

Dear Church

Look to Jesus - Revelation 1

The Book of Revelation is very different to most of the other books we find in the Bible. We know how to read the stories of the gospels and the letters to the churches but what about Revelation?

Take time to share how you feel about reading Revelation. Do you feel intimidated, confused or do you have fixed ideas of its interpretation? What is your experience of reading the book?

Revelation is a letter written to seven churches within the Roman province of Asia. In the early chapters we find a personalized letter to each of these churches. In this series we will focus primarily on these letters, what they meant to the original readers and what they say to us today. Revelation refers back to the Old Testament around 250 times so we will also read the book in the context of the whole Bible.

It is written in the age of the Spirit, after Jesus' death and resurrection and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on all believers. The best way to understand Revelation is to first ask the Holy Spirit to help your understanding and to remember that the book is:

1. God's word
2. a letter written to churches; and
3. all about Jesus

Read the first chapter of Revelation aloud.

God's Word

1. Trace the passage of these words from the origin of the revelation to us? What does this say about God? (Rev 1: 1-2, 11)
2. The book of Revelation is prophecy. Prophecy is God's message to a specific group of people, usually about judgement and salvation. What is this prophecy about? Is it relevant to us today? (Rev 1:19)
3. What are we encouraged to do with the prophecy in this book? (Rev 1:3)

A letter to the churches

4. Prophecy is normally spoken and perhaps later recorded. How does this book differ from the norm of prophecy? (Rev 1:11; 22:18-19)
5. What do we learn about the author and intended recipients of this letter? Rev 1:9-11
6. This book was written after Jesus death and resurrection, when Christians had spread throughout the Roman empire. Urbanisation had grown but the distribution of wealth was not equal. The seven churches lived under Roman rule when the emperor was considered to be divine in the region of Asia. Thinking about the context we live in what ways might we

relate to the original readers of Revelation? In what ways is our context different?

All about Jesus

7. The book of Revelation is also written in an apocalyptic genre. Most books of the Bible use images that are real (eg salt, lamps, fig trees etc) but apocalyptic books use images that are symbolic and have a hidden meaning. Read Rev 1: 12-16 again. What is the overall impression you get of Jesus from this imagery?
8. What else can we learn about Jesus in the first chapter of Revelation? (Rev 1: 5-7; 17-18)
9. What do we learn about God? (Rev 1:4, 8, 17) What encouragement does that give us today?

Pray Together

Take time to praise God who has revealed himself to us through Jesus and his word. Praise Jesus, magnificent in victory over death, alive forever. Praise the godhead, 'who was, who is and is to come'.

Dear Church

Don't forsake you first love - Revelation 2: 1-7

Even though the letters to individual churches are within the larger letter of Revelation each one follows a similar format and reads like a letter.

Greeting

1. Get out your phone/computer/travel diary etc. and do a quick search to see what you can learn about the ancient city of Ephesus. (See also Acts 19)

Title for Jesus

2. How is Jesus described in v1? (See also Rev 1:12-17) What does this description mean for us today?

What the church is doing well

3. What do we learn about the strengths of the Ephesian church? (v 2-3, 6)
4. Compare the Ephesian church with St Johns. What would Jesus commend us for?

Critique

5. What does a church look like that has lost its love for Jesus? (v4) How does St Johns measure up?
6. What does a church look like that has lost its love for each other and for people outside the church? (v4) How does St Johns measure up?

Warning

7. What three things does Jesus ask the church to do? (v5)

Promise

8. What is the promise Jesus gives if the Ephesians take the critique to heart and follow through? (v7) What is the significance of this promise for the Ephesians and for us today? (See also Gen 2: 8-9; Rev 22:14)

Pray Together

Take time to consider anything you think Jesus might be critiquing us as a community and as individuals for and bring them to God in repentance for his forgiveness and grace to change. Pray for his protection over us that all our acts of worship and service might be done in love.

Dear Church

Riches in Poverty - Revelation 2: 8-11

Greeting

1. Get out your phone/computer/travel diary etc. and do a quick search to see what you can learn about the ancient city of Smyrna. Where is it today?

Title for Jesus

2. How is Jesus described in v8? (See also Rev 1:17-18) What does this description mean for us today?

How was the church is doing

3. The church in Smyrna was made up of Jews who had become Christians. What do we learn about the challenges they faced? (v 9)
4. What are some of the challenges you are facing today?
5. In what ways was the church in Smyrna rich? (v9; see also Eph 1:7-8, 18)

Warning

6. The letter warns the Christians in Smyrna that they would be facing even more severe persecution. What form does persecution take in the world today? What have you experienced?
7. What does Jesus ask the church to do in the face of more persecution? Is that request still relevant to us today? (v10; See also Matt 10:28; Phil 2: 5, 8)

Promise

8. What is the promise Jesus gives if we and the Christians in Smyrna remain faithful through suffering and persecution? (v10-11) What is the significance of this promise for the Christians in Smyrna and for us today? (See also James 1:12)

Pray Together

Take time to pray for anyone you know experiencing suffering or persecution.

Dear Church

Beware False Teaching - Revelation 2: 12-17

Greeting

1. Get out your phone/computer/travel diary etc. and do a quick search to see what you can learn about the ancient city of Pergamum (we are interested in the time it was under the Romans). Check out how the natural geography of the place and its impressive temples placed high in the city, overlooking and intimidating to Christians.

Title for Jesus

2. How is Jesus described in v12? (See also Heb 4:12) Why was this image of Jesus appropriate for the church in Pergamum? What does this description mean for us today?

What the church is doing well

3. What do we learn about the strengths of the church in Pergamum? (v 13)
4. The book of Revelation in no way states that the Roman Governor ruling from Pergamum was Satan. What might this letter mean by the image of Satan having his throne there?

Critique

5. The question for the Christians in Thyatira was how much of normal civic life, including the festivals and worship of the Roman Emperor, can or should they take part in. They wrestled with the working out if there a way to just do enough without full involvement compromising Christian beliefs. The letter draws on the story of Balaam who rightly refused to curse the Israelites but then they were tempted by Moabite women. (found in Numbers 22-25:3 – don't get bogged down in this story, just skim it) In what way does the final temptation by the Moabite women achieve the same purpose a curse may have? What is the danger for us giving in to the temptation to compromise our faith?
6. The church in Pergamum had compromised in two areas, idolatry and sexual immorality (v14.) How does the church today measure up?

Warning

7. What does Jesus ask the church to do? (v16)

Promise

8. What is the promise Jesus gives if the Christians at Pergamum take the critique to heart and follow through? (v17) What do the images of manna (See also 1 Cor 10:1-12 and the word of encouragement in 1 Cor 10:13) and white stone with a new name (e.g. John 1:40-42) remind us of as Christians?

Pray Together

Ask God to show you any areas in your life where you may have compromised your faith. Pray for each other, specifically in areas where you are tempted and feeling pressure from the society around us in areas contrary to the Bible.

Dear Church

Beware Immoral Teaching - Revelation 2: 18-29

Greeting

1. Get out your phone/computer/travel diary etc. and do a quick search to see what you can learn about the ancient city of Thyatira. What was the city famous for? (See also Acts 16:14)

Title for Jesus

2. How is Jesus described in v18 (See also Rev 1:15 and contrast with an image of human power, Dan 2:33)? Why was this image of Jesus appropriate for the church in Thyatira? What does this description mean for us today?

What the church is doing well

3. What do we learn about the strengths of the church in Thyatira? (v 19)
4. What is suggested by the commendation that they were doing more than they did at first? (See also Eph 4:15)

Critique

5. Describe the false teaching taught by Jezebel v20 (See also her namesake I Kings 16:31; 2 Kings 9:22)?
6. The membership in a craft guild was necessary, in order to, conduct business in Thyatira but the guilds required attendance at pagan shrines where idol worship and sexual immorality were practiced. In what ways have you felt pressured or tempted to compromise your faith to fit in at work, in clubs, in your family or friendship groups?
7. Discuss how Christians can easily justify any compromise to their faith? (e.g. Gal 5:13; I Pet 2:16)

Warning

8. Notice that Jesus' response is in four stages: call to repentance (v21), discipline through suffering (v22), death or being cut off from the source of life (v23a), and judgement as witness (v23b). The language used is symbolic. What does it tell us about Jesus and his grace in situations of false teaching in the church?

Promise

9. What is the amazing promise Jesus gives if the Christians at Thyatira are victorious and do his will? v26-28 (See also Ps 2: 6-9; Matt 19:28; Rev 22:16)

Pray Together

Pray for St Johns and your Life Group, that we might recognize misleading teaching, repenting of giving in to it where that may have occurred and for discernment and strength to avoid it. Pray that we will grow in maturity in Christ showing love and faith, service and perseverance.

Dear Church

Wake Up - Revelation 3:1-6

Greeting

1. Get out your phone/computer/travel diary etc. and do a quick search to see what you can learn about the ancient city of Sardis. Check out the history around 547BC, an event the citizens of Sardis would never forget even down the generations.

Title for Jesus

2. How is Jesus described in v1? (See also Rev 1:19-20) What is the significance of the number 7 in the Bible?

What the church is doing well

3. What do we learn about the so-called strength of the church at Sardis? (v 1)
4. What does St Johns have a good reputation for? What about self-perception? What do we think are our strengths? Do our deeds match up to our reputation and self-perception?

Critique

5. What was the real problem of the church in Sardis (v1, 2; See also James 2:17)?
6. Jesus gives us 5 commands to remedy the situation. What are they? (v2-3 – Note: these are given in the present continuous tense, i.e. they are meant to be ongoing)

Warning

7. Why does Jesus warn the church of his second coming? What lesson should have been learned from 547 BC? (v3; see also I Thess 5:2; 2 Pet 3:10; Matt 24:43)

Promise

8. What is the promise Jesus gives to the Christians in Sardis who have not given in to complacency and sin? (v 4-5; See also Rev 20:12, 15; Lk 12:8)
9. While it is possible to fall into the trap of deeds left undone it is also possible to overcorrect. What is the danger of relying on our own deeds to be accepted by God? How does faith in Christ's work on the cross for us balance with our service for God? (See Eph 2:8-9; James 2:14-19)

Pray Together

Take time to things we at St Johns have a good reputation for. Give thanks to God for the areas of strong ministry and the volunteers that make them happen. Pray for protection against complacency and pray for the faith and spiritual life of staff and volunteers involved. Ask God how you can best support key volunteers and ministries.

Pray for members of your Life Group, particularly in areas the letter to Sardis speaks to you.

Dear Church

Keep Going - Revelation 3:7-13

Greeting

1. Get out your phone/computer/travel diary etc. and do a quick search to see what you can learn about the ancient city of Philadelphia. Check out some of the suffering the Christians experienced, e.g. persecution, earthquake. What are some of the name changes the city has experienced?

Title for Jesus

2. How is Jesus described in v7? (See also Is 22:22) What does this description teach us of Jesus?

How was the church is doing

3. What do we learn about the impact on the church of challenges they faced? (v 8-9)
4. How might the Christians have felt in a place so alien? How does the subtle persecution from those around us but open criticism from media in our changing world make you feel?
5. How have the Christians in Philadelphia borne the challenges? (v8b, 10a)

Promise

6. Our sense of belonging can feel under attack when people from our own identity group criticize or persecute us. What does Jesus promise regarding the Christians fellow Jews who did not hold to Jesus as Messiah? v9
7. In v 11-12 the letter uses different images in the future promises to victorious Christians. Reflecting on the suffering of the Philadelphian Christians how do each of the images including a new name offer strength and hope?
8. Reflect on these promises for us, in light of Eph 2:19-22.

Pray Together

Praise Jesus as sovereign over all things and give thanks for the hope we have for the future as Christians in his Kingdom. Take time to pray for anyone you know experiencing suffering or persecution now, that they may have strength to hold on without denying Jesus.

Dear Church

Don't be Lukewarm - Revelation 3:14-21

Greeting

1. Get out your phone/computer/travel diary etc. and do a quick search to see what you can learn about the ancient city of Laodicea. What was Laodicea famous for? (See also Col 4:16)

Title for Jesus

2. How is Jesus described in v14? (See also Col 1:16 - 17) What does this description mean for us today?

Critique

3. What does a church look like that is lukewarm in its love for Jesus? (v15 - 17)
4. How does St Johns measure up?

Warning

5. Notice how Jesus personalizes his message to the Laodiceans (and us). What three things does Jesus suggest the church at Laodicea needs? (v18) How do they relate to their problem and the background information you have found out on the city?
6. What does Jesus' discipline in our lives mean? How is that loving? V19 (See also Heb 12: 5-11)
7. The picture in v20 is for Christians. How does that speak to you?
8. Share how Jesus speaks to you and tips on how to hear his voice.

Promise

9. The ultimate goal of discipline and listening to Jesus is a transformed life. Why would that give us the right to sit on the throne with Jesus? V21

Pray Together

Has Jesus spoken to you as you have studied this passage together? Pray for any matters that need repentance and invite Jesus in to transform your lives.

Dear Church

Worship the Living God - Revelation 4

1. We often talk about people worshipping sport, music performers etc and use the word worship in phrases like hero-worship. For generations other cultures have worshipped idols, ancestors, aspects of the created world e.g. the sun. What does worship of things mean? Would you agree or disagree with the statement that human-beings were made for worship?

Read through Revelation 4

2. What are your overall impressions of worship as depicted in this chapter? [Hint: don't get bogged down with the detail]
3. How many times is there a reference to the term 'throne' and the one who sits on a throne throughout the chapter? What does this say about God? How would this encourage the 7 churches that we have been reading about in chapters 2 & 3? (See also Gen 9:12-17)
4. Who is with God? V4 (See also Rev 2:10b, 3:21) [The number 24 is representative of whole groups, probably referring back to the 12 tribes of Israel plus the 12 disciples and all they represent.]
5. Who else can be seen worshipping God? V 6b-9 [Hint: the lion, ox, man and eagle are used in Hebrew sayings to represent whole groups.]
6. Why is God worthy of worship and not us or other things? V10-11
7. As imperfect as our services together on Sunday are, how do they resemble worship found in Rev 4?
8. How can we worship God in the whole of our lives? (Rom 12: 1-2)

Pray Together (from The Prayer Book for Australia)

Father,
we offer ourselves to you
as a living sacrifice
through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Send us out in the power of your Spirit
to live and work to your praise and glory.

Dear Church

Worship the Lamb - Revelation 5

1. Have you ever been in a huge crowd when spontaneous, thunderous applause broke out. What did it feel like to be swept up in the moment?

Read Revelation 5 right through.

2. Revelation 5 is a continuation of the scene depicted in chapter 4. What do you already know about some of the images used in this chapter?
Elders (see Rev 4:4)
Lion of the tribe of Judah, root of David (Gen 49:9; Isaiah 11:1, 10)
Lamb (John 1:29)
Seven eyes and horns (Zec 4:10)
Scroll - The rest of Revelation, in particular Rev 6 tells us that the scroll contained God's plans for the future restoration of all creation.

Read through the whole chapter again.

3. Rev 5:1-4 Notice who is holding the scroll. What was the problem? Why could there be no human (or human philosophy or idea) worthy of opening the scroll? (See also Rom 3:9-12)
4. Rev 5:5-10 Why was the lamb worthy of opening the scroll?
5. The elders and creatures fell down in worship of the lamb. Why is Jesus, the lamb, worthy of the same praise as God? (Rev 5:13; Jn 1:1)
6. Notice the language used in worship of God and the lamb (Rev 4:8, 11; 5:9-10, 12, 13). How does our worship compare? What might be hindering us from full, exuberant worship as seen in this chapter?

Pray Together

Use the words in Rev 5 to worship Jesus and God.

In Rev 5:8 our very ordinary prayers are now appearing as wonderful sweet-smelling incense. Take time now to bring your concerns to God.