

Revelation ch 1. The Risen Christ

How do we who believe in a God of love come to terms with the suffering in the world? And how do we declare a message of hope and joy when we ourselves are being persecuted?

One way to respond to these real dilemmas is to read and be instructed by the Bible's book of Revelation. Some are frightened off by Revelation's violent imagery which is a pity because in fact it was inspired and written to encourage real believers like you and me living in the real world which at times is dark and cruel. Revelation was written in dark times to people who were suffering and its central theme right from ch 1, put very simply is this:

Christ is risen triumphant over death and evil and rules on high. He holds the keys and exercises final authority over all that happens. He knows those who belong to Him and He will not abandon us. As Hell seems to break loose and lash all around us like a fierce animal in its death throes, King Jesus stands with His Church and says, "Don't be afraid".

Let's look together at four things in the opening vision in ch 1:

- The Messenger John
- The actual Author Jesus
- The Addressees to whom the message is sent
- The Message itself

1. The messenger John. This is John, son of Zebedee, brother of James one of the Galilean fishermen whom Jesus originally invited to be a disciple. He had accompanied Jesus throughout His ministry and written an eyewitness account which we have in his Gospel. He had been on the mountain with Peter and James when Jesus was transfigured and appeared momentarily in similar glory to now. He had stood with Jesus' mother Mary within sight

of the cross and looked after her afterwards. He had seen Jesus raised from the dead, received the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, served as an apostle, an evangelist and later a church minister in Ephesus. He wrote a number of letters, 3 of which are in the New Testament. But it wasn't all pleasant or easy.

Not long after Pentecost his brother James was executed by Herod. And now as an old man John had been exiled to solitary confinement on the tiny island of Patmos. It was the last decade of the 1st century AD and the Roman Emperor Domitian, like the infamously cruel Nero back in the 60's, had instigated a systematic persecution of the Christian Church.

So John was not writing 'airy-fairy' words from a position of comfort and security. He was writing as a human being well-acquainted with sorrow and pain, to fellow sufferers. And here's a thought, God uses real people, as themselves, in real, sometimes complex situations to carry His message and fulfil His purpose. We don't have to wait until everything seems 'sorted' and tidy in our lives to be used by God. We can serve Him today, if we are willing!

2. Secondly, let's note the real Author behind the Book of Revelation and it's the Lord Jesus Himself. This message with accompanying instructions are the "testimony of Jesus Christ ... the faithful Witness", Who appeared and spoke to John and told him to record the message and distribute it to a number of congregations.

Look at how the Lord is described here with highly symbolic language. He is said to be shining brightly, suggesting divine glory, holiness and purity. His eyes are ablaze, seeing everything. He is dressed as a priest and we are reminded that the New Testament book of Hebrews describes Jesus as the *great* High Priest through Whom sinners like us may approach God. A sharp sword is pictured coming from His mouth and we remember that in his gospel John describes Jesus as the living

“Word” of God. He speaks God’s authoritative truth. And God’s Word, declared in the power of the Holy Spirit is a powerful weapon to cleave through the darkness and demolish evil strongholds.

Look how unique our Lord Jesus is! He is the Lord God, always has been, always will be. Who can compare with our Master? He is the first to be raised from death, never to die again and now He holds the keys – He has authority over who lives or dies. He is the First and Last. He was there with Father and Spirit, instrumental in creation and He is here drawing history to its climax. The end of the ages belongs to Him! For He is coming, this time in heavenly glory to judge the living and the dead. Every eye shall see Him, every knee shall bow, every tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

How could we offer worship to another? And how could we offer Him any less than everything we are and have in obedient service to bring honour to His name? How can we rise from this unmoved and unwilling to listen to what Jesus has to say?

3. Let’s take a moment to consider those to whom Revelation was originally addressed. John is told to write the message down and send it to 7 churches which are named as cities in the ancient province of Asia Minor (which is modern day Turkey). In chs 2 and 3 the Lord has specific words of commendation or challenge for each congregation. And we’ll find that these 1st century fellowships have individual characteristics which have recurred in churches all over the world through the last 2000 years. And considering that the central message of Revelation was of relevance to Christians suffering in Rome and elsewhere, we can take the message of this book to be for the Church in every age, in every place. This message is for us.

4. So before I finish, let’s return to the central message itself. What does the risen, glorified Son of God, our Saviour, have to

say to Christians suffering the pains and losses and sometimes persecutions of this fallen, dying world? He says: Don't be afraid. Don't lose heart. Don't abandon faith. Trust and keep obeying, for the end of the world, as its beginning, is in the nail-wounded hands of the One Who loves us and gave Himself for us.

This was not the first time Jesus said, "Don't be afraid". Numerous times in the Gospels He had had to reassure people. Listen to these words from Luke 12 v 4-8: "I tell you my friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that can do no more. But I will show you whom you should fear: fear Him who, after the killing of the body has power to throw you into Hell. Yes, I tell you, fear Him. Are not 5 sparrows sold for 2 pennies? Yet not one of them is forgotten by God. Indeed the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows. I tell you, whoever acknowledges me before men, the Son of Man will also acknowledge him before the angels of God".

Here is reassurance. Christians shouldn't fear unnecessarily. Evil will not have the last word. Let us be determined to have reverence for God first and foremost, whatever happens. Let's be encouraged that our once-wounded but now all-powerful Saviour stands with us but let's also be challenged for He wants us to be pure in the face of trial.

More instructions will follow in chs 2 & 3. Are we listening and willing to be instructed by our Master in Heaven? Are we preparing ourselves to meet our risen Lord?

To Him be the glory.

Amen

