

Fear Not!

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[0 : 00] Okay, good afternoon and welcome to our lunchtime service here at the Tron Church. You're very welcome indeed. It's very good to see you. My name is Paul Brennan. I'm one of the ministry staff here at the Tron.

And we're beginning a little series at the beginning of Revelation this afternoon. So it'd be good if you could turn there with me to Revelation chapter 1. And you'll find that on page 1028 in the church Blue Visitor Bible.

Amen. So do turn there. And before we read that, I'm going to pray and then we'll read it together. Let's pray. Amen. Our Father God in heaven, to him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever.

Father, lift our distracted minds and wayward hearts to things that are above. To see things from your perspective.

And as they really are, not as we perceive them to be. So encourage us this afternoon by what is true. How we need your word to comfort us.

[1 : 18] To encourage us. So that we might walk with Jesus through this barren land. To the glory that awaits with you forever. So help us now, for we ask it in Jesus' name.

Amen. Well, let's read Revelation chapter 1. The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show to his servants the things that must soon take place.

He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John, who bore witness to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw.

Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy. And blessed are those who hear and who keep what is written in it.

For the time is near. John, to the seven churches that are in Asia. Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come.

[2 : 25] And from the seven spirits who are before his throne. And from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness. The firstborn of the dead. And the ruler of kings on earth.

To him who loves us. And has freed us from our sins by his blood. And made us a kingdom. Priest to be his God and father. To him be glory and dominion forever and ever.

Amen. Behold, he is coming with the clouds. And every eye will see him. Even those who pierced him. And all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him.

Even so. Amen. I am the Alpha and the Omega, says the Lord God. Who is and who was and who is to come. The Almighty.

I, John, your brother and partner in the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance that are in Jesus.

[3 : 24] Was on the island called Patmos on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. I was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day. And I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet saying, write what you see in a book.

And send it to the seven churches. To Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamon and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea. Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking to me.

And on turning, I saw seven golden lampstands. And in the midst of the lampstands, one like a son of man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash around his chest.

The hairs of his head were white, like white wool, like snow. His eyes were like a flame of fire. His feet like burnished bronze refined in a furnace.

And his voice was like the roar of many waters. In his right hand, he held seven stars. From his mouth came a sharp two-edged sword.

[4 : 32] And his face was like the sun shining in full strength. When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. But he laid his right hand on me, saying, fear not.

I am the first and the last and the living one. I died, and behold, I am alive forevermore. And I have the keys of death and Hades. Write, therefore, the things that you have seen, those that are, and those that are to take place after this.

As for the mystery of the seven stars that you saw in my right hand, and the seven golden lampstands, the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches. And the seven lampstands are the seven churches.

Amen. This is the word of the Lord. Now, it can be easy, I think, can't it, to become unduly downhearted in the Christian life.

To look at how things are. To notice a declining church in our country. To hear further afield of Christians being persecuted around the world.

[5 : 45] Some losing their lives. Perhaps, perhaps for you, it's personal hardships, personal sufferings, personal griefs, that make life tough going.

It can be easy to become downhearted, can't it? But listen to the words of the Lord Jesus Christ, speaking to his disciples, as recorded in Matthew's Gospel.

He says this, Jesus, at this very moment, sits at the Father's right hand, ruling over the cosmos.

He is, at this very moment, building his church. And one day he is to return and bring to completion what he began with his earthly ministry 2,000 years ago.

Now, it's one thing to say that. And in a sense, that should be enough to encourage us. But the Lord is gracious. He knows that we need assured of his promises.

[6 : 50] We need reminders. We need to be encouraged and strengthened. So that we'll persevere. So that we'll press on and not fall back. Not compromise. And that is why he has given his church the book of Revelation.

It is a book that shows us in glorious technicolor that Christ will indeed build his church. And the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

It is a book written in the first instance to a suffering church. A church facing hardship and difficulty. It is a book written so that the church would be encouraged by the fact that God is at work in history.

Bringing about his purposes. Even in the midst of tragedy. Even in the midst of suffering. Even in the midst of the apparent domination of Satan. And of course of death itself.

It is a book about the future. Yes. But the real focus is on how to live in the present. In light of God's promises.

[8 : 00] In light of how he says history will unfold. In the last days. And that is the time that you and I live in. It's the time from Christ's ascension to when he returns.

We are in the last days now. So if you find yourself discouraged at what you see around you. Both in the church and outside.

Then revelation is the book for you. If you find yourself tempted to compromise. To go with the ways of the world at the cost of God's ways. Then revelation is the book for you.

If you find yourself anxious. Worried about how things may turn out. Then revelation is the book for you. Jesus is building his church.

The gates of hell shall not prevail against it. Revelation shows us what is going on behind what we can merely observe with our own eyes. It shows us the greater reality.

[9 : 05] And Jesus says to you. He says to his church. Fear not. Fear not. So let's look more closely at this first chapter of revelation.

Where we'll see what sort of book it is. And why God has given it for his church then. When it was first written. And for us today. So three points.

Firstly. God gives this revelation to his church in the midst of the hardship. In order to bring clarity. Look down again at the first couple of verses of our passage.

And as we do so. It's probably just worth saying. That the language of these opening words. Is drawn from the Old Testament scriptures. As is so much. Of the book of Revelation. It's a common feature of the book.

Almost three quarters of the verses in Revelation. Allude to. Or directly quote the Old Testament. That shouldn't surprise us. Should it? Or worry us. It shouldn't be surprising. That God should use what his people would be most familiar with.

[10 : 06] The scriptures. To communicate with them. So Revelation is a book soaked in the Old Testament. And not least here in verses one and two. Look again at those verses. The revelation.

Of Jesus Christ. Which God gave to him. To show his servants the things that must soon take place. He made it known. By sending his servant.

His angel. To his servant John. Who bore witness to the word of God. And the testimony of Jesus Christ. Even to all that he saw. What sort of book is this? Well.

It's a revelation. It's an unveiling. And as I mentioned. John draws on Old Testament language here. And the language used here.

In these first two verses. Is very very similar to that of Daniel chapter two. Where Daniel. Tells the king. King. At the time. That the dream he had just experienced.

[11 : 03] Is to be understood symbolically. It's the very same language used here in Revelation one and two. And so by using that same language. John is making clear that what God has shown him.

What we go on to read in the rest of Revelation. Is likewise. To be understood symbolically. But what is this book all about? Well again.

Back in Daniel chapter two. The king. Is given a vision. Of what was to happen. In the latter days. In terms of the coming kingdom of God.

And what Daniel saw. As an event to happen in the future. John says here in verse one. That they are soon to take place. The time is near. End of verse three.

In fact. These last days. Had with the earthly ministry of Jesus Christ. Already began to be fulfilled. The latter days that Daniel looked forward to.

[12 : 01] Are now happening. Says John. So this book is therefore. All about the things that are happening in this. Period of time. It was the time. It was the time. It was the time. It was the time. It was the time. It was the time. That the seven churches.

John wrote to were living in. And it's the time that we still live in today. We are in the last days. And Revelation. Unpacks. How these last days. Are going to be.

Revelations. Are all about things. That are to take place. In these days. These days. Between Christ's. Inauguration of his kingdom. And when he returns.

To consummate it. So Revelation. Is not. About. A set of events. In the distant past. And it's not just about.

A set of events. At some point. In the future. No. Revelation. Is. About. Ongoing events. It's about. Life. In these last days.

[13 : 00] And these are days. Marked. By hardship. And suffering. That is abundantly clear. As you read through the book. Just look on to verses 9 to 11.

Where we get a taste. Of the situation. Of John. And those he's writing to. He says. I your brother. And partner. In the tribulation. And the kingdom.

And the patient endurance. That are in Christ Jesus. Was on the island. Called Patmos. On account. Of the word of God. And the testimony. Of Jesus. John.

Has suffered. For the gospel. He's been exiled. On the. On the Patmos. Because. Of the word of God. Because of his. Unwillingness. To compromise. And the churches.

That he writes to. Also. Suffer. We'll see that. As we look at the churches. In the next few weeks. In chapters 2 and 3. These are churches. That are suffering. Being persecuted.

[13 : 58] Some. Even being martyred. For their faith. And the church. In every age. The church today. Suffers. Because it testifies. To Jesus.

And so. Revelation. This book. Is given. To the suffering church. To the church. In the midst of. Hardships. So that it will know. With real clarity.

What's really going on. So that it will know. With real certainty. That Christ. Is building his church. And it will not fail. That's what the rest of the book.

Goes on to demonstrate. In vivid. Technicolor ways. Christ is in control. And what reassurance. That will bring. To the suffering church.

And it's not that we're given. A blow by blow. Moment by moment. Account of how things. Are going to unfold. Today and tomorrow. And the next day. No. We can't read through. Revelation. And plot.

[14 : 54] Particular moments. In history. But what it does show. Is general patterns. The sort of things. That we can expect. It does give us. Clarity. On the big picture.

On the ways. In which Jesus. Is at work. And what we can expect. By way of response. From the world around us. The book of Revelation. Has been given.

To the church. Not to present. Mysterious clues. About the second coming. But rather. To bring clarity. To what the church. Is to expect. In this present age.

Yes. It's to expect. Hardship and suffering. But behind it all. Our father. Is at work. He is sovereign. Overall. He's in charge.

And he will protect. His church. He will give us. Victory. Through our Lord. Jesus Christ. And so. The apostle John. As he passes on.

[15 : 51] The revelation. That was given to him. He lifts the curtain. On the observable world. And he shows us. Reality. He shows us.

What is really going on. And he does that. To bring you and I. Clarity. That's the first thing. We must know. And see. From Revelation chapter 1. But secondly.

We see that Jesus. Presences himself. With his church. In the midst of their hardship. To bring. Real comfort. Jesus presences himself.

Amongst his church. To bring real comfort. John sees. From verse 12. Look down there. He sees. An astonishing vision.

Of one like. The son of man. And as we go on. To read. This is clearly. The Lord Jesus Christ. John sees. The son of man.

[16 : 48] Standing in the midst. Of seven lampstands. And later on. Verse 20. Tells us. That John. Is told. That these. Lampstands. Represent.

The seven churches. He's to write to. So there's the son of man. The Lord Jesus Christ. Stood. Stood amongst these lampstands. Which are. The churches. And so we see here.

In this vision. Jesus standing. In the midst. He's there. In the midst. Of his church. And that is a truth. That is to bring. Great comfort. To his church.

Notice the words of John. The words of Jesus. To John. Straight after the conclusion. Of this vision. In verse 17. He says. Fear not. So two questions then.

What do we learn. About Jesus. Here in these. Remarkable words. And why is it that. To be a comfort. To the church. What we learn.

[17 : 45] Of Jesus here. Is utterly staggering. In scale. And scope. Isn't it. What we learn here. Should lead us. To worship. To fall down. And worship. At his feet. As John does. In verse 17.

Remember what Jesus. Remember what John. Is told about Jesus. Back in verse 5. The faithful witness. The firstborn of the dead.

The ruler of the kings of the earth. He loves his people. He's freed them from their sins. He's made them a kingdom. He hears these things about Jesus.

Then he sees. From verse 12. The majestic vision of Jesus. It's a vision that impresses upon us. The majesty of Jesus. The power of Jesus. His awesome presence.

It's a picture. Of a priest. And a king. And a judge. One with supreme. And total power. And authority. And he stands in the midst.

[18 : 46] Of his churches. Now it's a terrifying image. John's response. Tells us that doesn't he.

He falls down. As though dead at his feet. What else can sinful man do. In the presence of the second person. Of the Godhead. Awesome.

Vision. Of the son of man. But why should this. Be a comfort. The emphasis is very much. On Christ's presence.

With his church. Now he. Is the living. And reigning Lord. And that is to be a great comfort. To his church. As well as a fact. To be rightly feared. It is to imbue.

His church. With the real sense. Of reverence and awe. Because of who he is. But. It also brings comfort. Notice. The tender words. Of Jesus. To John.

[19 : 41] But he laid. His right hand on me. Saying fear not. I am the first. And the last. And the living one. I died. And behold. I am alive. Forevermore.

And I have the. Keys. Of death. And Hades. What words of reassurance. To John. Christ.

Rules the cosmos. He describes himself. As the first. And the last. And these are words. That God the father. Attributes to himself. And Isaiah. Meaning. That he has complete.

Sovereignty. Over human history. From beginning to end. And Jesus says. That's true of himself. Christ rules the cosmos. And the Christ. That rules the cosmos.

Stands. In the midst of his church. That's pretty comforting. Isn't it? Christ. Has. Overcome death. Jesus is.

[20 : 37] The living one. He died. But is alive. Forevermore. He has the keys. To death. And Hades. What a comforting. And reassuring. Truth. That is. To the suffering. Church. Through all ages.

Who face. Persecution. For their faith. Death. But it is a comforting. And reassuring truth. For all Christians. Isn't it? Because we all. Sooner or later.

Face that great enemy. Don't we? Death itself. But Jesus. Delivers us. From that great. And final enemy. Christ. Through his death.

Has removed. The legal curse. That requires death. And by his resurrection. Has broken. The power of death. Death. Death. Is not. The end.

Christ. Has overcome. That's comforting. Isn't it? And as we'll see. As we read on. Through chapters. Two and three. As we read the letters.

[21 : 31] To the church. We see that Christ. Cares. For his church. He speaks. Words. Of encouragement. To them. But also. Words. Of rebuke. And he does so.

Because he cares. For them. Wanting the very best. For them. That they would stand. Firm. As witnesses. To the truth. As pillars. And buttresses. Of that truth. So this book of revelation.

Is to be a real comfort. To a suffering church. Because right. In the midst. Of the church. Standing there. Amidst the lampstands. Is Jesus Christ.

It's a great comfort. It's a great comfort. But the message of revelation. Is not just comfort. It is also a message. To be obeyed.

And this is our final point. God calls his church. To obey his word. In the midst. Of their hardship. And so. Avoid compromise. And no blessing.

[22 : 34] And I want as we close. To focus on one verse. And it's such a crucial verse. Look down at verse three. Blessed. Is the one who reads aloud.

The words of this prophecy. And blessed are those who hear. And those who keep. What is written in it. For the time. Is near. We see here in verse three.

The purpose of the whole book. It is to bless those. Who read it. Who hear it. Who keep. What is contained within it. It is a book.

To be obeyed. And through that obedience. Comes great blessing. And notice. That word. Prophecy.

It's a word. Often misunderstood. Isn't it? And the prophets. Through the Old Testament. Weren't primarily. Foretelling the future. Of course.

[23 : 29] They did speak about the future. But primarily. A prophet. Spoke. The word of God. Into the present situation. And as they did so. They did so. In order that the wayward people of God.

Would turn to him. Would repent. Would obey. And so too. With this prophecy. With revelation. Yes. It talks about the future. As we said.

It covers that whole period. From Christ. Ascension. To his return. But it talks about future things. In order to bring about. Present obedience. Right here.

And now today. As one writer put it. The prophecy of verse three. Is not. A set of predictions. But. In the biblical tradition. A word from God.

Calling. For obedient response. On the lives. Of his believers. Now that becomes quite clear. As we read. The following seven letters. To the churches.

[24 : 24] Great temptations. To compromise. Pressed in on them. They were under pressure. They were suffering. Temptations to compromise. On every side. But this revelation.

Is given. So that those churches. Then. And for us today. Will persevere. Even in the face. Of great adversity. It is a revelation. To be heard.

And obeyed. It is a revelation. That will truly bless you. Because it will reveal. And remind you. Of what is true. And who is really.

In control of history. And where your loyalty. Must lie. In light of that. It will bring you blessing. As you obey. The words contained within it. The message of revelation.

Is very encouraging. Indeed. And particularly. Chapter one. Christ. Is sovereign. He is in the midst. Of his suffering church. He will.

[25 : 22] In the end. Consummate his kingdom. He will bring it. To full fruition. And that means. For you. Each one of you. Here this morning.

Dear Christians. That you. All your enemies. All your enemies. Will utterly. And finally. Be defeated. Sin.

Will lose. All hold. Over you. The evil one. Will no longer. Attempt. Or accuse you. Death itself. Will have been banished.

That is. The true destiny. Of Christ's people. And knowing that. Knowing that. Means. That we don't. Have to fear. Don't fear.

What you see now. Because. You know. How things are going to end up. Revelation tells you. I will. Build my church. And the gates of hell.

[26 : 17] Shall not prevail against it. Don't fall into the trap. Of following the ways of this world. Don't compromise. Because there is no future. In following the things of this world. Instead.

Take courage. Because Christ. The glorious. Majestic ruler. Redeemer. He is with you. His church.

And he speaks. This revelation. For your blessing now. Even in the midst of hardship. Fear not.

Little flock. For it is your father's good pleasure. To give you the kingdom. And revelation. Displays that inglorious technicolor.

So hold to it. Treasure it. Obey it. Let's pray. Father.

[27 : 24] We thank you. For this. Your revelation. Making clear. That you are. The sovereign one.

And you will bring your plans. To completion. Thank you. That the Lord Jesus Christ. Stands in the midst of his church. The one who reigns supreme.

He stands with his church. And he will bring all that is promised. To fruition. So help us to trust you. Help us to be a people. Who hear the words of this prophecy.

Who are those who keep them. For all that is written in these pages. Is coming to be. So help us. To trust you. And not fear.

We ask it in Jesus name. Amen. Amen. Amen.

[28 : 34] Amen.