

Chris Edwards

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[0 : 00] Well, keep your Bibles open. And how many people have heard my sermon already? Right. Well, you'll be able to see whether it's the same now as it was earlier in the day.

And you should have all the answers to all the questions I'll ask as we go through. Let me pray. Heavenly Father, we do thank you for your word. But boy, this bit, it starts what is a very complicated series of passages and chapters with images that we can't quite get in our head, with ideas that we find difficult to resolve.

So I pray you'll help us with these two chapters that we might see and hear you speaking to us. That in our imagination and in our minds, we might be able to draw together the things that you're showing us so that despite what this world is like and what this world does, we might find our hope and our rest in you.

Amen. Well, chapter 4 and 5 in Revelation is really the beginning of a vision. Chapters 1, 2 and 3, although they are the beginning of the Revelation, that is, the vision that John is given begins at the beginning.

But what happens in those early chapters is there are a series of letters written and delivered to the churches in a place called Asia Minor, which is basically Turkey, modern-day Turkey.

[1 : 33] And the cities, the seven towns that are named and identified and that get letters, the seven of those, you can still go there today. But what's really interesting is of the six churches, sorry, of the seven churches that got the letters, six are gone.

They're not there anymore. What's really interesting is as you read through the seven letters, you'll find each of them is warned that if they don't repent and change their ways, then the candle, the lamp will be taken from them.

Only one is sort of commended by Jesus. And guess what? That one is the one that's still a church today, surrounded by mosques in a highly Islamic part of Turkey where it's encircled completely. But the church still meets and Christians still gather today, 2,000 years later. Isn't that something? It's a point that's often missed. I don't know whether you've talked about it in your sermon series so far, but six of those seven churches don't exist anymore.

They're just tourist sites and archaeological digs. They lived, they existed in a world which was tough. They existed in a world which was dominated by Rome. They existed in a world where if you were Christian, you were persecuted.

[2 : 53] If you tried to do business as a Christian, you would find it very, very difficult. You would have to pay additional taxes. The Jews and the Christians both had to pay an additional tax to Caesar.

But Christians started, by the time these letters were being received, started to gain a little bit more of the persecution than even the Jews. And so the Christian church was being attacked, not only in Rome, but right across the empire.

And certainly in Turkey. And so the people that first received this letter, I imagine would have been thinking, is it worth it? Is it true?

When is he coming back? Is he coming back? We've been told that Jesus who rose from the dead and is alive again, will come back and wrap it all up. So where is he?

Is he coming? When will he come? And so this letter, this message, this revelation is given to them as a kind of an encouragement to keep going.

[3 : 54] Don't give in. He is coming. And what's really interesting about chapters 4 and 5 is they start at a high point. There's real hope in these chapters. The God of all history, the God of all creation, the God who did everything, all of this stuff, he is in charge.

He has authority and power. And all dominion belongs to him. Because hang on to your hats in chapters 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, and 20. Because it's going to get hairy. And you go to chapter 6, you'll see the saints under the altar who've been slain, crying out, how long? How long? How long? When is it going to end? And the answer comes, soon, but not yet. Just wait. Just wait. Because not all of those who will die like you did have died yet. It's like, if I was hearing that, you'd be thinking, what? You mean more of us are going to die and be martyred? And the answer comes, yes. And there's going to be terrible persecution. There's going to be awful things happen in the world.

[5 : 01] The world is going to get dislocated. There'll be earthquakes. People will suffer. But not only that, there are going to be spiritual explosions that will wipe out many. Really?

Yes, really. And so you can see, when John reveals this, how good is God to say, listen, this is the starting point. The starting point is that I am in control of all of that. Nothing is going to happen that is not in my will. And nothing will take place for which I don't have a purpose. It will be a rough ride. But guess what? That is sin and the impact of sin in this world. Do not for one moment think that it's only a benign kind of naughtiness that you have. It is cataclysmic. It's broken us. And what I have to do to bring us back together, just watch. Just watch this space.

[6 : 02] For the Jesus you believe in is the Jesus who will save you from your sin. And that's the only way. That is the only way to be saved from what's coming. So you look in chapter 4 and it says there in the first couple of verses, after this, I looked.

And John says, Before me was a door standing open in heaven. It's as if the heavens get ripped apart and God's hands are holding it there and says, Okay, John, pop up and have a look through here.

And so he lifts his head up and he looks around. And there he is, not just on the outskirts of the suburbs of heaven, but in the throne room of God. There he is. This voice calls out like a trumpet. Come up here and I'll show you what must take place after this. At once I was in the Spirit. So you know from what he's saying that what you're about to see is not something that we normally see. That is, it's not like watching a bird fly past or watching a car drive past. It's not that kind of seeing. You're seeing me. I'm seeing you. It's not like that. It's a vision that he's given.

[7 : 13] But it's not like our visions either. It's not like our dreams. My dreams, they're crazy. What are your dreams like? Do they ever make sense? Do you ever get frustrated when you get up having had a very real dream?

It felt like it was so real. And then as you explain it to someone, you realize this is crazy. This makes no sense. There is no logical connection. I can see people smiling because you know your dream, right?

Yeah. Well, that's not what this is either because John is awake. He's having the dream, the vision, but he's awake. And so he's invited up.

What did he see? What did John see? Well, John looks in to this throne room and he has what he calls his apocalypse. It really is the word for reveal, a revelation. It all gets peeled back so that he gets to understand and see what's happening. And so in this vision, what he sees is God sitting on the throne.

[8 : 16] In chapter four, there he is. There is one on the throne. One on the throne. One. God has won on the throne. And yet, as he goes on, you'll discover there's someone in the middle of the throne.

Well, on his lap. How does that work? What John has revealed to him is that the God who is on the throne is the God who is Father, Son, and Spirit in one. And so just as he begins to describe that, how do you describe? Here it is, boys and girls. We're going to find out what God looks like. He goes into these colors. He describes a rainbow that's emerald that's around the throne. And then he describes this one on the throne who's like Jasper. Well, Jasper, did anybody Google it during the day just to test me? I invited you this morning.

No? You can safely go Google, then images, Jasper, and you'll see it ranges from orange to green. And it's kind of like a diamond in that it gets all this sort of clarity and stuff.

[9 : 23] It's an amazing stone. That's the stone that he, like, that's what God's like. Not like a rock, but that he's just a range of colors and incredible in luster.

But also deep red. Deep red, like a ruby. See, John chooses things that we will understand to describe the incredible majesty of a God we can never imagine.

I'm okay with that. Are you okay with that? I figure that if this God could make a universe with more stars, planets, and universes, then we can count.

He can put them there and name them. He can put them there and sustain them. He can put them there and use them. Then I figure he's probably a little bit cleverer than me. Yesterday, I put up some sun-tuff roofing stuff just in a deck at the back of our house.

And it rained last night. And although I thought I'd secured it so that it would be waterproof, it's not. I've discovered. I can't even put up sun-tuff.

[10 : 35] How could I ever imagine a God who could suspend a galaxy? Do you really think you can work him out? Do you really think the guys who write the books, like Richard Dawkins, who was so arrogant as to say God is a fairy tale, could ever work him out through their human philosophy?

Never. Never. This vision shows us. Well, listen to the words. Before me is a throne with someone sitting on it. The throne is a symbol of rule, jasper, a symbol of value, of beauty, carnelian, deep red. But there's so many Old Testament images here as well. The rainbow is a reminder of God's faithfulness. He promised he would never flood the world again after the ark.

He never has. His word holds. If he says it, he will do it. He will keep it. He is entirely faithful. Entirely faithful.

And so as John looks, he's reminded of that. But not only that, around this throne, there's also these flashes of lightning and peals of thunder, which is just like Exodus 19. When the Ten Commandments were about to be given and God came down to speak to the people, to talk to Moses.

[12 : 02] What was it like if you're looking up at the top of the mountain? Thunder and lightning. Go back and have a look at Exodus 19. That's what John sees in the throne room. Can you imagine it?

A rainbow and thunder and lightning on this throne. There's so much happening. But then around the throne are seven blazing torches. Now seven, the number seven is going to come up again as you keep going through Revelation.

Number seven is the number for completion. It's done. And it harks back to Genesis 2. How many days in the week? Yeah, six to make it and one for rest.

You know why? Because God had completed creation on the, oh, seventh day was the day when he rested. Because it was done.

All that had to be done was completed. Seven is the number of completion or perfection, of fulfillment. It's why later in this book, and you'll come across the beast with the number 666.

[13 : 04] I remember back in the 80s when bank card was introduced. So many people who want to get all the detail out of Revelation and turn it into something, said, look at the symbol, the logo for the bank card.

But it's three B's inside each other. But really it's the number 6. And then again, 6. 6. But I'm preaching to an audience that's never even seen a bank card logo, right? For those of us who remember the bank card logo, it wasn't the sign of the beast.

The sign of the beast is that he's not God. 666. 666. It's really close to 7. But it's not.

He tries to be 6 once. He tries to get to 7. He doesn't make it. So he's 6 again. He tries to get to 7 again. And he doesn't. He's 6. 666. He's not God.

He tries to be, but he's not. He has the appearance of God, but he's not. And around the throne are these seven lamps. There's no more light needed. This is all the light you need to perceive and understand the truth.

[14 : 10] This is the light of God emanating out. And it's done by the Spirit. The Spirit is the one who will enlighten you. Wow. See what John's doing here? God the Father on the throne has the Spirit sending the truth out to the world, to everybody, so that they can know, and then we get a glimpse of the one who is in the middle of the throne.

Not sitting on God's lap. He's actually in the center. On the throne. With the... John, this vision is crazy. What were you drinking?

Nothing. This is from God, so that we will understand where he is, who's in charge, and what it is. So, it is an image.

The next thing you see are the 24 elders who are around the throne, representing the 12 tribes of Israel and the 12 apostles, the redeemed of the Old Testament with the redeemed of the New Testament.

We'll all be there. And they've got crowns on their heads, and they're sitting on thrones, which is fulfillment of the promise that God gave to people, that you will be involved in my kingdom.

[15:18] You will rule with me. They've got little crowns to prove it, because a crown is a sign. I'm in charge. I'm the ruler. That's what it means. And then there are these four living creatures.

Watch over the next few chapters how many times four is mentioned. Four is the number that says it's everything that's been made. The four corners of the earth. Did you know there are no corners to the earth?

You've heard that expression, right? Yeah, well, get a photo from the moon or something. You'll see the world is a ball. It's round. And balls don't have corners. So that expression, well, it comes from this.

It actually comes from the idea of the four different things that are happening constantly. And that covers the whole of the created world, the one that we live on, the globe that we stand on. And the four living creatures that are here represented are a lion.

And this is the most noble, the royal, all the royalty of earth, all the nobility of earth, all those famous and capable ones who are noble.

[16:23] Not many in Australia, I don't think, but there you go. Then there's the ox. We still use the expression strong as an ox, right? An ox represents strength. The strongest people that have ever existed.

The strongest ones of the world ever. And then there's man who carries the image of God made in the garden as the one who would bear the image as God's co-regent.

He says, all of this I've put in submission under you. You look after it. It's your job. That's your responsibility. And then there's an eagle. The eagle is the creature which flies highest and fastest in all of creation.

Have you ever been around any Anglican churches? We're doing that a lot lately. And we find, you haven't got one, but in many churches, the bookshelf for the Bible is, guess what?

It's an eagle. And I remember saying to Donald Robinson when he was Archbishop, he said, you could ask any question. I think he was meaning for us to ask him questions about doctrine or the New Testament or some of those wise things that we were learning.

[17:27] And I said, yeah, I've got a question. How come the eagle is in so many churches? Like, who chose the eagle and not, I don't know, a chook or some other bird of dignity and nobility?

He said, oh, really? Do you not understand? I said, no. And I looked around my year group. None of us understood. So he said, the eagle flies higher than any other creature.

In all of creation, none go higher. And what's above the eagle? The Word of God. The Word of God is sovereign over everything. So that's why we have eagles in churches.

A little bit of trivia that I didn't tell anybody at any of the other services today. So glad you came tonight. But he's the eagle that represents the greatest, fastest in all of creation.

And all of these things in all of creation come together. Now, does it really, is this really what happens? I mean, does God really sit on a throne? No. Is he literally translucent and going from green to orange?

[18:29] No. Is he deep red? No. Is he a ruler? Yes. Is he beyond description? Yes. Should he be worshipped? Absolutely.

Absolutely. Do you worship him? Because you know what? In heaven, all these beasts worship him. It actually says, if you heard the description, that they're covered in eyes.

Now, how does an eagle fly if it's covered in eyes? Like, I can't work that one out. But again, this is imagery. We're not being given a photograph. We're being given a painting.

You know those paintings like Monet did and even Frederick McCubbin. We went to Melbourne. The Australian Gallery down there, the National Gallery in Melbourne, has got all these fantastic paintings.

And one of them I knew really well. It's in three panels. And it's a story in the panels of early settlers. And in the first one, there's a photo, a painting, not photo, a painting of the couple arriving in the

bush.

[19 : 26] And then in the middle, he's building the house. And she's in the background sort of doing the washing or whatever. And then in the last one, she's sitting beside his grave. And it's kind of that sad story that, wow, that's what happened.

And it's a beautiful, do you know the painting I'm talking about? You see it? What's amazing, if you go up close to it and you see her sitting with her hands on her lap, there's no fingers. You stand back, fair dinkum, you think that there's fingers there.

You go up close and there's no nose in there. All that is just sort of blobs of colour. You stand back and it all comes together. That's what John's doing here. He's using images to give us an idea. Words so that we can understand. And he's written it in a way so that people who are being discouraged, who are facing persecution, could cope. They were being reminded by him in this incredibly pastoral message that God cares for them.

He knows the trouble that they're in. He knows what they're going through. And he wants them to know he is in charge. He is sovereign. He is almighty. And all these creatures have eyes all over them so that they will have insight and understanding.

[20 : 37] And what do they do, these ones with insight and understanding? They cry out, holy, holy, holy, three times. And if you're here this morning, you'll know what the three times means.

I'll tell you again for those who won't, because you're hanging out to find out why, right? In English, we would say big, bigger, biggest. But in Hebrew and Sanskrit and Aramaic and many other ancient languages, even some modern languages, the way you give emphasis is you repeat it.

So you would say, for someone who is absolutely, extremely holy, holy, holy. For someone who is really rich, they're rich, rich. For someone who is really strong, strong, strong.

For God, he's holy, holy, holy. Now, as soon as you would say that, people who spoke that language would go, what? How could you be holy, holy, holy?

That's holiness that's beyond. That's exactly right. Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come.

[21 : 45] Who was in eternity past. Who is in the present day. And who is to come. The future. This is the God of all history, of all time.

Notice the three times? Was, is, is to come. The stress that he's making here to understand that this one is the one forever.

And they take off their crowns and they throw them down. Because they're saying, the power and authority that I have, it's nothing compared to your power. I'm no one compared to you.

And so they bow down and they worship to their Lord and God. Paul Barnett, who's written a book on this, says you've got to consider those words, Lord and God. Because these people lived at a time when the emperor who was ruling them, Domitian, he insisted on everyone calling him Lord and God.

It sort of pales compared to Team Australia, which is what Tony Abbott's come up with. And I'm glad because I don't think I could call Tony Abbott, Captain Abbott.

[22 : 52] You know, you, Captain Abbott. Domitian, however, said you will call me Lord and God or else you will die. You have to worship me. And if you believe in another God, that's fine.

So long as your other God is under me. For I am Lord God Almighty. Lord and God. It's no different to what's happening in Iraq.

Where Christians are being told, if you don't say Allah is the only God, you'll cut your head off. If you pay a tax, you can remain a Christian.

And you know what happened as soon as some of the Christians paid that tax? Their wives were taken and raped and their children were taken. What's happening today is no different to what was happening in Rome.

Look how far we've come in 21 centuries. Isn't it pathetic? Isn't it hopeless? This is our world. It's a broken and divided world.

[23 : 52] And we need a Savior. And Revelation 4 and 5 is saying to us, there is a Savior. He is on the throne. And this is who he is. He is a lamb.

He's a lamb. Well, I want a Savior. I want someone with claws and a bit of punch. And what do we get? A lamb. A little later in Revelation, you're going to hear about the wrath of a lamb.

Have you ever seen a cranky lamb? Really? Really? But the lamb is not only a lamb, which is cute and cuddly and soft and furry, of woolly.

This lamb has been killed. Of course we know who that is, don't we? In fact, as soon as I say the lamb of God, there's an image you already know, isn't it?

It's an image you understand that Jesus had to be sacrificed just as a lamb was sacrificed at each Passover. Why? Because our sins needed to be covered with blood.

[24 : 53] Someone's blood has to be shed for what you've done. Someone's blood has to be covered with blood. Here's the choice. Yours or someone else's. We lived for many years in Adelaide. And in Adelaide, I used to ride my bike to work every day in the city.

So the church was in the middle of Adelaide. And our house was out in the suburbs. And I used to enjoy riding in, riding out, riding in, riding out. And one day, I left my helmet in my office as I was riding home.

I don't know why. The helmet wasn't there. But you only have to go on a little bit of North Terrace before you get on the cycle track all the way to my home. So I jumped on my bike.

I was going up North Terrace, about to hang a left onto the cycle track, when a policeman went behind me. Yeah, that was just in case you were drifting off. And pulled me over.

Can you imagine that? I'm only about 100 yards from the church where I work, where everybody's coming in, going out. Red and blue lights flashing. And there's Chris standing there with his bike. And so this young guy, why did he have to be young?

[25 : 52] Got out and he came over and he said to me, I notice you've forgotten something. Yeah, yeah, yeah. I forgot my helmet. Come on, hurry up. I've got to go. He said, well, can you explain to me why you don't think you need to wear a helmet when everybody else in the state does?

I said, I know I need to wear the helmet. I'm sorry, I forgot my helmet. I must have left it in the office or at home. I'm not really sure. He said, well, there's a fine in South Australia for not wearing it.

It gets the book out. I'm thinking, please just book me. I don't want anyone from church to see me. And so he gave me a fine. I quickly put it in my pocket and then he let my tires down.

So I had to walk the bike home all the way. I got home. I was really happy and in a godly frame of mind. So Christian. And Belinda, my wife, said, what's wrong with you?

I let my tires on. I forgot my helmet and got this fine. And she said, how much is it? I said, I don't even know. I didn't even look. I pulled it out. And the top of the notice took my eye more than the bottom, which is where the dollar sign was.

[26 : 57] And at the top, you know what it says in South Australia when you get a ticket? Expiation notice. Expiation notice. And I looked at that and I went, how good is this?

This is going to be a sermon illustration for the rest of my life. It was only 25 bucks too. But the expiation notice, you know what that means? I went to church next Sunday. I said, I got given an expiation notice.

And some people, they're going, here, we saw you. Expiation notice means, brothers and sisters, I've got this fine that has to be paid. And anyone can pay it.

So who wants to step forward and pay it for me? No one did. But here's the thing. Jesus is our expiation for our sins. The sins that we have committed, the things that we have done wrong, Jesus says, I willingly paid for on the cross.

Everything. Wiped out. Forgiven. Done away. Chris Edwards. Your fine has been paid.

[28 : 02] Isn't that brilliant? That's why all the living creatures bow down to him. That's why the lamb is the one we need to focus on, especially as you see chapters 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 15.

All the way through. Where things get worse and worse. Remember this. The lamb is on the throne. He's taken away the sin of the world. And you can be forgiven.

And you get to chapters 20 and 21. And guess what? There is an incredible wedding where God brings us together forever.

Don't you want to be there? That's the wedding I want to go to. That's the wedding I'm going to be at. And it's the first wedding I will be at where I am the bride. How cool is that?

The ugliest bride ever. But in God's eyes, beautiful. What an incredible gift. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you that in your love and mercy, you paid the price we can't pay.

[29 : 05] You forgave us the sin that we have committed. And you've given us this word to assure us that you've got it all in your hand now and forever.

Amen.