Jesus say about these churches, which is what it goes on to tell us.

And what does Jesus say is going to shortly happen for the relevance and interest and importance of those churches. And if this is the unveiling, you know, what is going on?

We'd like to know that, wouldn't we? We'd like to know. And let's just make one point as far as we've got. There is a warfare.

There is a conflict. It takes different forms. It's not just suffering. Affluence is part of this conflict. There are churches that suffer from affluence.

[42 : 54] Too much money. Too easy. I am rich. I don't need anything. And God says, actually, you're poor and blind and naked and you should come to me so that you get things right.

So it isn't just persecution. Affluence can get them as well. And there's a warfare going on and I'll just give you a little spoiler of what happens next.

And Jesus talks to these churches. He says to them, to the one who is victorious, he says that to each of the churches, to you if you are victorious.

In other words, if in this conflict, you don't give up. If in this conflict, you don't forget.

If in this conflict, you don't lose the plot. If in this conflict, you keep fighting the fight of faith.

[44 : 01] If in this conflict, you don't become ashamed of Jesus. To him who is victorious. To the one who is victorious, says Jesus.

That's the one to whom I give all the promises. So with all that we've seen, let's take this away with us and let us be fighters for the Lamb that we don't give up and that we might be, in the end, victorious.

Amen. Let's close by singing this song. What is our hope in life and death? Christ alone. Christ alone.