

Revelation

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[0 : 00] There's been a fair bit of horror news lately. I think for me the tragedy of the Malaysian Airlines flights, or both flights, but certainly the one in recent times on the Flight 17, 17th of July, missile shot it out of the sky apparently.

Still working that one out. 298 people dead. A number of those are Australians. That sort of thing puts a sort of a shudder up your spine.

Having flown a number of times in the past, I couldn't think of a worse way to die really than to be up there in the sky and all of a sudden for your life to be gone or knowing that your life's about to end.

I actually witnessed a plane accident when I was 18. A plane crashed. A person was killed. And awful, awful experience to see that.

And it's planted clearly on my mind. I'll never forget the image of it. But to be part of something like this and to see the number of people that were impacted by this, no one would have seen it coming.

[1 : 13] But imagine you could. Imagine you did, in fact. Imagine that on the 16th of July, you got some information on the afternoon on the 16th of July about what was going to happen the next day.

And what if your wife or your son or your mother or your brother-in-law or your neighbour or your friend or some random person that you knew was going to be on that plane? Or, in fact, not even on that plane, but on any plane in the vicinity of Eastern Europe?

You knew that someone was flying back from Europe to Australia on a plane and you got this information that something terrible was going to happen. Would you not do everything within your power to use the information that you've received to help people avoid the destruction that was about to come?

It's pretty obvious. I would do everything in my power to make sure that people would avoid that destruction. And what the Bible tells us is that something is coming that's infinitely worse than Malaysian Airlines 17 and every other disaster you can think of.

It's eternally worse. It will impact every human being. The Bible describes it as the judgment of God. It's a terrible thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

[2 : 41] It's judgment. It's decisive. It's final. It's eternal. And what that information is meant to do for us is meant to shape the course of our lives now. And the question I want us to have in the back of our minds or in fact in the forefront of our minds as we look into Revelation chapter 1 right now is what would it look like for God to become the dominant reality of your life?

What would it be like for him, ultimate reality, to be the dominant reality in your life? What would it look like for the things in the Bible, God's revelation of himself, to be more real to us than the things on television or on the internet?

You see, God has revealed himself to accomplish that very purpose, that he would become the dominant reality of our life. God reveals himself so that we would know ultimate reality.

I fear, however, that because of what we, even what we read just now, was written so long ago that we've been lulled to sleep by just the ordinariness of our lives.

We've been lulled to sleep because one day ticks over to another day, ticks over to another day, ticks over to another day. Our senses have been dulled by the hundredth of day after day after day.

[4 : 04] And so what we need as Christians is to consistently be coming back, looking at the scriptures, reminding ourselves of God and how he sees things, how he sees reality played out, not how we see things.

We need to be convinced as Christians day by day in the humdrum of life that Jesus is reigning, that he is the risen king. We need to have him speak to the situations in our church.

We need to know that God is right now, he is right now in this very moment on his throne. He's in control in heaven.

He is worshipped by myriads upon myriads of heavenly hosts. We need to see the way that God is going to ultimately pulverize wickedness.

He will obliterate those who oppose him and he is setting up his kingdom. What we need is this book of revelation. It's exactly what we need.

[5 : 09] You see, God has given us this book of revelation so that we can see him in all his glorious mercy and justice, so that we can see that if you've got Jesus, you are so, so fundamentally blessed and so that we would live our lives in worship of him above everything else.

That's what we've got here in front of us in this book. You see, the message of revelation was essential for these very first recipients of this letter.

It's written first and foremost to Christians almost 2,000 years ago is living in the Roman Empire and they're facing the biggest nightmare that you can imagine. Revelation 1 verse 9 tells us that John was exiled on the island of Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.

So John, the guy who's written this, is representing Jesus and has got him into a whole heap of trouble. John's writing to the church, to the churches from exile.

He's writing from the island of Patmos. Now you can go to Patmos nowadays, it's only a fairly small island, but it's got about 3,000 inhabitants and it's full of five-star resorts and luxury villas.

[6 : 27] In John's day, it was a prison island, so he's there smashing stones without sledgehammers. And he's there as an old man sentenced to work in the quarries because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.

That is, what it's saying here is that Jesus was so real, so precious to John, that he would rather be exiled to a barren prison island than not represent Jesus.

John is typical, I think, and what he's experienced here is typical of the hardship of many Christians were facing in his time. They were feeling the full force of the Roman Empire.

According to the Roman writer Suetonius, the Roman emperor Domitian, who was the kingpin in the world at John's day, was both physically unimpressive and a moral catastrophe of a man.

He had many affairs with married women and eventually stole someone else's wife to be his own.

When his own brother Titus was hit with a serious illness, he ordered that he'd be left for dead.

[7 : 37] Another bloke, I think this guy was probably an actor or some kind of stand-up comedian or something like that, made some fairly harmless but humorous remarks about Domitian.

Everyone thought it was funny, except Domitian, so he had him executed. He seduced his married niece, got her pregnant. She then died from the abortion that he forced her to have. This moral catastrophe of a man, that's just some of the things, I mean, it just goes on from there.

He was sensitive about his baldness. He had a pot belly, spindly legs, and he demanded that the whole empire called him Lord God. And John is writing to a bunch of Christians who are suffering extreme hardship because they refuse to have this man say, I am your God.

They refuse to allow Domitian to be the dominant reality in their life. Now, many of you would be aware that Christians in northern Iraq right now are being severely persecuted by the militant group called the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, the ISIS group.

They've issued a decree offering Christians three options, either convert to Islam, pay a special tax, or be killed.

[9 : 06] And you've probably seen it on Facebook. They've painted a symbol on the houses of Christians so that they are identified. They've painted other symbols on the houses of other religious groups they don't agree with either.

And the ultimatum that was given to Christians was deadline for it was midday on the 19th of July. So choose that.

That's your choice. Either convert to Islam, special tax, which is confiscation of goods in the end, or die.

That's our brothers and sisters right now. That's what they're facing. And thousands upon thousands have fled and left everything.

Everything. And it must be a question that's in their mind. Would you not imagine of where is Jesus right now in amongst that if he is the ruler of the world?

[10 : 09] And I can only say that what we've read tonight would be a word of comfort and perspective for them as it should be for us as it was for these Christians in the first century in Rome.

The first thing that this revelation says that in spite of the terrible hardship that you're facing, you are truly blessed. Your life is one of blessing.

That's the first bit of perspective they need to see. They were blessed because God has given this revelation of Jesus Christ about what will soon take place. They're blessed because they can see ultimate reality.

They can see what truly is. They were blessed because God was giving them perspective and clarity not just on their present but in their future as well. They were also blessed because of what Jesus has done for them.

See verse 5. He says, To him who loves us. What a great word to say in these very first verses. Jesus loves them.

[11 : 08] This is in the present tense. It's not that just he loved them in the past but he loves them right now. Right now. And Jesus' love for his people led Jesus ultimately to lay down his life for them.

They are blessed because in laying down his life for them, verse 5, he has freed them from our sins by his blood. You see, those who sin, according to the Bible, deserve to die.

And death is separation from God. And Jesus' death cancels our obligation to pay the penalty for our sins to God so that we might in fact be reconciled to God and live forever.

And when you've got that, you've got everything. The blood of Jesus frees people from enslaving sin, lust and greed and pride and anger and everything else.

The blood of Jesus breaks the power of cancelled sin. We are blessed because of what we have in Jesus regardless of the circumstances.

[12 : 18] Verse 6 says, He has made us a kingdom and priest to his God and Father. That is, we belong to Jesus, we are his people and our allegiance is to him. We are blessed because the kingdom of Jesus cannot be overcome.

This blessing of love and forgiveness of sins that comes from Jesus is a secure blessing. No one can take it from you. Notice who gives it to us. Verse 4, From him who was and who is to come. Verse 5, From Jesus Christ, the firstborn from the dead and the ruler of the kings of the earth. Verse 6, The one to whom power and glory belong forever. Verse 8, The one who is and who was and who is to come.

the almighty. How good must John's experience of Christ be for him to declare this blessing.

You know, don't let this point miss you. John is sitting in a prison cell as an old man breaking stones for a living and he says, Man, how great it is to be in Christ.

[13 : 25] In spite of the way that Christianity will not advance you in the Roman Empire, in spite of the fact that knowing Jesus could cost you your possessions, land you in prison or cost you your life, you're blessed if you know Jesus.

John must think it is better to stand right before God by faith in Christ, forgiven and free of all of your sin than it is to have all of the Roman Empire bow to you.

John must think that there is life after this life in which the rewards for those who belong to Jesus will be superior to all the pleasures of sin in this present world.

This must have been an enormous comfort to John sitting in the island of Patmos. But it's also a comfort for the Christians in the Roman Empire.

and ultimately for us as well. The voice that he heard in verse 10 says in verse 11, write on a scroll what you see and send it to the seven churches.

[14 : 36] And so this vision John is about to get in the next number of chapters is meant not just for him sitting in the island of Patmos but for us too. The point of writing it down is to transmit to us the same kind experience that John has in seeing Christ.

John God has graciously given John this vision of the supremacy of Christ and all of history being in his hands.

And he writes it down so that we might see it too and so that we would be comforted as well. He appears to John and says write in a book what you see and send it to the seven churches.

John gets the vision we get the book about the vision. That is God wants to come to us as well through his word. He wants us to seek him in his word and know him by his word and gaze upon him steadily through his word so that we would know how blessed we are.

This is a revelation for imprisoned John for persecuted Christians in the Roman Empire and for our brothers and sisters right now in northern Iraq and for us sitting right here with our senses dulled.

[16:04] for us sitting right here who are suffering for those who are tired and weary and running out of steam and confused and disheartened and disenfranchised and insecure despite the circumstances you need to know how blessed you are if you are in Christ knowing how blessed you are we are called here to treasure Jesus to make him the dominant reality in our life.

Let's have a look at what John saw in verse 12. John turns to see the voice that was like a trumpet in verse 10 and what he saw was seven golden lampstands and Christ in the midst of them. Notice down to verse 20 at the end of the chapter for an interpretation of what the lampstands are. It says the mystery of the seven stars that you saw in my right hand 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.

So the vision of Jesus that John gets is Jesus among his churches among his people. Christ is standing amongst his churches.

He's not merely over the churches. He's not distant from the churches. He's in the middle of the churches. And John saw according to verse 13 one like a son of man.

[17:31] In Daniel chapter 7 verses 13 and 14 the term son of man or one like the son of man refers to a great ruler. This is what it says in Daniel chapter 7.

In my vision at night I looked and there before me was one like a son of man coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the ancient of days and was led into his presence.

He was given authority, glory and sovereign power. All peoples, nations and men of every language worshipped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.

And so what John saw when he saw this one like a son of man standing in the middle of the lampstands, he means that he saw someone who stands over the top of his kingdom with all dominion, glory and kingdom power.

It will be an eternal kingdom. kingdom, someone with authority over all nations, all peoples, who would rule forever and ever and ever and nothing can touch his kingdom.

[18:42] The one who stands among the churches is the one who received from the ancient of days, God himself dominion and glory and kingdom, rule and power and authority in heaven and on earth. That pretty much matches this figure that John saw in verse 13.

The son of man was dressed in a robe reaching down to his feet with a gold sash around his chest. The robe here is similar to the picture of the Old Testament robe where the priest wore.

The gold sash around his chest shows two things. It's up here around his chest, it's not around his waist and it's gold. The fact that it's gold shows that his priesthood is a highly valued priesthood and it is a great priesthood.

Jesus is not only the son of man from Daniel chapter 7 who receives everlasting dominion over all nations and people, he is also the final high priest who brings all the priestly work of the temple to the end.

There's no more need to sacrifice any animals to get right with God. Verse 5 says that Christ freed us from our sins by his blood.

[19:49] You see this priest is so great that he gave his own blood once and for all. For the sin of all humanity so that we might be reconciled to God.

He stands among the lampstands, he stands here by us today as one with authority and everlasting dominion, the one with final decisive forgiveness for our sins.

Then John sees in verse 14 that his head and his hair were white like wool as white as snow. And this is remarkable because Daniel chapter 7, you know, when John gets his picture of the one like a son of man in verses 13 and 14, a few verses further, earlier than that, God the father is described in verse 9, as I looked, thrones were set in place and the ancient of days took his seat.

His clothing was as white as snow and the hair of his head was white like wool. people. In other words, John is describing the son of man in terms used by God himself.

And so you put this picture together with the next thing that John sees in verse 14, that his eyes were like blazing fire. You see, the eyes of this son of man were not the clouded eye of fading glory.

[21:05] These eyes have eyes of sharpest clarity and purity. they miss nothing that happens in the universe and they are exploding with energy.

You see, we all know the drooping eye that's about to go to sleep. You know, you're trying to stay awake to finally get the end of the movie and the plot line. Or the resentful eye.

Or the grumpy eye. Or the half-shut eye with a scowl and a bad mood. We know the eye that is alive with wonder and excitement. hope and expectancy and energy.

Jesus' eyes here are described as flaming fire. What we see then is hair as white as snow and eyes like fire. You've got to know today 2,000 years after John saw this vision that Jesus is not tired, he's not burnt out, he's not fatigued.

His eyes are aflame with a flashing fire of inexhaustible energy and hope. He sees everything that has been and everything that will be. Nothing takes him by surprise that when Jesus thinks about his plans for you and for Paul's and for Australia and for Christians in northern Iraq and the nations of the world, beyond this day, he is not hesitant, he is not tired, he is not bored.

[22 : 31] his eyes are aflame of fire with utter exhilaration and passion and enthusiasm for the work that he intends to do.

His enthusiasm for his mission is as bright today as it was 2,000 years ago when John saw this. Notice also the bronze feet in verse 15, they are the feet of a glorious and mighty conqueror and again in verse 15 is the voice of the sound of many waters.

It's just a picture of raw power, the thunder of the voice of authority and then there is this right hand with the seven stars and a sharp sword coming out of his mouth and his face, shining with the sun in all its brilliance.

What do you do when you're confronted with such power and majesty and splendor and just sheer awe? verse 16, verse 17, when I saw him I fell at his feet as though dead.

I fell at his feet as though dead. This is the resurrected, glorified Christ and the person who's writing this, the person who fell at his feet as though dead is John.

[23 : 53] John. Just a matter of decades earlier, John was Jesus' best mate. John was the guy when the moment of quietness was there, Jesus would gather John with him.

John was the one who leaned on Jesus and had a nap. Sam doesn't do that for me. Not even on a long flight.

That's how close John and Jesus were and John sees Jesus here and he falls down as though dead. I am not worthy to be in your presence. This Jesus is not to be trifled with.

He's not to be treated with disdain. Domitian might be the emperor of the Roman Empire but he's a librarian compared to Jesus. And to John's immense relief, his once best mate leans over to him.

The judge, the king, the majestic eternal ruler places his hand on his right shoulders and speaks words of comfort to him, do not be afraid. See, this is a word of comfort for Christians struggling in this world.

[25 : 10] Do not be afraid. This is astounding words of comfort for a prisoner of the Lord Jesus.

This Jesus stands with his people suffering terribly in Iraq right now and from this word you can say do not be afraid.

Someone greater than ISIS is here. The encouragement here is that despite how it looks, Jesus is with his church, he's in Iraq, he's right here with us right now as the son of man, the one with power over all that is, seen and unseen, the one with everlasting dominion and glory.

He is the great high priest and he has put away your sins once and for all. He is the great and wise ancient of days and yet his eyes are aflamed with the fire of youth and energy and hope and exhilaration for his unstoppable plans for you and for his church and for his world and for his universe.

gaze upon Jesus and let his royal power and his priestly forgiveness and his fiery hope fill you with confidence afresh that treasuring this Jesus and making him the dominant reality in your life is not a vanity.

vanity. It is never a vanity to throw your lot or everything behind this Jesus and with this Jesus.

[26 : 47] You see the most significant feature of this passage is the overwhelming glory of Jesus.

He is risen, he is indestructible, he is unconquerable, he is Lord and as such he summons forth obedience and allegiance and worship from his blessed people.

Jesus is to be worshipped, he is to be obeyed because of his surpassing worth and power. And John intends this book of Revelation to produce a radical change in perspective for us, for everyone.

Is your gaze consistently upon Jesus? Do you preach this gospel to yourself every day and remind you that you are so blessed regardless of the circumstances in your life?

That you are so blessed because of Jesus. Are you announcing to everyone who will listen how blessed it is to know Jesus? Are you calling people to taste and see that this Lord is good? Do people see it in your life, in your values, in your priorities, in your attitude, and your perspective, that Jesus is the dominant reality of your life? Let me read to you something that was written.

[28 : 09] So, John gets this revelation, sends it to the churches in Rome. Let me read you, to you, how the Christians in Rome responded to this revelation.

This is one writer reflecting on the Christians at this time of enormous persecution. They loved everyone, but by everyone they are persecuted.

They are unknown, yet they are condemned. They are put to death, and yet they are brought to life. They are poor, and yet they make so many rich.

They are in need of everything, and yet they are bound in everything. They are dishonored, and yet they are glorified in their dishonor. They are slandered, and yet they are vindicated. They are cursed, and yet they bless.

They are insulted, yet they offer respect. And when they do good, they are punished as evildoers. And when they are punished, they rejoice as though they are brought to life.

[29 : 13] And so Christians were punished daily. And so Christians, when punished, daily increase more and more. don't miss what that quotation communicates.

These Christians live in a way that says that knowing and treasuring Jesus is better than everything. It's better than freedom from persecution.

Knowing and treasuring Jesus is better than avoiding martyrdom by denying him. Knowing and treasuring Jesus is better than money and status. Knowing and treasuring Jesus is better than fame.

Knowing and treasuring Jesus is better than doing evil to avoid persecution from criminal governments. You see, when Christians joyfully embrace Jesus as the dominant reality of their lives, through difficult times especially, it causes their numbers to increase.

When Christians treasure Jesus by joyfully showing by their lives that knowing God is so immensely good, others want to know such a God.

[30 : 27] Is Jesus the dominant reality in your life? And do others see it? Let's pray. Father God, we pray that you would help us to see Jesus.

Give us a glimpse of his majesty, of his worth. earth, we ask that we would be a church that lives out what we say that we exist for, to know, to treasure, to represent Jesus.

Help us with pray. Give us such a glimpse of your glory and your purposes that he might become the dominant reality of our lives. grace. We pray for our brothers and sisters in Iraq, right now and in many other places in the world, where they are not dulled to the senses of what the cost is in following you.

Father, we pray that you would pour out your spirit upon them so that they might see Jesus in all his splendor, that they might feel his hand upon them.

they might hear the words from your word by your spirit to their hearts, their minds. Do not be afraid. We ask it for your glory. Amen.