

Treasure Jesus in 2018

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[0 : 00] It'd be great if you had a Bible in your hands at the moment. So if you don't have one, put your hand up. And they are busting to get you a Bible. So put a hand up anyway to give them something to do.

That would be fantastic. Has anyone not got a Bible? There's one down here, fantastic. One over there. Anyone else not got a Bible? Everyone else has got... Over here, we've got a couple over here.

Girls over this way, this is brilliant. Couple over here, keep your hands up. They will get them to you. There's one there, one at the back here. Another one over here. I know they're running around the back out through there. They're going everywhere.

Just keep your hands up, they'll get to you. Over there. They're Chinese Bibles. I give up.

I always say don't work with animals and children. That's fantastic. Wonderful. Okay, we're all good? Brilliant. Brilliant. Chinese Bible. There's a Chinese one?

[1 : 00] You don't want a Chinese one. You want an English one. A Chinese Bible. You want a Chinese Bible. Oh. There's one over here. Brilliant. Fantastic.

All right, we're settled. Hopefully. Give them a round of applause. Thank you for helping out today, kids. Okay, so what would it look like for God to become the dominant reality in your life in 2018? What would that look like? What would it look like for the things in the Bible to be more real for you than the things on the television, the things in the newspapers, the things on the internet and social media?

What would that look like? See, what we can be confident of is that God has revealed himself to accomplish that very thing.

God reveals himself so that we might know the way things actually are, that we might know reality. And yet, for some of us, we are just falling over the finishing line of another year.

[2 : 22] That's what it feels like. I think for some of us, it's so easy to be lulled into sleep by the ordinary day-by-day life that we have.

It feels like we're on a treadmill. Our senses can be dulled by the humdrum of one day after another day after another day. And so what we need, as we close off another year, is we need to see God. We need to be convinced that Jesus is reigning as the risen King. We need to have him speak to the situation, whatever it is that we're facing in our lives.

We need to hear him speak into the situations of our society and our country and into this church. We need to know that God is right now on his throne.

And as we have sung, he is in control in heaven. He is worshipped by myriads upon myriads of the heavenly host as the infinite God over all.

[3 : 34] We need to see the way that God will pulverise wickedness and injustice. He will obliterate those who oppose him. And he will set up his kingdom for the joy of all who trust him.

And so this book of Revelation and these verses which Wendy just read out to us is exactly what we need as we come to the end of 2017. God has given us the book of Revelation so that we can know his glorious justice and his mercy and see how blessed we are.

And so that we might live lives that worship him by faith. And the message of Revelation was essential for his first recipients.

You see, this was written first and foremost to Christians almost 2,000 years ago. They're living in the Roman Empire and they are facing the biggest nightmare that you can imagine.

Revelation 1 verse 9 tells us that John, the writer of this, the one who receives this vision from God, is exiled on the island of Patmos.

[4 : 47] And it says, because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. And so John has been representing Jesus and it got him into a whole lot of trouble in the first century.

John's writing to the church from exile on the island of Patmos. Now these days, today, you go to the island of Patmos and there's about 3,000 inhabitants there.

And it is full of five-star resorts and villas. In John's day, it was a prison island. Very different circumstances.

And John, as he receives this vision and he writes these words, is an old man. He's sentenced to work in the quarries because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.

And Jesus was so real and so precious to John that he would rather be exiled on a barren prison island than not represent Jesus.

[5 : 57] And John is typical of the hardships of many Christians were facing in his day. They were feeling the force of their society.

They were feeling the force of the Roman Empire wanting to squeeze them out. According to the Roman writer Suetonius, the Roman Emperor Domitian, he was the emperor when John wrote these words.

He was both physically unimpressive and a moral catastrophe of a human being. He had many affairs with married women.

He eventually stole someone else's wife to be his own. When his brother Titus was hit with a very serious illness, he ordered that he just be left on the side of the road for dead.

Another bloke, called just the kind of a guy, made some sort of harmless but humorous remarks about Domitian. Everyone thought it was funny except Domitian.

[7 : 02] And so that joker was executed. This man seduced his married niece, got her pregnant, and then she died from the abortion he demanded that she have.

And this moral catastrophe of an individual was sensitive about his baldness, as most guys are. He was sensitive about his pot belly and his spindly legs. But he demanded that the whole empire refer to him as Lord God.

You call me God. And John is writing to Christians who were suffering extreme hardship under his hand because they refused to give a Roman Emperor that kind of worship.

They refused for Domitian to be the dominant reality in their lives. And this is what the churches were facing when this revelation came to John.

[8 : 14] And so this is a word of comfort and it's a word of perspective. And the first thing that this revelation says is that despite the terrible hardship that they were facing, God wanted to know that they were truly blessed.

They were blessed because God had given this revelation of Jesus Christ of what will soon take place. They were blessed because God had given them perspective and clarity on the present as well as the future.

They were also blessed because of what Jesus had done for them. Verse 5 of chapter 1 says, To him who loves us. Jesus loved them.

That there is in the present tense. Jesus loves his people right now. Even with Domitian, he still loves his people.

And Jesus' love for his people led him to lay down his life for them. They are blessed because in laying down his life for them, it says in verse 5 that he has freed us from our sins by his blood.

[9 : 30] You see, those who sin deserve to die. And death, ultimate death, is separation from God. And Jesus' death cancels out our obligation to pay the penalty for our sins to God.

That we might be reconciled to God and live. And so the blood of Jesus, it says, frees us. It frees us from lust and from greed and from pride and from anger and from bitterness and grumpiness.

And every other enslaving sin. You see, the blood of Jesus breaks the power of cancelled sin.

Jesus didn't just come to save us. He came to change us. We are blessed because Jesus, as verse 6 says, made us a kingdom, priest to his God and Father.

We belong to Jesus. We are his people. Our allegiance is to him. We are blessed because the kingdom of Jesus cannot be overcome. Notice who the security is in this blessing.

[10 : 44] See who it is that gives us the blessing. 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. To the one whom power and glory belong forever.

Verse 8. The one who is and who was and who is to come. The almighty. The one who is ruler from eternity to eternity. How good must John's experience of Christ be for him to declare this blessing? In spite of sitting in a prison cell as he writes it. In spite of the ways that Christianity will not advance people in Roman culture.

In spite of the fact that knowing Jesus could cost you your possessions, your land. Put you in prison. Cost you your life. You're blessed if you know Jesus.

[11 : 59] John must think it's better to stand right before God by faith in Christ. Forgiven and free from all sin.

Than it is to have all of Rome bow to you. John must think there is a life after this life in which the rewards for those who belong to Jesus will be infinitely more superior than all the pleasures of sin in this present world.

And God gives John this revelation. Not just for John. But for the seven churches of Asia. John got the vision.

And he took... Jesus told him to write it down so that we could get the vision. He gets the vision. We get the Bible. You want to see Jesus as John saw Jesus?

You need to have your face planted in the Scriptures. That's why week after week after week I say to you, have a Bible in your hand. You won't see Jesus otherwise.

[13 : 21] And so if you're sitting here today and you've got your face planted on Facebook or something else, get off it. Get off it. Jesus is infinitely more important to you right now to hear him.

He gives a rip what the Sydney Morning Herald thinks. Don't feel too embarrassed right now to get to a Bible. God gives John this revelation, not just for John, but for the seven churches of Asia.

And the voice he heard, verse 10, says in verse 11, write on a scroll what you see and send it. It's meant for us.

This vision of Jesus is meant for us right now. He appears to John.

Write it in a book. What you see. Send it to the seven churches. John gets the vision. We get the book. I want to keep making that point. John gets the vision. We get the book. Do you declare yourself to be a Bible-believing Christian?

[14 : 46] Don't claim it if your face is not in the scriptures. Don't claim it just because you sit in a church that declares to be one of its core values of Christ-centered Bible saturation.

See, this God wants us to come to him through his word. He wants us to seek him in his word, to know him by his word, to gaze upon him steadily through his word, so that we would know how blessed we are.

Your perspective will go in a million different directions unless you are constantly getting the perspective of Jesus that the scriptures give us.

This is a revelation for imprisoned John and persecuted Christians in the Roman Empire and for Christians in North Korea and a thousand other hard places in our world and for us right now.

For those who are suffering, for those who are tired, for those who are weary, for those who are running out of steam, for those who are confused, for those who are disheartened, for those who are disenfranchised, for those who are spiritually dry, for those who are insecure about where they stand with Jesus.

[16 : 09] Despite the circumstances, we need to know how blessed we are if we know Jesus and are known by him. Knowing how blessed we are, the call here is to persevere in treasuring Jesus even when it is tough.

Let's look at what John saw. Verse 12, John turns to see whose voice it was that he heard that sounded like a trumpet. But that's a fairly natural response, I'd imagine.

And what he saw was seven golden lampstands and Christ in the middle of the golden lampstands. And verse 20 is the interpretation of the lampstands.

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.

And so the vision of Jesus that John gets here is that Jesus is amongst his churches. And as you know, if you're around here recently, seven is the number of fulfillment, completion.

[17 : 25] This is a revelation of Jesus amongst his church. His complete church. And Jesus, he's here.

Christ is standing among the churches. He's not merely over the church. He's not distant from the churches. He's not standing on one side. He's right in the middle of the church.

And it says that John saw, according to verse 13, one like a son of man.

And he gets that term from Daniel chapter 7 in the Old Testament, where in verses 13 and 14, it talks about the son of man or one like a son of man, who's referring to a great ruler.

He's a great ruler. This is what it says in Daniel. In my vision of man, I looked. And there before me was one like a son of man coming with the clouds of heaven.

[18 : 26] 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. So when John says, I saw one like a son of man standing in the middle of the lampstands, he means that he saw someone with dominion and glory and kingly power.

That's what he saw. Someone with authority over all nations. Someone with authority over all peoples. One who would rule the world forever and his kingdom would never be destroyed.

The one who stands amongst the churches is the one who received from the ancient of days dominion and glory and kingdom rule and power and authority in heaven and on earth.

That's what John saw. And in verse 13, this son of man, it says, was dressed in a robe, reaching down to his feet with a golden sash around his chest.

[19 : 42] The robe here is similar to the robe in the Old Testament, which is almost always refers to the robe of the high priest.

And the gold sash around his chest signifies two things. The fact that it's high, not down here, it's actually up here, around his chest.

And the fact that it is gold shows that this priesthood is very, very great. Jesus is not only the son of man from Daniel 7, who receives everlasting dominion over all nations.

He is also the final high priest who brings all the priestly work of the temple to an end, where he mediates between God and humanity. There's no more need for any animal sacrifices.

This priest is so great that he gave his own blood once and for all to put all sin once and for all, to deal with it all, put it all away by the sacrifice of himself.

[20 : 55] And he stands among the lampstands. He stands in his church, with his church. And he is with his church today as one with authority and everlasting dominion and one with final, decisive forgiveness for our sins.

And then John sees in verse 14 that his head and his hair were white like wool, as white as snow. Now this is remarkable. Because in Daniel chapter 7, where John gets the picture of the one like a son of man in verses 13 and 14, God the Father is described like this in verse 9.

In other words, John is describing this son of man in exact same terms that Daniel describes him, describes God himself.

And you put this picture together. And the next thing that John saw was the end of verse 14, and his eyes were like blazing fire. The eyes of this son of man were not the clouded eye of fading glory.

They were the eyes of sharpest clarity and purification. These eyes miss nothing that goes on in his universe.

[22 : 42] They are exploding with energy. All of us know the drooping eye that's about to go off to sleep and you have the nodding head.

We all know that experience. And we know the role of the eyes and the resentful eye and the grumpy eye and the half-shut eye of the scowl and the bad mood.

And we know the eyes that are alive with wonder and excitement and hope and expectancy and energy.

They're generally children. And Jesus' eyes were like a flaming fire. Hair as white as snow.

Eyes like fire. So we've got to know 2,000 years after John saw this vision that Jesus is not tired. He's not fatigued. He's not burnt out.

[23 : 41] He has not lost his energy. 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. And when Jesus thinks about his plans for you, about his plans for St. Paul's, his plans for this country, his plans for this world and for Christians of all the nations, he's not hesitant.

He's not bored. He's not tired. His eyes are aflame with fire, utter exhilaration and passion and enthusiasm for the work that he is bringing to completion.

John also happened to notice the bronze feet in verse 15. They are the feet of a glorious and almighty conqueror.

And again in verse 15 is the voice like the sound of many waters. It's the picture of just sheer raw power, the thunder of the voice of authority.

[24 : 48] Then there's the right hand with the seven stars and a sharp sword coming out of his mouth and his face shining like the full strength of the sun.

What do you do when you're confronted with such power and authority and splendor and majesty and glory and awe?

What do you do when you see that? Verse 17 is what you do. This Jesus who we play with, John says, 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, this judge, this king, this majestic eternal ruler, reassuringly in verse 17, places his right hand on him and speaks a word of comfort.

[25 : 57] He says, do not be afraid. Do not be afraid. What a comforting hand. I don't know what your circumstances are right now, but that comforting hand is on your shoulder when you turn to Jesus.

Do not be afraid. These are incredible words of comfort for a prisoner of the Lord Jesus. This Jesus stands with his people.

The encouragement here is that despite what it looks like, Jesus is with his church. He's with us as the son of man, the one with power over all that is, both seen and unseen.

The one with everlasting dominion and glory. He is the great high priest that has put away the sins of his people once for all. He is the great and wise ancient of days. Yet with eyes that are aflame with the fire of youth and energy and hope and exhilaration for his unstoppable plans for you, for his church, for his world.

So gaze upon Jesus. Let his royal power and his priestly forgiveness and his fiery hope fill you with confidence afresh that treasuring him is never a vanity.

[27 : 23] It is never a vanity. It is never a vanity to throw your lot in with him. And there are some here, I confident, who are hedging your bets either way.

Make a decision. Cross the line. Throw your lot in with Jesus. 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 worship from his blessed people.

He is to be worshipped and he is to be obeyed. He is to be treasured because of his surpassing worth and power. And so what John intends for the book of Revelation, as Jesus intended for the book of Revelation, is to produce a radical change in perspective for us.

As you look back on 2017, ask yourself, and as you think about the area, is your gaze consistently upon Jesus?

[28 : 40] Do you daily preach the gospel to yourself of how blessed you are? Do you know daily how blessed you are? Are you announcing to anyone who will listen how blessed it is to know Jesus and to be known by him?

Are you calling people to taste and see that the Lord is good? Do people see it in your life and the values and the priorities and your attitude and your perspective? Do they see the radiance of Christ displayed in your life despite the circumstances?

Do they see that? Do they see that? This was written about Christians. Let me read to you what was written about Christians not long after Domitian's time.

They love 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.

[29 : 52] 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, and yet they offer respect.

When they do good, they are punished as evildoers, and when they are punished, they rejoice as though brought to life. And so Christians, when punished daily, increase more and more.

Is that you? You? Don't miss what this communicates. These Christians live in a way that says that knowing and treasuring Jesus is better than freedom from persecution.

Knowing and treasuring Jesus is better than avoiding martyrdom by denying him. Knowing and treasuring Jesus is better than worldly possessions of money and wealth. Knowing and treasuring Jesus is better than fame.

Knowing and treasuring Jesus is better than doing evil to avoid persecution from a criminal government. You see, when Christians joyfully obey and worship and treasure Jesus through difficult times, this causes their numbers to increase.

[31 : 17] You see, when Christians treasure Jesus by joyfully showing by their lives that knowing God is this good, it is this good, others want to know that God.

They want to know, what have you got? So if you are stuck in a rut with your relationship with Jesus, maybe you've not planned to grow with him for years, maybe you've just kind of given up on him doing any change in your particular life, I want to encourage you as you enter into the new year to make a plan to treasure Jesus more in 2018.

Every staff member of St. Paul's does it. By the end of January, they have to submit a master plan for their life, not just for their work, for their life, for the upcoming year.

The changes that God is going to bring in their life that they want to see God do. What would it look like for this Jesus that we see here in Revelation 1 to be the dominant reality in your life in 2018?

Plan your run with him for next year. See what he will do. Pray that many more people encounter him as you treasure him. That's what we're seeking to do as a church in increasing measure in this next year.

[32 : 41] We are desperate for more people to encounter Jesus and treasure Jesus. May it happen because we're doing it.