

Christ, the Lord

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[0 : 0 0] this evening let's read together from Revelation chapter 1 right through from verse 1 to verse 20. This is the Word of God. 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 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 was sorry, 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 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 I am the Alpha and the Omega says the Lord God who is and who was and who is to come the Almighty I John your brother and companion in the suffering and kingdom and patient endurance that are ours in Jesus was on the island of Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus on the Lord's day I was in the spirit and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet which said write on a scroll what you see and send it to the seven churches to Ephesus Smyrna Pergamum Thyatira Sardis Philadelphia and Laodicea and Laodicea I turned round to see the voice that was speaking to me and when I turned

[3 : 0 0] I saw seven golden lampstands and among the lampstands was someone like a son of man dressed in a robe reaching down to his feet and with a golden sash round his chest the hair on his head was white like wool as white as snow and his eyes were like blazing fire his feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace excuse me and his voice was like the sound of rushing waters in his right hand he held seven stars and coming out of his mouth was a sharp double-edged sword his face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance 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 I am the living one I was dead and now look I am alive forever and ever and I hold the keys of death and Hades 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 of the seven golden lampstands is this the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches and the seven lampstands are the seven churches Amen Friends do indeed have your Bibles open at Revelation chapter 1 as I bring a message from God's word this evening do be looking and reading and following along and checking what I say against the word of God let's just pause briefly to pray just now before I begin

Lord the heavens declare your glory the skies declare the work of your hands though they have no speech or words their voice goes into all the earth your law Lord is perfect refreshing the soul your statutes Lord are trustworthy making wise the simple your precepts Lord are right giving joy to the heart your commands Lord are radiant giving light to the eyes the decrees of the Lord are firm and all of them are righteous they are more precious than gold by your words Lord your servants are warned in keeping your decrees there is great reward but Lord who can discern their own errors

Lord forgive our hidden faults keep your servants from willful sins lead us and guide us in your ways Lord and may the words of my mouth and the meditation of all our hearts this evening be pleasing in your sight Lord our rock and our redeemer amen well friends as I said do turn to revelation and have God's word open in front of you and perhaps you might spare a thought for the folks in Kilwinning and East Kilbride I won't say I've perfected this sermon but I have cut it down a fair bit since my first time of thinking this through when I tried to cover foolishly of me the whole of revelation chapter 1 in one sermon

I then tried to chop it down a bit when I was at East Kilbride and you'll be pleased to know I've worked on it a bit more since then so we're mainly covering the first eight verses this evening and God willing I'll maybe get a chance at some point in time to come back and cover verses 9 to 20 but as we look at these words this evening I was thinking about us progressing into a new year a new year often brings time of contemplation perhaps as individuals perhaps in our families but perhaps also for us as a church we wonder what the year ahead will bring maybe that seems a bit too philosophical and indeed my family will have heard me wax lyrical about it's just another day it's just another calendar I can't tell you what this year will bring for our fellowship indeed given the last couple of years more and more people are realising that we can't really tell what tomorrow will bring with any certainty but I can tell you that there is good news those of us who love and follow the Lord

[9 : 10] Jesus Christ know the one who does know the future and not only knows the one who knows the future but who owns it but if we were thinking ahead excuse me if we were thinking ahead to what the coming year might hold for us as a church beginning to make plans or refine our plans that we've had from the last year review where we've been maybe it'd be good to start with a question church what's it all about what's it all for what are we doing here in covenant church what are we doing here in the valley why do we come together a strange well maybe I should speak for myself as a strange person but for the rest of us as a bunch of ordinary people gathering on a Sunday when other people are doing pretty much anything but coming to church

I suspect that most people who don't come to church might readily admit that they just don't really know what church is all about they may just simply say that it's not relevant to them but if we did ask the question and we got some answers well I wonder what we might get well I decided I'd go somewhere fairly simple for that answer I couldn't find the nat 5 study on it and I decided Shona had more than enough studying to do just now without me asking her that question so I went to the BBC bite-sized guide for GCSE what I would have known in my day as religious education but it's probably got some other name now and the BBC bite-sized guide says the main function of a local church is and then it goes on here we are a place for people to go to worship this includes people attending church services or visiting the church for private prayer not bad so far there are also many other religious functions which take place in a church such as rites of passage ceremonies rites of passage include for example baptism marriage or funeral

I thought that was an interesting and unusual choice of words rites of passage ceremonies and the BBC bite-sized goes on to say Christians believe that it is part of their duty to act in a moral way and this involves helping others around them the church can play a vital role in Christians helping others as they provide for example food banks there are also many non-religious functions that can take place in a church building e.g.

creche facilities youth groups community meeting places such as keep fit classes adult education classes charity events coffee mornings birthday parties concerts or maybe it could be flipped around the other way and say that well even in the Darville town hall the church can meet here where all these other non-religious things happen anyway and the bite-sized version says Jesus taught the importance of helping others who are less fortunate and this is why the church has these extra functions it's interesting to read what others think the church is all about but what about us as the people gathering in this place the people who would say we are the church what do we think church is all about and I hope that as we consider the verses from Revelation tonight we'll get a picture of what the church is all about or actually

I should really change my question because it's not what the church is all about it's who the church is all about if what we build the church upon is not the right who then like any building with a weak or incorrect foundation it might look nice it might even serve some of the purposes that BBC bite size would think are part of a church but if the church is not built on the right foundation it will come crashing down so let's get into these verses in Revelation and think first of all a bit about the context what's happening here who is this to the writer well they're identifying themselves as John and it is indeed believed to be the apostle

[14 : 07] John and he's doing what he's commanded to do in verse 10 and 11 we read I that is John heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet which said write on a scroll what you see and send it to the seven churches to Ephesus Smyrna Pergamum Thyatira Sardis Philadelphia and Laodicea so John was writing down what he saw and sending it to the churches so the book of Revelation is a letter although it's not just a letter it's in part a letter it's really a combination of three types of biblical literary work that being apocalypse which means a revealing of something hidden the other type is it's prophecy bringing a foretelling of things and a message from God to his people and then that third style that I mentioned is that it's a letter written for a recipient and with a purpose when was it written well it was written in about AD 95 and at that time just towards the end of the first century the Roman emperor was the emperor

Domitian he was emperor from AD 81 to 96 and he was persecuting the followers of Jesus prior to Domitian the emperor Nero had started persecuting Christians but apparently that was mainly in or near to Rome but the emperor Domitian he really wanted all the people in the empire to acknowledge him as a deity and so Christians proclaiming that the one they were following Jesus proclaiming that Jesus is God and the only God was not acceptable in Domitian's world and so the persecution spread and became more intense than it had been under Nero there really was no easy life for the followers of

Jesus for those who were part of the church now more and more in recent years I've become more aware of how fortunate we are in the UK to have centuries where the foundation of our society has been Christianity and Christian values and the teaching from God's word it may be that there are increasing numbers of people who don't like the teachings of Christ or at least there may be more people who don't like the notion of not being free to make your own individual choices and having a God that sets standards for obedience there's definitely a decrease in the tolerance of the idea that the standards of human life are not individual personal choice but are set by God but despite changes in our society in the

UK we are still not in the same situation as some of our brothers and sisters in countries elsewhere around the world where there is indeed outright persecution much like there was for the believers in the days of the emperor Domitian just this past week you might have had to go looking for it on some of the news channels but even the BBC World Service reported on Open Doors just publishing their world watch list for 2022 and between the Open Doors website and the Barnabas website to name just a couple you can find out about some of the real struggles our brothers in Christ are suffering across the world not just struggles but persecution wherein the top country now has become the top hardest country now to live as a Christian has become

Afghanistan where being a believer will almost certainly result in your death not your death in your bed of an old age but being killed for your faith this should drive us onto our knees before the Lord for our brothers and sisters who are part of our church across the world or part of his church across the world and it's into this situation that John's letter is being sent to fellow Christians in those days it was far more than just a distrust of this sect from the Jewish people or a dislike of them or not liking them proclaiming Jesus as Lord as I mentioned well that went against the whole of the desire of the emperor to be seen as a deity it usurped the emperor's and the empire's authority it even challenged the way business was done and challenged the very way of life in society promiscuous and or perverse sexual practices are actually not a new invention despite what many in our modern age might like to think about the so-called sexual revolution in recent decades you just need to look into the practices in Ephesus of temple prostitution and other such promiscuous and immoral behaviour that were the very fabric of society and if you were not part of that society your business and your personal life suffered and yet in that very society the followers of Jesus were called to live in obedience to God not following their own personal desires or what might get them on in the world and that led to persecution it could cause quite a stir remember the riot in

[21 : 09] Ephesus following Paul's preaching there you can read about that in Acts chapter 19 particularly verses 23 to 29 where we're reminded the whole city was in uproar with cries of great is Artemis of the Ephesians what a challenge the followers of Christ faced we don't face that level of persecution here in Scotland right now but for others followers of Christ the church in those days and indeed in other parts of the world now that persecution is very real that persecution friends is part of an attack of the devil but it's not the only attack of the devil that he uses to get at God and God's people the enemy of God the devil himself continues to use three main tactics to try and pull the followers of

Christ away from following and obeying the Lord to attack not just Christ's church but Christ himself as we think of these things you can see them replicated against Christ and against his followers I've mentioned persecution but I'll quickly mention the others as well as that persecution there's false teaching and then the other is the temptation and the falling into sin or immorality or another way we might look at them the devil can attack physically he can attack intellectually or he can make an attack on morality and moral standards what will we as Christ's church face in 2022 well we will face the same attacks that the devil has used against

Christ and against his church for years and years and years persecution false teaching and sin he will use these to wage war against the very relationship between us as followers of Christ and our Lord Jesus himself he used them in the early days of the church and he's not stopped using them now they may come in different forms and they may come in different measures for different people in different places but it's the same attacks from the devil how might we face those attacks or how might we help others face those attacks well when we know friends or family that are struggling or in difficulty it doesn't even need to be that we are thinking that there's spiritual warfare happening and that they're being attacked by the devil it might just be that we see them struggling what do we want to do naturally we want to support them we want to bring them comfort to encourage them to help them we might visit them we're used to the luxury of cars or even reasonably good public transport these days or maybe even a phone call or dare

I say it a text message or a facebook message or some other message to connect with them but if you can't get to someone in person you might be a bit more old fashioned and write them a letter sending them words of encouragement and so it is as John finds himself on the island of Patmos banished to this small island off the coast of what is modern day Turkey he is commanded to write to the fellow believers to the Christians in the churches who are facing persecution false teaching and immorality and he's told to write to them the words of Christ himself you'll see on the slide the way the set up is for the churches that

Ephesus is listed first it's the nearest to the island of Patmos and the rest go round clockwise in order of travel so you if you were on the delivery run of the first century equivalent of the royal mail the commandeers say this is the way the journey would have happened it would have made sense to come across and go round in that way and here's the Lord commanding John to write to these churches and to send it round them and God willing we'll get an opportunity to work through not just the remainder of chapter 1 but on into chapters 2 and 3 as we read those specifics of the letters and the messages to each of those churches not just for those churches but of course preserved for us in scripture to help us think of God's word to us today they're not for us to ignore or to think of as too difficult though there is difficult imagery sometimes to work through in revelation but they're for us to think and look at how prayerfully we can apply them to our lives but we note something as we read the introduction of this chapter this isn't just a word of encouragement as I said from John to the struggling first century

[27 : 27] Christians yes John is writing to it but it is from Christ himself verse 1 says the revelation from Jesus Christ which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place and remember in verse 10 John says he heard the voice behind him which said write on a scroll what you see and send it to the churches so these are the words from Christ himself for his church as we go on through in chapters 2 and 3 you'll see words repeated these are the words of chapter 2 verse 1 says these are the words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand verse 8 of chapter 2 says these are the words of him who is the first and the last in verse 12 of chapter 2 it says these are the words of him who has the sharp double edged sword and so on so we can read here words from

Christ to his church other translations though also help us as we look at the ESV in the New King James for example they helpfully translate for us verse 1 not just saying the revelation from Jesus Christ but they say the revelation of Jesus Christ and so from what I read in preparing for this evening and the times I've worked through this both from and of are correct this is a revelation from Jesus Christ but it is very much a revelation of Jesus Christ and what an amazing revelation that is and so I better move on so that we get some time to look at who this Christ is that is revealed in these verses this Christ is described for us in verse 5 as the one who is the faithful witness the firstborn from the dead and the ruler of the kings of the earth

Christ is the faithful witness of God if anyone wants to know what God is like let them look to the one who is the faithful witness in Colossians 1 verse 15 we read those words the sun is the image of the invisible God the firstborn over all creation or as I found it perhaps in more common terms from the message we look at this sun and see the God who cannot be seen we look at this sun and see God's original purpose in everything he created we see in Christ the living God but what more of this

Christ the one who is sending a letter through John he is the image of God the faithful witness but verse six goes on to tell us he is the one who has loved us I don't know about you friends but there are times when I struggle to think how on earth can I be loved given all my faults and failings even by my own family and I know their faults and feelings how much more amazing is it that the holy and righteous God should have loved us do you see the contrast here between the emperor Domitian who when those who wouldn't recognize him as a deity what did he do he began to persecute them to try and force worship out of them and yet here is the Lord

God almighty who is worthy of all praise and glory and honour and when we fail to give that to him what does he do he loved us he loved us and then the verse continues in even more amazing terms if it can be possible to be more amazing than thinking about God having loved us the verse goes on to tell us that Christ is the one who shed his blood for us because loving us had a cost because in our sin and in our failing to give God all the praise and glory and glory and honour that he alone is worthy of in failing to do that each and every one of us deserved eternal condemnation the wrath of God to be poured out on us forever and yet

[33 : 32] God loved us and freed us from our sins by his blood do you know what it is like friends to be freed from your sins maybe it's nicer to think about being loved by God that has a nicer ring to it doesn't it but it says he loved us and has freed us from our sins by his blood we know we fail yet the amazing thing is that God has made us to be his people to come to him through Christ and to be his holy nation to serve his God and father Christ the faithful witness of

God has loved us he came and he freed us from our sins by his blood scripture tells us do you want to know what God is really like then look to Christ I wonder what image we have as we think of what Christ looks like well next time round we'll look at the image given in verses 9 to 20 but for now let's think of that verse that says for us he loved us and shed his blood for us that wasn't just some little cut on his hands friends we know that he was spat upon mocked beaten scourged with a whip and then had nails driven through his hands and feet and hung on a cross with good reason the

Bible tells us that cursed is one who hangs on a tree yet more than all that physical pain even if we dare to bring into our minds that image of God hanging on the cross more than that we should be jolted by the cry of Christ himself my God my God why have you forsaken me Christ the only man who fully kept the covenant law the only one who could walk and stand before the presence of God holy and righteous took on himself our sin shed his blood for us paid the price for the wages of our sin is death and he bore that as he hung on the cross not just the physical pain and death but the separation the

God forsakenness that he experienced hanging there on the cross other sins notekt not but it is