

Revelation 1:1-20 // Meet the Real Jesus

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Preacher: Martin Ayers

[0 : 00] That's 1,233. And before I do the reading, I'm just going to pray. Lord, thank you for your words.

Thank you for blessing us with your words. And Lord, I pray that you would bless us with ears to hear and eyes to see what you're saying to us.

And Lord, I pray that you would prepare our hearts, that our hearts would not be hard when hearing your words.

Lord, I pray this in your name. Amen. Okay, so Revelation chapter 1, beginning at verse 1. 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.

[1 : 12] 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 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 pierce 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.

[2 : 35] 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.

I turned round to see the voice that was speaking to me, and when I turned, 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 as wool, as white as snow, and his eyes were like blazing fire. His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace, 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.

[4 : 02] 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. Thanks be to God for his words. Thank you so much, Jack, for reading.

If we've not met, I'm Martin, the lead pastor here. There's an outline inside the notice sheet, if you find that helpful, as we turn to this portion of the Bible. And if you could keep your Bibles open at Revelation chapter 1, that would be a great help.

[5 : 16] It's page 1,233 that Jack was just reading from for us. And Jack's already prayed, so we'll dive in. Some years ago, there was an award-winning advert for a newspaper.

I looked it up, actually, this week, and it's won some award for being one of the best adverts of all time, where it showed a clip of a man, and he was the sort of guy that the public stereotype of him would be that he was edgy.

You know, he was a skinhead. He had, like, a leather jacket on, like the stereotype of a thug. And he was running. He started running down a street towards a well-dressed man who was further away walking away with his back turned, holding a briefcase.

And he put his arm out to grab the guy, and the guy turned and, frightened, held up his briefcase to shield himself. And it paused.

And the voiceover said, seeing things from one angle gives one impression. And you thought, this guy's getting mugged here. I can see that.

[6 : 23] And then it replayed the scene from the other side, and what happened was that what you couldn't see first time was that there was, like a platform from some builders full of stonework and bricks up in the air above this guy with the briefcase.

And it was losing its balance. It was held aloft by a chain, and it was about to topple. And so this young guy with a shaved head had spotted down the road this danger, and had set off sprinting, and grabbed the man in the suit, and he pushed him out of the way just as the bricks fell to kind of save the guy's life.

And so the big idea was, when you see the bigger picture, it completely changes your perspective on what's happening. And the point was, read The Guardian, because that's how you kind of change your perspective on what's going on.

Now, I will leave it up to you whether you feel The Guardian is your way of seeing the big picture, but we all get that, don't we? This idea that there are times when new information, seeing things from a different angle, would completely change how you interpret what's happening.

And for our world, for our news, for our own lives, we get that opportunity together here and now with this book, Revelation. We looked at the first half of Revelation as a church this time last year, and we're going to pick up the second half in the coming weeks, but not all of us were here then.

[7 : 58] And those of us who were here, not all of us will remember everything that was said. And some of you are here for the first time tonight, which is a great thing. So you're just taking a look at Jesus.

So to help us kind of get back up to speed with Revelation, we're looking at chapter one this evening. And our first point is that John reveals to us the bigger picture. And we learn in verse one that though I've said it's John revealing to us the bigger picture, there is a chain in this revelation to us.

And John is in the middle of that chain. If you just have a look at verse one, 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.

So whenever we hear information, we have to gauge, don't we, is this someone I should listen to? Do I trust this voice? Recently as a family, we were getting on a train from Annie's Land where we live to Glasgow Queen Street.

[9 : 10] And we got to the platform that I'm accustomed to using to getting that train. And a guy on the platform overheard us as a family saying we get this train to Queen Street from this platform.

And he said, oh, are you going to Queen Street? You're on the wrong platform. The train you want, that train over there on that platform, that will get you to Queen Street much quicker than staying on this platform.

And we had to make a decision. Do we trust this guy? Do we change our plans? Because this guy says there's a different way. And if you think about it, that's the kind of thing we have to decide all the time in life.

Is this a voice worth listening to? If you think about whether you follow advice from the media, from advertising, maybe just from your peers about the way to go in life, or from a parent, from a family member.

Well, we are to listen up, says John, because what we read in Revelation is not just John's take on life. the words we're engaging with have come from God to Jesus, to an angel, to John, because

God wanted them to come to us.

[10 : 23] And that word revelation in verse one is literally the word apocalypse. That's the kind of root word. And it's a word that, confusingly today, we use to mean the end of the world, don't we?

That's how we use the word apocalypse. Catastrophe. So with the fires in Los Angeles, the headlines have said this week, the scenes were apocalyptic. I read one writer who lives in LA saying that because when you live in Los Angeles, there are earthquakes, and you're prone to tsunamis, and now there are wildfires, you generally live with a sense of impending apocalypse about your life.

So there you are, if you want that kind of life, but if you otherwise stay in Glasgow. But the word apocalyptic there is being used in a way that means like the end of everything.

But really the word apocalypse means uncovering. It means unveiling. There are things that are real and true that we can only know about if they are revealed to us.

That's the reality of how we find things out. And that's what this book Revelation does. It reveals, it strips back what's hidden from view.

[11 : 44] It takes away the things that are hiding it to reveal mysteries we wouldn't already know. And it comes to us as a book with a particular style. So when this writer John writes his own account of Jesus' life, the Gospel of John, he writes in plain English, well, as we have it translated, in plain language about what he saw before his very eyes about Jesus.

As though he's saying that what I saw, that the man that I touch with my hands, this man, I'm explaining to you what happened. But when, in this book Revelation, that same writer is revealing things that are beyond our experience and he's kind of describing what to us would be unimaginable, he uses this different style of writing that we also get elsewhere in the Bible where it's highly visualized and lots of the pictures are symbolic to reveal deeper realities.

He uses language in the way that might be, it's true but not necessarily literally true. A bit like if you were describing a boxer in the ring and you said, you know, he had the feet of a ballet dancer and his fists were made of iron.

It would be a way of graphically describing the strength of that boxer and their agility. And John here uses numbers symbolically as well. That's good for us to understand if you look at this chapter. So in verse 4 he talks about how this letter is addressed to seven churches in Asia which is now modern day Turkey and they are real churches in real situations as we meet in chapters 2 and 3 but the number 7 is a Bible number for completeness and so there's a sense in which this letter is written for the church through the ages for all Christians everywhere.

[13 : 36] And in verse 4 it describes the sevenfold spirit but as we get there we'll see that it's the complete it's the spirit of God the one spirit of God being described there as the sevenfold spirit.

So numbers and pictures being used with these deeper meanings to reveal hidden realities. So let's going let's get going and in verses 4 to 8 first we find God reveals to us through John who he is as one God and three persons starting with a reigning father the reigning father.

Look halfway through verse 4 again with me. Grace and peace says John to you from him who is and who was and who is to come.

Now if you're here just looking at the Christian faith I guess this is a moment just to ask yourself whether you're willing to be open to the idea that God is real and God is there because that is behind the revelation claim here that God is the reason that there is something rather than nothing and we're not going to find him through our own discovery or exploration or science.

He is the very reason that science is possible. He is the maker of all things and our only hope of knowing that the truth about that God is if he chooses to make himself known to us and wonderfully he has done that.

[15 : 04] He has done it here. In verse 4 we meet God the Father and we find that he is all powerful. You notice at the end of verse 4 that he talks about his throne and if you look down at verse 8 at the end it says the Almighty.

That's God the Father and he is everlasting in verse 4. He is the one who was and who is and who is to come. Now the first heroes of Revelation they really needed to be reminded of that about God. John was writing this probably about 85 AD sometime around then and it's a time when the Roman Empire was turning up the heat on followers of Jesus.

One temptation was to be seduced by Rome. Rome was wealthy and prosperous like no empire had been before and to throw in your lot with the Roman Empire would mean potentially alluring

pleasure and security from being citizens of Rome and loyal to Rome.

And so there's a temptation there to give up on the claim that Jesus is the risen Lord of all because that was unacceptable in the Roman Empire. So you could be seduced by Rome but the other temptation was to be terrified as a Christian by the authorities in Rome as Christians were being driven from their homes they were being dispossessed they were being set fire to alive they were being thrown to wild animals for people's entertainment how easy it must have been for Christians to be in terror and to give up their claim to follow Jesus Christ.

[16 : 49] And Rome at that moment seems undefeatable it seems eternally powerful. In Ephesus one of the cities that gets addressed in this letter the church in Ephesus is addressed in chapter 2 in Ephesus archaeologists have found graffiti from around this time on walls where people had written Rome your power will never end.

But God here reveals the wide angle lens that says it's only God who is almighty and it's only God who will last forever.

And that would have been hard for them to believe in the Roman Empire just as we need to hear that today that neither America nor Russia nor China nor Iran nor their leaders are almighty and none of them will last forever.

They might seem unstoppable today they will fall like the Roman Empire did. God is almighty God is everlasting and that is deeply reassuring if we trust him.

So that's the reigning father we meet at the beginning of the letter and secondly this message is from the everlasting the ever present spirit that is very brief but just in verse 4 there where it says grace and peace to you from him who is and who was and who is to come and from the seven spirits before his throne.

[18 : 20] In other words the spirit of God through whom God is present with his people wherever we are whatever we're going through. And then thirdly we hear that this greeting is from the rescuing son in verse 5.

If you just look there and from Jesus Christ and he's described for us the faithful witness the firstborn from the dead and the ruler of the kings of the earth.

So he's the faithful witness he is the ultimate revelation of God to us. We want to see what God is like we go to him as he went to the cross. It's stunning to think his fullest revelation of what God is like was that he came to serve and suffer.

And then the next clause he is the firstborn from among the dead. He didn't stay dead that on the third day when the women went to the tomb where Joseph of Arimathea had laid the body the stone had been rolled back the tomb was empty and then he was seen alive again by the people who had followed him.

So he is gloriously the firstborn from among the dead. He smashed death to bits and he rose to rule. So verse 5 goes on that he is now the ruler of the kings of the earth.

[19 : 39] You see that? And then we hear what his rescuing work means for you and me if we put our faith in him. It means that we are loved, verse 5, to him who loved us.

And this is the secure bedrock of every Christian's life. We heard Emily speaking, didn't we, just earlier about the difference it's made in her life that every Christian can say whatever we're going through I am loved by Jesus.

He died for me and you are freed he says to him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood.

Jesus has liberated us from being under the penalty that we were due for everything we've done wrong and as well as being free from the penalty of sin we're free from its power as his spirit comes to live in our life and move us to be holy for him.

So we're loved and we're freed and we are commissioned by Jesus in verse 6. He has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father.

[20 : 45] And so maybe you're here tonight and you feel a sense of purposelessness about your life a sense of meaninglessness a sense of not quite knowing what life's got in store for you. The universe doesn't tell us what we're here for but when we come to Jesus he gives us a new identity as citizens of his kingdom his righteous kingdom that we would live under his rule and make him known and reflect his righteousness and enjoy the blessing of knowing him and together we are his priests.

You see there that word in verse 6 not being used to describe church leaders but being used to describe everyone who trusts Jesus because we can all pray to God and we can all make God known to others.

we can stand in the gap between people and God. So we live in the present loved freed commissioned and in verse 7 we're told of the next big thing that's going to happen in human history.

Verse 7 look 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 our men. Now here what John is doing is he's taking sometimes revelation is a bit of a bit of an enigma but the key to cracking it is in our hands because it's the it's all about the Old Testament and the better you know what had already been written before Jesus came in the Old Testament the better we can get this and here John is taking prophecies from Zechariah and Daniel from centuries before Jesus and explaining that they're going to be fulfilled because Jesus is coming back and we have a song about this actually we have several songs where we mention Jesus coming again that we sing at church and one of them about Jesus being this lion and the lamb says the first line is he's coming on the clouds we know that one some of you you're thinking you can't sing but I do know what you mean he's coming on the clouds but notice Jesus isn't coming on the clouds here he's coming with the clouds this is Jesus with the glory cloud of God all around him like a chariot for God as he comes and it's the glory cloud so he's bringing the glorious presence of God back to earth because we're in exile from the presence of God at the moment and Jesus will come and he'll restore all things and he'll make everything brilliant because the presence of God will fully and finally come into our world and he'll dwell forever with the people who've been waiting for him and longing for him so let's just think of how this changes our perspective when we look at the news at the moment it might look like chaos reigns in our world and we might feel very anxious about the way things are going maybe we worry that we're heading for geopolitical chaos war extending across Europe conflict with China conflict in the

[24 : 06] Middle East escalating we might have climate change anxiety worried about the impact of the way we're treating the planet lots of us are worried about AI and how that will affect our lives things may seem worryingly uncertain well the bigger picture of Revelation chapter 1 is that God reigns and at just the right moment Jesus is coming and he'll bring the glorious presence of God to our world and he'll make all things new for those who trust him and who belong to his kingdom so that's our first point we've heard what God is like at the start of this revelation this letter and now John has an encounter with the risen Jesus that's our second point John meets Jesus face to face in verse 9 we hear that he's on this island of Patmos exiled there for being a Christian himself and in verse 10 he hears a voice commanding him to write down this revelation so he turns to look at where the voice is coming from verse 12

I turned around to see the voice that was speaking to me and when I turned I saw seven golden lampstands again seven that number for completeness and he says and among the lampstands was someone like a son of man now the lampstands here represent the churches John gives us that well Jesus gives us that actually in verse 20 Jesus assuring us here that every church no matter how hard things seem no matter how hard pressed they are he is present with them he is among the lampstands he is with us here tonight and the drama of what happens to John as he turns and sees the son of man among the lampstands comes in two parts we're going to think about the Jesus he sees in 12 to 16 and then about the impression that leaves on John so first of all what he sees he sees Jesus as Lord of all in verse 13 he describes him he says he sees one like a son of man and our key again here is the prophet Daniel centuries before he was given a dream where great empires of history were depicted in Daniel's dream as four beasts and they all came and went they all had limited lives the Greek empire the Persian empire the Roman empire we could add many more empires that have been and gone through history and then Daniel saw one man the son of man going on the clouds into the very presence of God himself and this man is given by God an everlasting kingdom that is universal he says all authority and glory and sovereign power are given to this one man so that people from every nation will bow to him and when we read the gospels the accounts of Jesus life we find that

Jesus preferred term for himself again and again is that he is the son of man he is that one that Daniel had seen and then we see here that John sees him now as a son of man but then things take this dramatic turn in verse 14 John says of the son of man he sees of Jesus he has hair white

like wool and eyes like blazing fire and feet like heated bronze and a voice like rushing waters and the extraordinary thing here is that in Daniel 7 those are the descriptions not of the son of man but of God on the throne as he gives the son of man authority in other words Jesus in heaven if we could see him now fulfills both sides of Daniel's vision as a man he is the all conquering ruling forever king and he is also divine himself the glorious divinity of God

God himself radiates emanates from Jesus and so we could ask ourselves did we know that this is what Jesus is like as we go about our lives this is what he is like now as we meet here tonight as you know walk around Bray Head or Silverburn doing your shopping Jesus is like this you know if we know anything of Jesus we might be able to picture him as a baby at Christmas in a manger we might picture him depicted suffering on a cross in churches or we might see him as meek and mild you know like holding a lamb in an artist's romantic picture of him there's one guy who was giving his own story of becoming a Christian American guy who grew up in a downbeat part of his city that was quite edgy and he said that he saw pictures of Jesus when he was a child and he used to think to himself whoever this guy is he wouldn't stand a chance in my neighborhood in other words why would I be willing to throw my lot in with him is he strong enough well those pictures do depict something true about Jesus that he is gentle he is very gentle when we come to him in faith but John's vision here of what Jesus is like now tonight corrects us if we are to think that things can match up to Jesus here he is victorious ascended he is the champion of heaven verse 16 in his hand are seven stars there are a picture there of he's got complete power and control over the whole cosmos he holds it in his hands and John sees this sharp double edged sword this is the judge of the whole world with the sword of justice and he'll judge with his powerful words with his true discerning piercing powerful words and it's appropriate to think you wouldn't want to be on the wrong side of this man how awful that would be to go our way tonight and and not respond rightly to him and then meet him not as a saviour but as a judge that would be that would be an awful thing if he is this awesome but if this man is on your side you really have nothing else to fear that's who John sees he is awesome and John is totally overwhelmed so that's our next scene in the drama John is struck down but not consumed have a look with me at verse 17 John says when I saw him I fell at his feet as though dead he's overcome he crashes out and that shouldn't be a surprise to us this happens to people when they have an encounter with the glory of God when Moses wanted to see God God said to him that he wouldn't be able to look on the glory of God and live when Isaiah had a glimpse of God a vision of God that kicks off Isaiah's prophetic ministry God is so awesome that he's high and exalted and even just the train of his robe fills the whole temple and Isaiah collapses and says water me I am ruined Daniel collapses when he sees God Ezekiel is totally overwhelmed by his vision of God in verse 16 there it says that his face is like the sun shining in all its brilliance it's a good picture of us isn't it of what it's like to see that kind of glory if you were to stare at the sun for long enough directly then when you look away you'd never see anything again because of the effect it would have on your retina and so it is with any true experience of the glory of God because God is so holy his creative brilliance his majesty his blazing purity and there's a great tragedy here in the human condition because we were made by God with hearts to be satisfied by experiencing

[32 : 49] God's glory by knowing him by seeing him if you think about the things that thrill us in life that give us a sense of awe and wonder it's often things that are transcendent that are so much greater than us it's being in being in the natural world it's seeing the mountains seeing the stars at night these things give us a sense of awe or when we see morally beautiful things or we see great achievements these things give us a sense of awe and these things are all taken up and fulfilled in seeing God in knowing God and yet because of our weakness and because of our sin we can't behold him and live so the big shock here is not that John collapses as he sees Jesus it's that John doesn't die from his vision and here we see the magnificent grace of Jesus his tenderness demonstrated with a physical touch verse 17 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'm alive forever and ever and I hold the keys of death and Hades Jesus can offer John life with him because of Jesus death and he makes the same offer to each of us he offers us life in all its fullness because it's life with Jesus seeing God's glory in Jesus and it's life that lasts those words again Jesus says don't be afraid look I'm alive forever and ever in other words see him raised and have confidence that he has the power to give you life forever when Jesus rose from the dead he was like a prisoner who broke free from

the prison of death and he didn't just do it for himself it's as though he broke free from his cell and as he walked out he went into the security room and he grabbed all the keys so that he can go back and unlock every cell for his people so that for each of us here he makes this offer that's too good to refuse he promises us whatever you've done the day you come to me whatever your sin whatever your shame you will find you are loved by me you are freed by me you'll be raised back on your feet by me and you will have life forever look at me he says risen from the dead and trust that with me on your side you will live even though you die because I can unlock the gates of death and pull you back out and I'll do it for all my people to be with me forever so folks our time is gone but as we close let me just bring us back to the promise at the beginning of the chapter in verse 3 have a look there again that John says 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 so Jack was really pleased he was on the rotter to read tonight because verse 3 says he is already blessed he got to read it out but for the rest of us the promise is that we're not necessarily blessed tonight by having heard it we are blessed if we take to heart what is written so let's keep coming back perhaps you're here tonight as a guest would you join us next week as we continue in revelation would you come this

Wednesday evening to the life course to keep looking at Jesus we've had a glimpse tonight of what that blessing is that's on offer in verse 3 it's the blessing of knowing what the future holds do you see that at the end of verse 3 because the time is near in verse 4 it's the blessing of grace and peace from God you see that grace and peace from God the Father who is and who was and who is to come in a world that looks chaotic we can have God's undeserved favour his grace we can have peace the peace of knowing everything is right between you and God in verse 5 there is the blessing of being loved by Jesus freed by Jesus from our sins commissioned by him verse 6 and in verse 18 the blessing is nothing less than life forever with a saviour who's defeated death let's make sure nothing gets in the way of us taking to heart God's word of revelation of grace and of life Amen we're going to sing together in response to what we've heard Ailey and the band will lead us in song