



Week 1

A series in REVELATION

15 June Monday

Read Revelation 1:1-3

The word 'revelation' means 'unveiling'; a revealing of something that has been hidden or secret. This book is a 'pulling back the curtain' on things to come, on reality, on what is really happening. One commentator writes, 'Revelation may be viewed, as an extended commentary on Paul's statement in **Ephesians 6**: "for our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of the dark world, and against the spiritual forces in the heavenly realms."'

It came to John (likely the disciple John and likely around the turn of the 1st Century) from Jesus Christ, as a blessing and encouragement to those who heard it. That is to say that it was meant to be pastorally encouraging and useful for all that the early church were facing and had ahead of them. It is helpful to remember that it was not firstly written to us, but instead to them, those churches in the 1st century, in imagery and concepts that they would have understood. However it is for us, and so we prayerfully want to digest all that the Lord is saying to us today through it.

One question to keep asking as we read is, how does this encourage me to live as a disciple of Jesus in a world that often flows the other way? Rather than getting too confused by the bits that aren't immediately easy to get clear about, or even worse, discouraged(!), prayerfully draw out a simple encouragement from the passage.

How does the idea of *unveiling*, of seeing behind the curtain, challenge and encourage you with regards to the way you see and live in the world?

16 June Tuesday

Read Revelation 1:4-8

John is writing to 7 churches in Asia. And this introduces us to the significance of numbers in this book. 3 and 7 are both numbers for completeness. He writes to 7 real churches, but the numerical specificity suggests they are also 'representative of the whole'. He then greets these churches with a series of 3's; the greeting is from Father, Spirit and Son; Jesus is described as true, alive and 'ruler of the kings of the earth' (evoking Psalm 2 and Psalm 89); and it is he who loves them, freed them and has made them priests. The final section utilises language from the Old Testament book of Daniel (Ch. 7) as John looks to the return of Jesus. This introducing us to another important interpretative tool: the Old Testament. Revelation makes heavy use of Old Testament imagery.

For those struggling under Roman persecution, how might seeing Jesus as 'the ruler of the kings of the earth' have struck them? What about us today?

17 June Wednesday

Read Revelation 1:9-16

John speaks of suffering for faith in Jesus and receiving a vision from him. It is in fact both from Jesus but also about Jesus. We are introduced here to the nature of prophetic and apocalyptic literature; it heavily uses imagery and symbolism. Here the lampstands represent the churches (as we see later in the passage) and Jesus is spoken of in Old Testament language (but also Jesus' own language at times) as the 'son of man'. This vision of Jesus is central to these opening chapters and indeed the whole book. With much symbolism, use of simile and metaphor, Old Testament referencing and compelling imagery, Jesus is pictured as the Messiah and divine Son of God, with divine wisdom, power, steadfastness and penetrating vision. Every bit of imagery draws us towards Jesus, who is powerful. And yet, not in the way of the world. The sword, for example, a weapon and symbol of war, is not in his hand but coming from his mouth; he does not conquer through military violence, but instead his 'faithful witness to God's saving purpose'. Jesus came 'proclaiming' the Kingdom of God, telling the good news, sharing the gospel; the 'sword of victory' was in his mouth and words.

What strikes you as encouraging here?

18 June Thursday

Read Revelation 1:17-20

Here John falls at Jesus' feet. This is a familiar way to respond in the Old Testament for those who encounter the supernatural. But Jesus calms him with his touch and words, 'do not be afraid'. Each of the following phrases continue to communicate important things about Jesus: 'the first and the last' is a description of God in the Old Testament (from Isaiah 41:4; etc.) and so a restatement of Jesus' divinity; the 'one who was dead and now alive forever' shows him as the very same Jesus whom John knew, who was crucified and rose again; 'holding the keys of death and hades', speaks of his authority. Keys were often worn as a sign of status and power, here Jesus has power even over death, he himself conquered it, but not only for himself in his resurrection but also for all humanity – he alone can unlock its doors for all creation.

This 'lofty' vision of Jesus is in complete harmony with the Jesus who is described as 'gentle and lowly' in the gospels, who washed his disciples feet and said that he calls us 'friends'. **Do you tend to see Jesus in one way rather than another?** Be encouraged that when you pray you come to both friend and King of Kings! There are times we need the comfort of a friend and times we need the comfort of a king. When facing hard things, as they were, both matter.

19 June Friday

Read Daniel 7:1-14 (for context)

Take some time to notice the Old Testament backdrop to images and phrases that John uses in the book of Revelation. For those to whom it was originally written, these things would have been immediately clear. They would follow the images like hyperlinks that open up an whole world of meaning, perhaps in a similar way to how the mention of 'marmalade sandwiches' might draw our thoughts to Paddington and that whole story, or how the image of Sauron's eye, immediately transports us to the world of The Lord of the Rings.