

REVELATION

POSTCARDS FROM PARADISE



REVELATION: POSTCARDS FROM PARADISE (TALK 1/5: A PICTURE OF JESUS) SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

CONNECT: What are some 'applications' that you can take from our 1 Thessalonians series that will help you live in preparation for Jesus' return?

WARM-UP Questions

1. What has your approach to the book of Revelation been in the past? (e.g., avoided it, obsessed over it, were confused by it, loved it, *or something else!?*)
2. What are the common ways that you prepare for Christmas? How could you use this period to help you better prepare for Jesus' return?

Read Revelation 1:7-8

3. Whose 'revelation' is this? What do you think are the common approaches to the book of Revelation?
4. Have you ever treated Revelation as a code book to be deciphered? Why is this not very helpful?
5. What is significant about the promise that Jesus will return? How will his return be distinctive to his first coming to earth as a baby?
6. Have you ever worried about missing Jesus' return? Why should we not be worried about this?
7. Why will people mourn? Why is it actually good news that Jesus will return to judge justly?

Read Revelation 1:9-16

8. What two aspects of identity (from Daniel 7) are being merged together in this picture of Jesus? Why is this so important?
9. What do you think of the image of Jesus that is described in this section? Do you think you ever are in danger of having a 'distant' or 'domesticated' view of Jesus?
10. How can we consistently maintain a clearer and truer picture of who Jesus is in our lives?
11. How extensive does Jesus' power appear to be? What is the significance of this?

Read Revelation 1:17-20

12. Why do you think John falls as though dead? Do you think this is the natural reaction? Why or why not?
13. What is meant by Jesus holding the keys? What are the implications for us? Why can we not be afraid?
14. What are the ways in which Jesus makes it clear that he is alive and has conquered death? What is the significance of repeating this truth over and over again?
15. If Jesus is omnipotent (i.e., all powerful) and imminent (i.e., present) why should we not be afraid?

APPLY (this week): How can you use advent to practically prepare for Jesus' return?

PRAY: *Almighty God, thank you that you hold the keys over death and that by trusting in you that we can have confidence of life forever. Please help us to have a clearer and more truthful view of Jesus. Please help us to live in great anticipation of his return. In Jesus' Name, Amen.*

A person's hand is visible on the right side, holding a postcard. The background is a blurred field of tall grass under a bright sky. The text "GOING DEEPER" is overlaid in large, white, sans-serif capital letters.

GOING DEEPER

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GOING DEEPER RESOURCES

For Families

- 'Bible Story: Revelation' by Life Kids
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HcWxb2lpU3M>
- 'Tips for teaching Kids the book of Revelation' by LifeWay
<https://blog.lifeway.com/explorethebible/blog/kids/tips-for-teaching-kids-the-book-of-revelation/>

Audio

- "The Revelation of Jesus Christ" by John Lennox (12-Part Series):
<http://www.st-helens.org.uk/resources/media-library/src/series/934/title/the-revelation-of-jesus-christ>
- "A Message to the Churches" by Andrew Sach (St Helen's Bishopsgate)
<http://www.st-helens.org.uk/resources/media-library/src/talk/53794/title/a-message-to-the-churches>
- "Revelation Part I" by Don Carson
<https://resources.thegospelcoalition.org/library/revelation-part-1>
- 'The Cosmic King' by Tim Keller
<https://gospelinlife.com/downloads/the-cosmic-king-6257/>

Other Helpful Articles and Courses

- The Ridley Certificate Course: Revelation Unwrapped
<https://www.ridley.edu.au/ridley-certificate/subjects/revelation-unwrapped/>
- Open Yale Course on Introduction to New Testament History and Literature (see Revelation Handout):
<https://itunes.apple.com/us/course/introduction-to-the-new-testament-history-and-literature/id675625271>

Talk 1/5 (REVELATION SERIES): 02/12/18

“A Picture of Jesus”

by the Rev'd Adam Lowe

Bible Passage: Revelation 1:7-20

Today we begin a new *five-part* series on the *Book of Revelation*.

- With only five weeks, we're not going to be able to explore the letter *exhaustively*, but as we anticipate celebrating Jesus' first coming this Christmas, *we're going to look at five pictures from Revelation, in order to inform our understanding about Jesus' return.*
- Often as we prepare for Christmas, we can spend a lot of time thinking about trees, presents, parties, holidays, but the best possible way *as followers of Jesus* that we can prepare, is **not ONLY** by *looking back* to Jesus' birth, **but ALSO** by *looking forward* in confidence, that Jesus is coming back again.
- That's actually what 'advent' - *which simply means arrival* - is all about. It's about celebrating the first arrival of Jesus, in light that he is soon to arrive again.

Now when it comes to Revelation, (note: *not 'Revelations'*), some people can be full of trepidation, *others full of excitement*, or sometimes a bit of both all at the same time!

- There's often all sorts of wild ideas about how we should read this book. Sometimes people treat it like a secret code book about the future *waiting to be cracked*, but that's not *quite* how it would have been understood by those who first received it.

- It was a style of writing that was rich, not in secret codes, but in symbol, much of which is directly related to symbol used in the Old Testament. //
- The original word in greek translated as 'revelation', is actually *apocalypse*.
- Now, when we think of writing or films that are apocalyptic in nature, we tend to think of some sort of cataclysmic end to the world.
- And whilst the very first followers of Jesus believed, that the dawn of the Christian era was also the dawning of the last days, they would not have read this as simply as a letter about dramatic endings, but an **unveiling**, that brought insight into the past, present, and future.

It is a *letter* with both an AUTHOR and an AUDIENCE!

- John writes to *seven* churches in Asia, distributed along a highway, with the intention that it should be passed on and read aloud to each church.
- And whilst we don't know if this was the John from the Gospels, or someone else, we know that he writes not as a superior, but a fellow brother who is suffering.
- John, is exiled on the island of Patmos for preaching the Gospel, writes, at a time in which there was considerable persecution of Christians. at a time in which the emperor Domitian *probably was systematically ramping things up*. at a time in which worship of the emperor was becoming more prevalent.

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- And in the face of all of that, some churches were standing against that faithfully, others were being caught up in the ways of the world around them.
- And what's critical to note, that as John writes into that situation, **this is not merely his revelation, but as per v.1, it's JESUS' revelation.**
In fact, it's given to Jesus from the Father, and made known by angelic vision to John.
- **John is not the AUTHOR, but simply the REPORTER, for it is not his revelation, but the revelation from Jesus Christ,** that has the power to bring encouragement not just to the seven churches, but to believers of every age who are awaiting the return of their King.
- That we would be reminded, that God is indeed working out his purposes, and that even amidst great trial, is bringing things to their true end.

And so as we prepare to celebrate Christmas,
by preparing for Jesus' return,
we see a picture of Jesus, who is...

- **RETURNING** (vv.7-8);
WITH POWER (vv.9-16); *and*
HOLDING THE KEYS (vv.17-20).

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#1 JESUS IS RETURNING \\ VERSE 7-8

So first, *Jesus is* **RETURNING**.

“Look, he is coming with the clouds,” and “every eye will see him, even those who pierced him”; and all peoples on earth “will mourn because of him.” So shall it be! Amen. “I am the Alpha and the Omega,” says the Lord God, “who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty.” (vv.3-6)

The book of Revelation, both begins and ends with the announcement, that Jesus is returning, to bring history to an end, *and establish God’s Kingdom forever*.

- And how spectacularly dramatic that will be!
When we hear the refrain, “Look, he is coming with the clouds”, our attention and imaginations are meant to be completely and utterly captured!
- The phrase means to look, listen, pay attention! Like an air-raid siren going off. //
- When Jesus ascended, the disciples were left gazing in the air, *only to be told to get on with their work that Jesus had left them*, but now, when *this* moment arrives, the eyes of the world will be lifted heavenward to see the coming of the King.
- And it won’t just be that some will see, and some will not.

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- Every eye will see him, even those who pierced him.
When Jesus returns, every single person will know about it.
- It will not be like his first advent to earth as a baby in a manger, *but that his identity*, as the one who holds all time together and in whom all time holds together, **will be plain for all to see**.
- If you’ve every wondered if Jesus has returned, and perhaps you missed it, or you’ve been scared that somehow you might miss it, *you don’t need to worry!*
- No one will miss it. No one will be left wondering who this is.
There will be no opportunity for mistaken identity.

But note that people won’t just see him, but they will also **mourn**.

- When you hear that, *or read that*, you might wonder what that is all about... you might think that sounds terribly pessimistic...
- But drawing together allusions from Daniel 7 and Zechariah 12, we’re reminded, that in the face of the who one comes to establish God’s rule and Kingdom forever, *that this new kingdom will be birthed, with the judgment of the King being poured out*.
- Not because God is petty or vindictive, but because he is just, and that the fulfilment of God’s Kingdom, requires the final blow to evil and sin.

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- The one who is the first and the last,
that's what is meant by the ALPHA and the OMEGA,
that's the first first and last letters of the Greek alphabet,
the one who holds God's all-encompassing power, is returning,
to deal with evil and sin once and for all.
- And we're told, that if you stand on your own merit,
then that will indeed be a day of mourning,
but if you have put your trust in Jesus, then you will have nothing to fear,
for he has, as per verse 5, freed us from our sins by his blood.

You can imagine that to a church who was facing terrible persecution,
suffering socially, politically, economically, physically,
that this would have been incredibly encouraging, the day couldn't come soon enough.

- But to the ones who were falling away,
who were tempted to worship the emperor instead of God,
then this would have been a dire warning.
- that the one, whose authority extends not just over a region, but over all,
that the one, whose authority extends not just for a time, but across all time,
is returning, and on that day, you won't be wondering who really is in charge,
of who really deserves your allegiance, because that will be plain to see.

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#2 WITH POWER \ \ VERSE 9-16

For Jesus is not only returning, but he is **RETURNING WITH POWER.**

I turned around to see the voice that was speaking to me. And when I turned I saw seven golden lampstands, 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. The hair on his head was white like wool, as white as snow, and his eyes were like blazing fire. His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of rushing waters. 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. (vv. 9-16)

This is Jesus like we've never seen him before!

- So often we paint Jesus as some meek and mild fellow,
tending the sheep, and feeding the hungry,
but in this description, we're being reminded precisely of who he is.
- This description of Jesus, as one who stands amidst the churches,
that's what the second golden lampstands are representing,
is described as *like the* the Son of Man,
but also as completely powerful, like the Ancient of Days, that is,

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a majestic form, brilliant face, eyes like fire, deafening voice, hair like white wool, a sword representing judgment.

- Both images picked up from Daniel 7.
- And you might be thinking that doesn't sound like Jesus,
but John is painting a picture of what it is to see Jesus clearly and his identity unveiled.
- The original hearers would have been quite surprised to hear this,
because what John, in his reporting of the revelation from Jesus,
is showing that the Son of Man, and Ancient of Days are not two separate people,
but actually one and the same.
- He is mind-blowingly powerful, but there in human form.
- No one was expecting that the Son of Man, would be God himself,
but that's exactly what we see here. That when you look at Jesus, you are seeing God.
- And incredibly, on top that, he is standing amidst his church.
- The God who is omnipotent, *that is all powerful,*
Will also be imminent, *that is we will be right in his presence.*

So often we can have an image of Jesus that is distant or domesticated.

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- An all-all-powerful God out of sight and out of reach,
or a timid-meek view of Jesus who is just our best mate.
- But John will have none of that.
- He won't let us just relegate Jesus to someone whom we take or leave,
that we just casually choose to acknowledge or not,
that we can relate to simply on our own terms,
or ignore as someone far off, like the greeks believed!
- No, for John's view of Jesus is neither distant nor domesticated,
but grounded in history, that what God looks like in Daniel,
is precisely what Jesus looks like in Revelation.
- He's still man, but no longer veiled in weakness.
He's incredibly close, but also ruler of all.
He's beautiful, but also fearful.
He's saviour, but also judge.
He's all-powerful, but present.

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#3 HOLDING THE KEYS \\ VERSE 17-20

And he is also, **HOLDING THE KEYS**.

When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. Then he placed his right hand on me and said: "Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. I am the Living One; I was dead, and now look, I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades. (vv.17-18)"

In the face of this awesome view of Jesus,
John simply has one response: to fall at his feet *at though dead*.

- That in response to seeing King Jesus for who he is,
John falls at his feet, *paralysed with fear*, but also captured in awe!
- I wonder if you've ever had an experience when you've seen something,
and you couldn't quite make sense of what you were seeing,
but it completely captured your attention.
- Well here John is, seeing Jesus with an immense clarity yet utterly bamboozling,
and so his immediate response, in the very presence of God,
recognising him for who he really is, is to fall to the floor in reverence and fear.

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- That seems like a very natural response to everything described!
That seems like an appropriate response in the presence of the great King!
To fall before him both in fear and worship.
- But then something, absolutely astounding and surprising happens:
Jesus says, "do not be afraid".
- How could you not be afraid! To be in the very presence of the one,
whose power and majesty are completely unveiled!
- How could the original hearers, who were facing incredible persecution,
not be afraid?
- **Because Jesus is alive!**
We're told that three times!
That he is the first and the last,
That he is the living one,
that he was dead, but is now for ever and ever.
- But even more than that, we do not need to be afraid,
because he holds the keys of death and Hades in his hands.
- In the ancient world, they thought that the realms of the dead had gates,
and so, by saying that he holds the keys,
it means that he is the one who has authority over death.

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- *This is good news!*
Jesus has the credentials! He was dead, but he is now alive!
- *Do you hear what Jesus is saying?*
Of why John should not be afraid!?
- Because:
there is only who has authority over even death itself,
there is only one who holds the keys,
there is only one who can free us,
there is only one who has risen,
and he's inviting us to put our trust in him.
- That we wouldn't have a Jesus of our imagination,
as a domesticated friend who we can take or leave,
or a distant god from whom we are removed,
but the one who is all-powerful, and who will return. //

As persecution of Christians escalated towards the end of the first century,
there were absolutely horrific things done to Christians.

- Christians, who refused to acknowledge that Caesar was the Lord of all,
were torn to pieces, thrown to the lions, molten metals poured into their skulls.

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- Yet as they faced this, they did so with a *peace* that perplexed those who watched.
And the persecution that was intended to quash Christianity had the opposite intended effect.
- The more they were persecuted, the more Christianity spread.
The blood of the martyrs became the seed of the church.
- How could they face such trial, how could they face such suffering?
- Because they knew who Jesus truly is.
- They knew that their beginning was not found in themselves,
And that their endings were not found in what was inflicted upon them,
but that their all was found in the one who is the both beginning and the end.
- That when we look at Jesus in the manger,
that would not just see a baby, but the King,
who would die for us, but is now alive,
and is returning with power,
holding the keys in his hands.

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