

Fear Not!

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- [0 : 00] Well, if you turn in your Bibles to the beginning of the revelation of Jesus Christ, the very last book of the New Testament, if you have one of the church Bibles, it's page 1028.
- If you haven't, it's the last book of the New Testament, so hopefully you can find it. And we're going to read together chapter one. Revelation chapter one at verse one, the revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show 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.
- [1 : 22] 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 the kings on earth.
- To him who loves us and has freed us from his from our sins by his blood and made us a kingdom priests to his God and father. Amen.
- 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 the kind of him. Even so. Amen. Amen. I am the Alpha and the Omega, says the Lord God, who is and 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.
- [2 : 30] I 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 Pergamum 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 wool, as white as snow. His eyes were like a flame of fire. His feet were 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 two-edged sharp sword.
- 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.
- [3 : 59] 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. And may God bless to us this his word.

Good evening and good to see you. Please turn back to Revelation chapter one. Let's go. It can be easy, 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.

[5 : 28] To hear about Christians being persecuted around the world, even losing their lives for it. Or perhaps close to the home, it's personal hardships that make life just so tough going.

It's easy to become unduly downhearted as Christians. But listen to the words of the Lord Jesus spoken to his disciples recorded in Matthew's gospel.

He said this, I will build my church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. Jesus Christ is at this very moment sitting at the Father's right hand, ruling over the cosmos.

He is at this very moment building his church. And one day he is going to return and he will bring to completion what he first began in his earthly ministry.

He will do it. Now in one sense, that's an easy thing to say. In a sense, that should be enough. But the Lord is gracious.

[6 : 39] And he knows that we need assured of his promises. We need reminded. We need to be encouraged and strengthened in our Christian walks. 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 great hardship, great difficulty.

Many were dying for their faith. It is a book written so that the church will be encouraged by the fact that God is at work in history.

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

[7 : 47] It is a book about the future. Yes. But the real focus of the book of Revelation is on how to live in the present.

In light of all God's promises. In light of how he says history will unfold in the last days. And that is the time that we live in. It's the time from Christ's ascension until his return.

The days that we live in now. So if you find yourself discouraged or confused. And what you see going on in the world 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. Or concerned. Worried about how things might turn out. Then Revelation is the book for you.

[8 : 54] Jesus is building his church. And the gates of hell will not prevail against it. This book, Revelation, shows us what's really going on.

It shows what is going on behind what we can simply observe. It shows us the greater reality. And Jesus says to you. He says to his church.

Fear not. Fear not. So let's look a little more closely. At this first chapter of Revelation. Where we will see.

What sort of book it is. And why God has given it for his church then. And today. And we'll consider three points. God gives the suffering church this revelation.

To bring clarity. And not confusion. To bring comfort. Not concern. And to bring constancy. Not compromise. Or cowardice.

[9 : 57] It's the letter C in the Brennan household this week. So firstly. God gives this revelation to his church. In order to bring clarity.

And not confusion. Just look down at the first couple of verses of our passage again. And whilst you're looking. It's worth just saying that the language of these opening words.

Is drawn from the Old Testament scriptures. And that is a common feature through the book of Revelation. Almost three quarters of the verses in Revelation. Either allude to or directly quote the Old Testament.

Now this shouldn't surprise us or worry us should it. It shouldn't be surprising that God should use what his people know best. The scriptures. What they're most familiar with.

In order to communicate with them. And so as we read through Revelation. Again and again we'll bump into things that remind us. Of things we find in the Old Testament. Let's look again at these first couple of verses.

[10 : 55] One and two. What sort of book is this?

Well it's a revelation. It's an unveiling. But it's not at the first read at times. The most straightforward to understand is it?

As I just mentioned. John draws on the Old Testament. And his language here. Is very very similar to that used in Daniel chapter 2. Where Daniel tells the king.

That the dream he's just experienced. Is to be understood symbolically. Not literally. And so by using the very same language. As in Daniel chapter 2.

John is making clear. That what God has shown him. In this great vision. What we're going to read in the rest of Revelation. Is likewise to be understood symbolically.

[12 : 05] And not literally. Revelation is a book. Packed full of vivid. Symbolic language. And it is symbolism. Teaching truth.

It's not symbols. Standing for specific events. We've got to try and work out. We read it. Symbolically. Not literally. So for example. In chapter 1 verse 17.

Which we read earlier. Jesus. Places his right hand on John. And as he does that. We don't have to ask. What he's done with the stars. That he was holding in the previous verse.

It is to be read symbolically. And likewise. At the end of the chapter. We are told. What some of the things mean. The angel.

The lampstands. Are the churches. And the stars. Are the angels. Of those churches. It is to be understood symbolically. Not literally. But what is this book all about?

[13 : 01] Well in Daniel chapter 2. Which I just mentioned. 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 a future event to happen. In the last days. John says here in verse 1.

That they are soon. To take place. The time is near. He says. End of verse 3. And that phrase. Soon take place.

That means. Imminently. The time of fulfillment. Is upon us. And in fact. The phrase at the end of verse 3. The time is near. Is very similar. To the phrase used by Jesus.

In Mark chapter 1. Verse 15. Where he says this. The time is fulfilled. And the kingdom of God. Is at hand. And Jesus means there.

[13 : 55] That it is about to arrive. It's already begun. And so. These days. That John speaks about. All that's about to be unfolded.

Has. With the earthly ministry. Of Jesus Christ. Already begun. To be fulfilled. The latter days. That Daniel looked forward to. Are now happening. Says John.

So this book. Is therefore. All about things. That are happening. In this period of time. It was the time. That the seven churches. He wrote to. Were living in.

It's the time. That we still live in today. These last days. As we wait. For Christ's return. Revelation is a book. All about. The things. That are to take place.

In these days. These days. Between Christ's. Inauguration. Of his kingdom. And his consummation. That his return. That we look forward to. So revelation.

[14 : 55] Is not. About. A set. Of events. Somewhere. In the past. It is not. Just about. A set of events. At some place. In the future. No. Revelation.

Is about. The ongoing. Events. It's about. Life. In these last days. Until Christ. Returns. And they are. Days. Marked.

By hardship. And suffering. That is abundantly. Clear. As you read. Through. The rest. Of the book. Just look on. Briefly. Down to. Verse 9. Of our chapter.

We get a taste. Of the situation. I. John. Your brother. And partner. In the tribulation. And the kingdom. And the patient. Endurance. That are in Jesus.

Was. On the island. Called Patmos. On account. Of the word. And the testimony. Of Jesus. John. Had suffered. For the gospel. The church.

[15 : 50] As he writes to. Also. Are suffering. We read that. In the next couple. Of chapters. We'll see that. Next week. And beyond. The church. Was suffering. And the church.

In every age. The church. Today. Suffers. Because. It testifies. To Jesus. And so. This book.

This revelation. Is given. To the suffering. Church. To the church. In the midst. Of hardship. And it's given. To the suffering. Church. 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 won't fail. So revelation.

Is here. To give clarity. And certainty. It is therefore. Not. Cryptic. Or confusing. It's not.

[16 : 45] That we're given. A blow by blow. Account. Moment by moment. Account. Of how things. Are going to unfold. Today. And tomorrow. And the next day. We're not. To try and work out. Like some cryptic puzzle.

How each image. We read about. Later in revelation. We. Relates to a particular. Moment in history. No. But it does give. 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 the present age. Yes.

It's to expect. Hardship. And suffering. But behind it all. Our father. Is at work. He is sovereign. Over all.

[17 : 41] He is in charge. And he will protect. His church. He will give us victory. Through the Lord Jesus Christ. That is clear. And so.

The apostle John. As he. Passes on. The revelation. Given to him. He lifts the curtain. On the scene world. He shows. The reality. He shows.

What's really going on. And he does that. To bring you and I. Real clarity. Not confusion. Revelation. And so. If.

A particular approach. To reading Revelation. Is complex. And cryptic. Then it must be. A wrong approach. Mustn't it? Because Revelation. Is here to bring the opposite. It's here to bring clarity.

And confusion. Clarity. And certainty. Sorry. So if you find yourself. Perhaps. Watching some chap. On the God channel. Who promises.

[18 : 35] The real meaning. Of Revelation. Which he. And only he. Has found the answer to. And it's deeply. Complicated. And cryptic. Then. Turn it off. Watch the rugby.

Far more likely. To do you spiritual good. Particularly if Scotland win. But that sort of stuff. Is all over. Those sorts of TV channels. Complex. Cryptic. Only I've got the answer.

That's not what Revelation. Is here for. It's here to bring you. Certainty. And clarity. About how things are going to pan out. For the church. In these last days.

So that's the first thing to see. God gives this revelation. To his church. In order to bring clarity. And not confusion. But secondly.

We see in this chapter. That Jesus. Presences himself. With his church. To bring comfort. And not concern. John sees.

[19 : 35] From verse 12. An astonishing vision. Of one like the son of man. And it's Jesus Christ. That he sees. John sees the son of man.

Standing in the midst. Of seven lampstands. And later on in verse 20. Jesus tells John. That the lampstands. Represent. The seven churches.

That he is to write to. And so we see here. In this vision of Jesus. Him standing in the midst. Of his church. He is with his church.

And that is a truth. That is to bring great comfort. To his church. Revelation is here. To bring comfort. Not concern. And notice the words.

Of Jesus. To John. Straight after the vision. Has been given. Verse 17. He says to John. Fear not. Fear not.

[20 : 32] So two questions then. What do we learn about Jesus? Jesus. And why is that to be a comfort. To his church? And what we learn of Jesus. In this chapter.

Is utterly staggering. In scale and scope. What we learn here. Should lead us to worship. To fall down. And worship at his feet. As John does in verse 17. Jesus is.

John is told. Verse 5. He is the faithful witness. The first born of the dead. The ruler of the kings of the earth. He loves his people.

He has freed them from their sins. And made them a kingdom. And then he sees. From verse 12. The majestic vision of Jesus. And it's a vision that.

Can't but impress upon us. The majesty of Jesus. The power of Jesus. His awesome presence. It's a picture of him.

[21 : 29] As priest. And king. And judge. One with supreme power. And total authority. And this man. Jesus. In all his power.

Stands. Where does he stand? Well he stands in the midst. Of his churches. It is.

An astonishing. Terrifying image. And John's response. In verse 17. Must surely be an appropriate one. He falls at his feet. As though dead. And what else can sinful man do.

In the presence. Of the second person. Of the Trinity. But why should this be a comfort? And the emphasis here. 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 feared. It is to imbue.

[22 : 27] In the church. A real sense of reverence. And awe. Because of who he is. It's not terror. But right fear. Not undue concern.

But real comfort. Why is that? Well. Look at the words of Jesus. Jesus. 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.

We see here that Christ. Rules the cosmos. He describes himself. As the first.

And the last. And those are words. That God the Father. Attributes to himself. And Isaiah. Meaning. That he has complete sovereignty. Over human history. From beginning to end. This Jesus.

[23 : 23] Who rules the cosmos. He stands. In the midst of his church. That's pretty comforting. Isn't it? Christ.

Has overcome death. Jesus is. The living one. He died. But is alive forevermore. He has. The keys. To death and Hades. What a comforting truth.

To the suffering church. Through all ages. Who face persecution. For their faith. But it's a comforting.

And reassuring truth. For all Christians. Not just those. Who are persecuted. Because. We all. Sooner or later. Face that great enemy. Himself.

Death. But Jesus delivers us. From that great. And final enemy. Christ. Through his death. Has removed. The legal curse.

[24 : 19] That requires. Death. And by his resurrection. He's broken the power of death. Death is not the end. Christ has overcome. Come. That is pretty comforting.

Isn't it? And as we'll see. As we read on. Through chapters two and three. We read in the churches. The letters to the church. 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 truth. And as pillars and buttresses. Of that truth. The book of Revelation. Is to be a comfort.

To the church. It is therefore. Not to lead. To undue concern. In the church. And that has been the impact. Of some approaches. To the book of Revelation.

[25 : 16] Someone was telling me. The day of. The videos. They were subjected to. As a youngster. At church youth events. Depicting the rapture. And you'd see. Poor Johnny.

Arriving home. And his father's. Electric razor. Was dangling. Still buzzing. And mum and dad. Were gone. And poor Johnny. Was absolutely terrified. That is not.

A right terror. That is not. A right fear. Of the Lord. That's terrible. And fearful. Revelation. Revelation was not written. For that end.

It was written. To bring comfort. To the suffering church. Not terror. And so. The book of Revelation. Is to be a real comfort. To a suffering church.

Because right there. In the midst. Right there. In the center. Is Jesus. He is with his church. So.

[26 : 12] It's a comforting message. Not a concerning one. For those who are his. But it's also a message. To be obeyed. And this is our final point.

God calls his church. To constancy. Not. Compromise. Or cowardice. And I want. As we close. Just to focus. On one verse.

And it's such a crucial one. Verse three. Blessed. Is the one. Who reads. Allowed. 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. 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.

[27 : 07] And through that obedience. Comes great blessing. And notice in particular. That word. Prophecy. At the. In the middle of the verse.

The words of this prophecy. Prophecy. That word prophecy. Is a word. Often misunderstood. Isn't it? The prophets. Through the Old Testament. Weren't primarily. Foretelling the future.

Now of course. They did speak about the future. But primarily. The prophets were there. They were speaking. The word of God. Into the present situation. They did so. In order to bring.

A wayward people. Back to God. The prophets were there. To bring about. Repentance in the people. So that they would obey. And return to the Lord. And so too.

With this prophecy. With this revelation. Yes. It talks about the future. As we said. It covers that whole period of time. From. Christ's ascension. To his return. But it talks about.

[28 : 08] Future things. In order to bring about. Present obedience. To bring about. Real constancy. And perseverance. 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.

In the lives. Of believers. Now that becomes quite clear. As we read on. Through. The letters to the church. In the next couple of chapters. Great temptations.

To compromise. Preston and the church then. And in every age since. And this revelation. Is given. So that the church. Then and today. Will persevere.

Even in the face. Of great adversity. And the constant refrain. In each of the seven letters. The one thing. That unifies them all. Is that call. To constancy. In the face of hardship.

[29 : 04] A call. To obedient faith. To remain loyal. To the Lord. It is a call. To constancy. And not compromise.

Or indeed. Cowardice. And so. If. A particular approach. To revelation. Pushes you. Towards cowardice.

To fearfulness. Then it must be. A wrong approach. Mustn't it? It's here. Not to encourage. Cowardice. That sort of. Hunkering down. Sticking one's head. In the sand. Sort of thing.

No. It's here. To encourage. Obedience. And through. That obedience. Comes. Great blessings. Eternal blessings. It is a revelation.

To be heard. And obeyed. It is a revelation. That will truly. Bless you. Because. It reveals. What is true. It reminds you.

[29 : 59] What is true. And who is really. In control of history. And it calls you. To loyalty. To that. Lord. Who wins. Christ is victorious.

That is the great message. Of revelation. He will build his church. Nothing will stop him doing that. So heed his word. Be constant in obedience.

Not compromising. Not being cowardly. So it's a message that calls us. To be a constant people. The message of revelation.

Revelation chapter one. Is greatly encouraging. Christ. Is sovereign. He is. In the midst. Of his suffering church.

He will in the end. Consummate his kingdom. He will bring it to full fruition. Nothing is going to stop that. God. And that means.

[30 : 58] For you. Each one of you here. This evening. Dear Christian. Brothers and sisters. That all your enemies. All of them. Will in the end. Be utterly. And finally defeated.

Sin. Will lose. All hold over you. The evil one. Will never again. Tempt you. 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 we know. How things are going to end up. I will build my church.

And the gates of hell. Shall not prevail against it. So don't fall. Into the trap. Of following. The ways of this world. Don't compromise.

[31 : 57] Because there is no future. In following the things of this world. The things that we can see. Instead. Take courage. Because Christ.

The glorious. Majestic ruler. The great redeemer. Is with you. He is with his church. And he speaks. This book. This revelation. For your blessing.

Now. Now. Even in the midst of great hardship. And so. The Lord Jesus says to you. Fear not. Little flock.

For it is your father's good pleasure. To give you. The kingdom. And revelation. And revelation. Paints that glorious truth. In wonderful technicolor.

So fear not. Let me pray. Let me pray. Our father.

[32 : 59] Father we thank you. For. This revelation. Which you have given. To your church. Help us. To be those.

Who read aloud. The words of this prophecy. And to hear them. And to keep them. So that we might know. Blessing.

So that we might know. With great certainty. That you will prevail. You will build your church. And nothing will stop it. Help us to know that. And to live in light of it.

We ask. In Jesus name. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.