

thrive

MAY-JUL 2020

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THIS ISSUE

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REVELATION

- our firm hope

In this issue of *Thrive* we will be delving into the most complex book of the Bible, the book of Revelation. My aim will be to transcend the complexities by drawing out the central meaning of the text and to apply its amazing message to our lives. Revelation is not a puzzle to solve. It is more like a piece of abstract art that seeks to impact us with its symbols and pictures without giving away more than God wants to give us. The book of Revelation is an exhilarating ride for sure, so join me as I explore these remarkable visions of the apostle John.

MJ

LIGHT IN THE DARK

Revelation 1:1-3

FRIDAY
1 MAY

The book of Revelation is a collection of very dramatic and cryptic visions given by God to the apostle John while he was in exile on the island of Patmos around 95AD. God wanted to show John “what must soon take place” (1:1). This was a dark time for the church. They had been persecuted before, now they were being persecuted again and they had every reason to believe that this would continue in the future. It wasn’t a good prognosis for the embattled Christians. It was into this dark situation that the light of these revelations shines. It is often in the darkest places in life that we see the light most clearly. I think of all the people in the Biblical stories who encountered God in the hardest of places: Moses, David, Daniel and others. If you are in a dark place right now, then according to the Bible, you are in the best place to find God. John was imprisoned on the island of Patmos and, as a leader and shepherd of the church, he no doubt would have been very concerned about the fate of his flock. Would they survive these persecutions? Would the light of God’s church be snuffed out? The Roman authorities were doing their best to squash the Christian movement, and they were fearfully good at this sort of thing. So, God reveals to John that these events are part of a bigger spiritual battle. The message of the book is simple: we win in the end. There is light at the end of our tunnel.

Read Revelation 1:1-3

Ask God to reveal himself more to you.

Celebrating Justice – Psalm 76

Psalm 76 is a celebration of God as the one who gives his people victory over their enemies. The two events most likely being alluded to in this psalm are the victory over the Assyrians in the time of Hezekiah (2 Kings 19) and the destruction of the Egyptian army at the Red Sea. These victories became emblematic of God's protection of his people and his judgement upon the evil nations. God's judgement as a theme of celebration is not something we are much accustomed to in our time. We tend to see judgement as a negative thing. But to a people who had witnessed the worst of the cruelty and oppression of mankind the anticipation of judgement was a matter of great consolation and joy. It was seen as equalising the scales of justice and vindicating those who suffered from this oppression and cruelty. Every evil action will be judged and punished. That is a theme of celebration in the psalms. Of course, this becomes problematic if, in suffering evil, we become like those who afflict us. In an important sense, such prayers as this can only be prayed by those who stand within Christ's innocence. The grace we benefit from did not mean that our sin was not judged. It was judged in Christ's suffering and death. In this sense Christ validates God's judgement. But he also reserves the right to take it on himself for those who trust in him. We can therefore joyfully anticipate and celebrate God's final judgement because, on that day, both the justice and the grace of God will be manifested.

Read **Psalm 76**. Thank God for both his justice and his grace.

Revelation 1:4-8

John makes it clear that this message comes from another place. It comes from heaven and it is the account of the climax of a heavenly invasion that has already begun. God is establishing his Kingdom on earth now and that process will culminate in the return of Christ. The more the Kingdom comes into the world in this present age, the more polarised the world will become because the brighter the light, the darker the shadows become. In Matthew 13:24-30 Jesus likened the Kingdom of God to a crop of wheat and the seeds of Satan to weeds. He predicted that the weeds will grow beside the wheat until, at the end of this age, God will send his angels to weed out of his Kingdom everything that does evil (Matthew 13:41). This is what we shall see in the book of Revelation. The church at the time was experiencing an overt manifestation of evil as their presence in the world polarised people. God wanted to remind them that their heavenly invasion would be successful despite the opposition. God's Kingdom would come in this age, at the end of which Jesus would return to his Kingdom, purge all evil from the earth and usher in the age of the new heavenly earth (Revelation 21-22). Let us be reminded that we are the foot-soldiers of God. We are here to vanquish darkness with light, turmoil with peace, hatred with love and evil with justice. That is your mission if you choose to accept it.

Read Revelation 1:4-8

Ask God to make you shine more brightly as a witness for him.

TUESDAY
5 MAY

THE EXALTED CHRIST

Revelation 1:9-20

John was very close to Jesus, in fact, in his gospel, he referred to himself as 'the beloved disciple' because he was one of Jesus' closest companions. Here, John meets Jesus again but in a vastly different form than he knew him 65 years earlier. Here, John meets the same Jesus that Daniel saw: "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. 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" (Daniel 7:13-14). When John saw this Jesus, he was overwhelmed by such power and glory, so much so that he could not stand in his presence. It is this Jesus who is the main character in the events about to be described and this is the significance of this vision. John had met the lowly Jesus who had stooped down to love humankind. Now he was meeting Jesus the sovereign Lord and Judge of the earth. The lowly Jesus has come, but now the majestic Jesus is coming. John had nothing to fear, however, because he had responded to the call of the lowly Jesus. So the judge was *for* him, not against. If you follow the lowly Jesus down into humble service then you will be exalted by the majestic Jesus.

Read Revelation 1:9-20

Recommit yourself to the service of Christ.

JESUS

Revelation 1:9-20

The Jesus that John saw in his vision was not distant and disinterested in his people. John saw him standing among seven golden lampstands which represent the seven churches that John was addressing in his letter. Jesus had said that he would always be with his people (Matthew 28:20). The very first vision that John received was a vision of Jesus standing in the midst of his church. Not only was it Jesus that John saw but it was Jesus in all his glory and power. Each of the aspects of Jesus' manifestation here in Revelation 1 says something profound, not only about who Jesus is, but what he is doing, or prepared to do, right now in the midst of his church. There is authority (the robe), divine wisdom (the white hair), penetrating vision (fiery eyes), and pure power (bronze). His voice is powerful and his word comes forth like a sharp sword. The opponents of the Christian movement are many, but there are no competitors because nothing can rival the mission of Jesus in this world. If only we would believe this more fervently and shed our timidity! The first recorded corporate prayer of the Christian church (Acts 4:24ff) was a prayer for boldness in the face of opposition. And God answered this prayer by shaking the very foundations of the building that the Christians prayed in. You can be a bolder witness to Christ if you want. Jesus will pierce the hearts of many with his love through you if you are willing. The power of God will work through you if you are willing. Are you willing?

Read Revelation 1:9-20 again
Ask God to give you greater boldness.

THURSDAY
7 MAY

LETTERS TO THE CHURCHES: THIS AGAINST YOU

Revelation 2

If Jesus sent a letter to you, what would he say? If he sent a letter to your church, what would he commend and what would he decry? Throughout these seven letters to the seven churches of Asia Minor (present day Turkey) we have two repeated phrases. The first is, “I know your deeds”. The second is, “I have this against you”. Jesus was not condemning these people in saying this. He was chastising them in love. However, there is something soberingly disturbing about the combination of these phrases. That Jesus might have something against us, is not something we think about a lot. But *we should* think about this. Because, if Jesus has something against you, that must necessarily be the most urgent thing you need to know. There is probably something in your life that grieves Jesus right now. At least, it is safer to assume there *is* rather than assume there is *not*. And, if Jesus is grieved, then it is only because he loves you. But don't take this love for granted and use it as an excuse to do nothing. That would amount to a rejection of Jesus' role in your life. Whatever problems are preoccupying you at the moment, none is more urgent than the fact that Jesus may have something against you. So, take some time, now and regularly, to reflect on what Jesus might be grieved by in your life. What might Jesus hold against you? Acknowledge this before him, seek forgiveness and ask him to help you move to a better place.

Read Revelation 2

Do what I have suggested.

LETTERS TO THE CHURCHES: EARS TO HEAR

FRIDAY
8 MAY

Revelation 3

Yesterday we looked at a couple of the repeated phrases in Jesus' seven letters to the seven churches of Asia Minor. Today I'd like to focus on the other repeated phrase, and this one is repeated at the end of every letter: "Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches." What does it mean to "have ears"? In short, it means to be willing to hear Jesus' voice. Our attention is always selective. There are many things we could think about and give attention to at any given time. We therefore make choices to focus on some things and accordingly 'block out' other things. One of the things we most readily block out is our own faults. We have to live with ourselves and it seems easiest to believe we are doing well, even when we are not. But this is not an easy way to live. It is disastrous. One of the most important spiritual disciplines is that of confession. We must regularly reflect on and confess our faults to God. Jesus will forgive us and lead us out of our personal flaws, but we must acknowledge them and bring them to him for that to happen. If Jesus has "something against you" (as the repeated phrase in these letters goes) then you need to know this more than anything. So be intentional about giving attention to this. You probably already know what Jesus is grieved by in your life. Are you willing to give that your attention and do something about it? That is what it means to 'have ears to hear'.

Read Revelation 3

Reflect on and confess your sins to God.