



SEVEN SEARCHING LETTERS

REVELATION 1-3

Small group questions

Revelation 1 "The Revelation of Jesus Christ"

Leaders – this is the only sermon in series for which discussion questions will be produced. I'm suggested you don't meet next week, but urge people to come on Wednesday 14th at 4pm or 7.30pm to hear the first Lenten study. For the weeks in Lent following, the questions will be on the Lenten studies.

1. How have you felt about the book of the Revelation in the past?
2. What was the point of showing the political cartoons at the start of the sermon?
3. On the first page of the sermon printed below, just before Mark introduced the outline, recall the four things Mark said are important to remember as we read Revelation.

The Revelation

4. What is a 'revelation'? What is the source of this vision?
5. Who are the people you typically envy? What does it mean when it says we will be blessed if we read it and take it to heart? What measures can we take to ensure that we well and truly 'read it and take it to heart'?

Of Jesus Christ

6. Read vv5-6. What is the most central and significant theme of this book?
7. Jesus is described as – witness to the truth, firstborn from the dead, ruler of the Kings of the earth! Yet what is the most significant thing said about this one?
8. Read again the vision of Jesus from vv12ff. How would you have felt if this vision had been given to you? Does anything stand out for you from the picture of Jesus?
9. What does he mean by 'one like a son of man'? (Refer Daniel 7:13-14)

To the Church

10. Where is Jesus pictured as standing and why is that significant?
11. What difference should this make to how we understand the significance of church?

...in turmoil

12. What were the realities and challenges for the Christians at the end of the 1st century?
13. Recall some of the realities and challenges for Christians at the beginning of the 21st century.
14. How does the vision of Jesus, speak to our circumstances?
15. How can we become more bold to live for and speak for Jesus in our time?
16. Share what you have taken away from this message.

Date: 04 February 2018
Services: 730, 930 Tewantin, 930 Peregian (via video)
Series: 7 searching letters
Passage: Revelation 1
Title: The revelation of Jesus Christ
Outline: The Revelation
of Jesus Christ
to the church
...in turmoil

Let's play a little game called 'name this face'.

(Put up political cartoons of Gillard, Rudd, Abbott and Turnbull)

Now that's fascinating that you didn't flinch... even though I didn't show you actual photos of those people...

I showed you political cartoons... and YOU knew who they were as soon as I showed you...!

What are the features? – distortion, exaggeration, not flattering... but they designed in a particular way to make a point...

...and yet we recognised the people instantly.... //

But what do you think would happen if I showed these cartoons to people (say) 2,000 years from now.... ?

people not only will they not have a clue who they are... but they won't understand the subtleties of the points being made in the political cartoon... they will find them **strange**... perhaps **inexplicable**... weird! ///

Now this morning we start our Lenten/Term 1/pre-Easter series on the first 3 chapters of the final climactic book in that library of books we call the Bible...

And because **WE** are 2,000 years removed from when this was written... there are **things** there – there is **imagery** – there are **references** – we **struggle** to grapple with...

But if we remember this great book

1. is actually all about **Jesus**...
2. ...if we remember that what we learn here will be consistent with the rest of the Bible...
3. ...if we think that this book is written not so much to tell the **future** but to show **persecuted** Christians **present realities**...
4. ...if we recall something of the situation Christians faced in the last decade of the 1st century – then we'll be in a good place to start **interpret** the book without being **frightened** by the book.... /

So I have a very simple outline – which in itself acts as a summary of what I want you take away... that this book is

1. **Revelation**
2. **Of Jesus Christ**
3. **To the Church**
4. **... in turmoil**...

1. THE REVELATION

Have a look with me at v1 *The revelation from Jesus Christ...(of Jesus Christ)*.

A revelation is, *to state the obvious*, is meant to **REVEAL** stuff to us... the word literally means to *lift the veil*...

It's not called a **concealment** from Jesus Christ... or a **hiding** of Jesus Christ...

...no - what was written was written to be **understood**...

...and we understand that those who **first** read it - **DID** understand it... that the imagery was commonly known and understood late in the 1st century... and made sense...

So it may **appear** complicated to us... but we realise that it wasn't to the **original** readers...

...and this is not something that's been **made up**...

...not some clever **invention** by the **church** or by a **committee**...

...this is a **revelation** - a **revealing** - a **lifting the veil** - which has come **to us** from **God**...

...**what did we read?** - that the vision John saw is word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ...

So - **take care** in what you're dealing with **here!**

Ancient text - yes it is **that**.

But it **originates** from **God himself**... //

And we're told that we will be **blessed** if we read it - v3 - have a look with me - *Blessed is the one who reads the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written...*

YOU WILL be blessed if you read and take this book to heart!

Let me ask you - who are the people you **typically** envy? - those on **overseas trips**; those who own their own **home**; those whose families seem to have it all **together**... //

Look at **Christians** today: - as we are scattered in different parts of the world - we are a **ridiculous minority** - look how small we are this morning??

we can't **influence** anything it would seem...

you think governments take any **notice of us any more?**

Do you think we are really highly regarded by **anyone** in this society? //

We are not the "*successful*" people in this world - but look at those who **are** - think of anyone you like... think of the **influential** - the **powerful** - those who make this world go in the **direction** it goes... **who would you like to be?**

Answer - the person who is to be **envied** - the person who you'd **change places** with for **anything**... is the person who **hears** and **responds** to the **words** of this **book!**

If you hear what this book has to say... if you live in the **light** of what this book shows you ... then you actually never want to be that person of **influence** or **power** or **fame** or **wealth** of our time... they are **not** the ones to be envied...

YOU ARE to be envied - how *enviable* - how *blessed* are **you** - if you **hear** this message and take it to **heart**... // - because you will have seen the grand reality behind this world's **confusion**... you will know who **really** is in control... you'll **know** the **one** who really is in control... //

In the coming weeks... will you set your **mind** - **open** your **heart** - to **hear** what's **said** here? - to **grapple** with it - to **pray** about it - to take it to **heart** and **act** on it??

How **blessed** will you be, if you do...!! ///

So - it's a **revelation** about

2. JESUS CHRIST

Note that it's about **Jesus**...

...not weird and wonderful things about the **future**... //

People have found all sort of things here - from **Bankcard** to **Hitler** to the **Clintons**...

No - this is about **Jesus**. ...and we see **Jesus** here, as we've **never seen him before**...

And it's primarily about an event that has **already taken place**... an event that has such **massive** implications that it has changed the course of world history and has ongoing **implication** for world history - for **all** of **time** and for the **end** of **time** as we know it.

That **great event**? / The **death and resurrection** of the **Lord Jesus**!

We get a glimpse of that here - have a look with me at

V5 - the letter is *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, 6 and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father - to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen.*

Who is Jesus?

Witness to the **truth**... (he is the truth)

Firstborn from the **dead**... he's **risen**... he's **alive**...

Ruler of the **Kings** of the **earth**. //

You think **Trump** has any real **power**? **Angela Merkel**? **Theresa May**? Even the **Taliban**?

Oh no! - **Jesus** is the **ruler** of the **Kings** of the **earth**!

And this one - this **witness** to the **truth**, this **firstborn** - this **ruler** - loves us... //

Ever wonder if anyone **really** loves **you**? /

The **ruler** of the **Kings** of the **earth** **does**! /

And what's more, *he has (v5) freed us from our sins by his blood*...

... Recently heard of a minister of a church not too far from here who banned any songs mentioning the blood of Jesus... but you can't avoid the theme in Scripture... Jesus **dealt** with your **sin** - **freed** you from your **sin** - as he shed his **blood**...!

Messy? / **Uncomfortable**? / Yes! But **reality**!

And he has made us Christians - small and insignificant as we seem - to be a **kingdom** and **priests** to serve his God and Father...

His kingdom consists of **US**... and as priests - we **mediate** his **love** to those **around**... //

And then we need to **know** that **this Jesus** is **coming back**.

Everyone one day will not only **see** him - but see him for who he **is** - see him in all his **magnificence**... and they will **mourn**... because they will get the significance of what he has done for them in the **shedding of his blood**... and they will mourn their **sin** that took him there - ... and they will fall in **worship**.... /

...for he is **there** and he is **Almighty**... //

He was there at the **beginning** and he was **almighty** and he will be there at the **end** and he will be **Almighty**... ////

Now I don't know what situation you are facing now... but you need to know whatever challenges you face... that the one who **rules** the **rulers**... / loves you!

How do you know? Because he **freed** you from your **sin** by **shedding** his **blood**...

...and **he** is the **first** and the **last** - the **only** and the **great Almighty**... !! ///

And then John sees **him**...

Actually – first – he **hears** him first – v10 *on the Lord's Day I was in the Spirit, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet...*

If you are a Bible reader... If you heard anything like a trumpet – hair on your neck stand up... image of the end of the world... (Billy Graham – walking behind the stage on my way to my seat... trumpet... thought the end had come – but it was only the band in rehearsal... disappointing)

He hears a voice – like a **trumpet**. He turns around to see the voice...

What he saw when he turned, was worth seeing... v12... – look with me - *I turned around to see the voice that was speaking to me. And when I turned I saw seven golden lampstands, 13 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 around his chest. 14 The hair on his head was white like wool, as white as snow, and his eyes were like blazing fire. 15 His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of rushing waters. 16 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. 17 When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead.*

Pause and take **in** this **vision**. //

John's reaction... **fell** at his **feet** as though **dead**... wouldn't **you**??? /

He saw a **magnificent** vision of **Jesus Christ**.

A vision we could explore for a **week**! And the vision is in terms we don't now quite get – but we **DO** get that its **significant**!

Note that he said to be... "*like a son of man...*"; ??

...he's seeing someone like Daniel many years ago had seen in his **own** vision... do you remember Daniel 7? – vv13-14 - "*In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. 14 He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all nations and peoples of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.*

JOHN – realised - turned around – realised he was looking at **that** one...

robe... golden sash – a noble figure..

hair – white like snow – a great age – and great wisdom

eyes – penetrating – searching – seeing everything

feet – bronze glowing – firm immovable...

right hand – seven stars – these turn out to be the church

sword - coming out of his mouth – he rules by his Word...

face shining – he is magnificent!! //

Jesus assures John "*don't be afraid, I was dead, behold I am alive forever and ever... and I hold the keys of death and Hades...*"

Would that have been **reassuring**?? //

Friends this is **Jesus**!

He is **magnificent**!

He **was** **dead** but is now **alive**!

He **reigns**!

All **power and authority** is **his** //

And if you're **connected** to **him** – then you're ultimately **safe**... no **one** or no **thing** can threaten you! ///

Buddha is dead

Mohammed is dead

Confucius is dead //

But **Jesus is alive** and he **reigns!**

So this is a **revelation**

A revelation of **Jesus Christ**

3. TO THE CHURCH

Breath-taking was the vision... but what I want to draw your attention to is **where** the figure was **standing**...

The **majestic Jesus Christ**... the one who is clearly the **ruler** over all God's creation -

...is standing **where?** - among the **7 golden lampstands**...

What does that mean? Well - we don't need to **guess** - look at the very last words of ch 1 - where he says *the seven golden lampstands are the 7 churches.* //

Now numbers in this book are **symbolic** - and 7 is a symbol of **completeness** and **wholeness**. So the 7 churches represent **all** the churches.

You want to know where the Lord Jesus Christ is **standing**? You want to know where the one is who is in control of the **universe** and the **planets**... you want to know what his **central concern** is?? - he's standing among the **churches!**

We are not just a club this morning for the **religiously minded** - this is a gathering of people **among whom the Lord Jesus Christ stands... if only we have eyes to see it.**

So this is a **revelation**, of **Jesus Christ**, to the **church**... a church which was at the end of the 1st century... a church...

4. IN TURMOIL

He writes out of pastoral concern - for the spiritual needs of his readers. **He** knows stuff, **they** know stuff... we **don't** know now...

So we need to read between the lines a little...

But the evidence is - that is late 1st century - c95AD - and it was a time of **intense persecution**.

John was on an **island** - a Roman **prison** island - for his **preaching** of the **gospel**.

People were being put to **death** for being Christian... that was happening.

One issue dominated **life** - the demand that **everyone bow down** and **worship the emperor** - on **pain of death**.

Likely to have been the Emperor **Domitian**.

1st century Christians - were **hated** and **despised**... they are regarded as the **scum of society** - they were considered as not being **loyal** to the **emperor**... and they are being **persecuted**; they are losing their **property**, and **many** are losing their **lives!**

Does that remind you of another time in history?

How about **now**?

List of 50 top nations - where it's most dangerous to be Christian...

<https://www.opendoors.org.au/persecuted-christians/world-watch-list/>

top 5 - North Korea, Afghanistan, Somalia, Sudan, Pakistan.

“We estimate that in the top 50 countries alone, **215 million** Christians face intimidation, prison, or even death for their faith in Jesus. That’s **one in twelve** Christians worldwide.”

The Centre for the Study of Global Christianity, an academic research centre that monitors worldwide demographic trends in Christianity, estimates that between the years 2005 and 2015, **900,000** Christians were martyred – an average of **90,000** Christians each **year**.

equivalent to **one** being killed every **six minutes**, according to research by the Centre for Studies on New Religions

<http://www.foxnews.com/politics/2017/04/14/christian-persecution-how-many-are-being-killed-where-are-being-killed.html>

<http://www.christiantimes.com/article/over-90000-christians-were-killed-for-their-faith-in-2016-according-to-new-study/69339.htm>

so this book – speaks powerfully to **our** time...

and it reminds persecuted Christians losing their lives because they love Jesus – whether at the end of **the 1st century** – or in **2018** – that Jesus stands alongside them... and that something has been done about their situation... you’ve been freed from your sin by the shed blood of the Lord Jesus... that Jesus has **conquered** evil and death and reigns as the **ruler of Rulers**... and that he’s coming back and everyone will see him!!!

See this **glorious** vision of **Jesus**... read it again and again this week...

And when someone gives you a hard time for following Jesus... or when you are tempted to say **nothing** about Jesus – tempted to hide your love for Jesus **away**...?

... remember **Jesus**... standing among the **church**... and ruling even **now**...

...and **fall before** him... **revel** in his **love**... **bask** in his **glory**... **trust** him when you lose sight of anything **good**...

Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. 18 I am the Living One; I was dead, and now look, I am alive for ever and ever!