

Who? What? Where? When? Revelation 1:1-20

- If you've ever read a crime novel,
- Seen a detective movie,
- Or answer a comprehension test,
- You'll know that the big questions are Who? What? Where? When? Why?
- As you go digging around the crime scene,
- The history books,
- The newspapers,
- Those questions will leap out from the scene and give a picture of what's going on.
- The book of Revelation is the ultimate mystery novel.
- Not because of all the strange creatures and bizarre scenery,
- But because it was designed to be a mystery,
- An enigma.
- It was written deliberately to be inscrutable,
- Baffling,
- Secretive,
- Unless, you held the key,
- Or maybe more accurately unless you knew the key.

- The book of Revelation however is no first century 'da Vinci Code',
- Requiring some fantasy reconstruction to unlock its secrets.
- In fact the book of Revelation would have been no harder to understand to its first century Greek reader,
- Than a political cartoon in 'The Sydney Morning Herald' is to a modern Australian reader,
- If you knew the key.
- And for the person with eyes to see and ears to hear,
- The key is right there in the very first sentence;
"The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants
what must soon take place." Revelation 1:1

- It's Jesus Christ,
- If you knew Jesus in the first and second centuries,
- You would have read and understood the Book of Revelation as plainly and clearly as we would read a newspaper today.

- You've probably heard fantastic sermons,
- Or maybe even read fantastic books about Revelation,
- And I use that word fantastic in its original sense of fantasy.
- In those books or sermons,
- You'd have heard how our world is entering the 'Last Days',
- And in those last days there will be a great war,
- There will be famine and pestilence,
- Millions of people will die,
- There'll be a great false religion that will cry for allegiance,
- There'll be an evil anti-Christ,
- The church will be persecuted,
- Christians will be tortured and martyred for their faith,
- And then Jesus will return to wrap up this world and put all of that trouble to an end.

- Well did you know that every age has believed that?
- Why?
- Because that was what Jesus revealed to John in the book of Revelation.
"The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place." Revelation 1:1
- By no stretch of the imagination can 'soon' possibly mean 2000 years after writing,
- As if all the tribulations of the Book of Revelation are only just coming about.
- 'What soon must take place',
- Is literally the first century of Christian history.
- The Book of Revelation was written to Christians in the first century,
- Who were facing one of the most ferocious attacks by a hostile, unbelieving world.

- They were attacked physically by a persecuting empire,
- Spiritually by false leaders preaching heresy,
- And morally by the temptations of the devil and a promiscuous culture.
- It was not easy being a Christian in the first century.
- Should they have been surprised by that fact?
- No, because this reality was revealed to them by Jesus Christ.
- This reality was made;

“. . . known by sending his angel to his servant John, ² who testified to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw.”

Revelation 1:2

- Do you want to understand the book of Revelation?
- Then look at Jesus.
- Because the book is called Revelation we think that opening word in v1 is just the title.
- But John wasn't giving us a book name in that verse,
- He's describing what's taken place.
- ‘Revelation’ is a verb not a noun.
- When you reveal something you open it up to view,
- You expose it for all to see.
- That's what the word literally means
- So Jesus is revealing something that God has given to him,
- Making it clear to John to write down,
- So it will be opened up, unveiled, revealed to his people in the first century,
- And to us some 2000 years after the events of which it speaks.

- Cast your eyes down to vv4-5 and we begin to see who Jesus is;

“Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven spirits who are before his throne, ⁵ and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth.

To him who loves us . . ." Revelation 1:4-5

- The first thing we see is that John affirms Jesus as the second person of the Trinity.
- Immediately John has made a controversial statement.
- In the pagan world,
- Heaven and earth were full of gods.
- There were gods for all sorts of activities.
- Gods of war, gods of love,
- Gods of the sea,
- Gods of the underworld.
- You name it there was a god for it.
- The Jews however were staunchly monotheistic.
- They believed that there was only one God.
- The Lord God Almighty,
- There were no other gods beside him,
- Just mere idols.

- Yet because of the claims of Jesus,
- The early disciples had to rethink their understanding of the one true God.
- Being faithful Jews they knew that there was only one God,
- And yet Jesus prayed to his Father God in heaven,
- He claimed to be the Son of God,
- And he promised to send the Spirit of God to his followers.
- Three persons,
- One God,
- What through out church history has been known as the Trinity.
- And in his greeting to the seven churches in the province of Asia,
- John uses a Trinitarian greeting,
- So his readers will know who is the revealer of the words that will follow,
- This revelation comes with the grace and peace of the Father God,
- ‘Who is, and who was, and who is to come’,

- Of the Spirit of God,
- The seven spirits or the sevenfold spirit before the throne,
- And the Son of God,
- Jesus Christ who is the faithful witness,
- The firstborn from the dead,
- And the ruler of the kings of the earth.

- This is Jesus the Son of God,
- The second person of the trinity.
- The faithful witness of the truth of the saving grace of our creator God.
- Who through the treachery of a friend,
- The complicity of a governor,
- And the sin of you and me,
- Was nailed to a cross and killed,
- But rose to life and conquered death.
- There is no greater power,
- No higher authority than this Jesus.

- No wonder that when John hears a trumpet behind him on the Island of Patmos,
- He turns and sees an awe inspiring vision of Christ;

“. . . someone "like a son of man," dressed in a robe reaching down to his feet and with a golden sash around his chest. His head and hair were 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 out of his mouth came a sharp double-edged sword. His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance." Revelation 1:13-16

- Here is a picture of the ascended Jesus dressed in the clothes of a king and priest,
- It's an image of wisdom and authority and power,
- Of awesome strength and stability.

- His words have power to cut down and destroy opposition like a double-edged sword,
- And holiness and righteousness burn from his face like the sun.
- In the presence of such majesty what do you do?
- You fall on your face like a dead man.
- And that's exactly what John did when confronted by this vision of the Ascended Lord.

- Why?
- In recognition of who he is and what he's done.
- Listen to the words Jesus spoke to John;
"Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades." Revelation 1:17-18
- What Jesus did through the cross and resurrection was to conquer death.
- He was dead but now is alive.
- Forever and ever.
- For all time.
- So whatever aeon may bring trials and tribulations,
- Persecution and suffering to his family the church,
- Jesus will be alive with them in it.
- He's the one who has power over death,
- Not the devil,
- Not a government,
- Not any hostile force on earth.

- Because of what he's done on the cross,
- Jesus has authority over the whole universe.
- Yet v17 says Jesus placed his right hand on a petrified John.
- That's how close Jesus is to the needy soul.
- He doesn't give an announcement from the far side of heaven with a booming voice,
- He comes right alongside his struggling servant,

- And touches them,
- Comforts them,
- Assures them.

-Look there at the second half of v5, ***Don't read!***

("To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, ⁶and 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." Revelation 1:5-6)

- Jesus assures John, and us, that we're loved.
- He assures him that he has freed us from our sins,
- He assures us that we're a new kingdom in this world,
- A kingdom of priests who serve and glorify God our mighty Father.
- We belong to Jesus,
- Not the world,
- Not a tyrannical government,
- Not the devil and his minions.
- We belong to God.

- But John sees not only what Jesus has done but what he's doing.
- The readers of John's letter were living through a time of severe trial.
- The emperor Domitian was going one step further than the sporadic persecutions of the crazed emperor Nero,
- He was systematizing the persecutions across his whole empire,
- And the churches in ancient Turkey were feeling this pressure.
- But what was God doing about it?
- If Jesus is the ruler of the kings of the earth why isn't he intervening?
- If he's the Alpha and Omega,
- The beginning and the end,
- Who is and was and is to come, the Almighty,
- Why are we suffering so?

-Well just listen to what John sees, vv12-16;

“. . . 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. His head and hair were 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 out of his mouth came a sharp double-edged sword. His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance.” Revelation 1:12-16

-There's Jesus standing in the midst of seven golden lampstands.

-What's in his hand?

-Seven stars which Jesus explains, v20;

“The mystery of the seven stars that you saw in my right hand and of the seven golden lampstands is this: The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches.” Revelation 1:20

-The stars are angels or leaders of the churches.

-Angel just means a messenger,

-The stars in Jesus right hand are his messengers,

-His emissaries who bring the good news to the churches,

-The seven lampstands.

-Jesus wants John to tell his church that he is standing right there in the midst of them,

-Jesus is so close to them that he holds their leaders in the palm of his hand.

-Do you really think that any harm can come to the ones standing close to the God,

-From whose mouth comes a double edged sword?

-Whose eyes are blazing with fire?

-Whose face is shining with the brilliance of the sun?

-You want me to say 'No!', don't you?

- Did you know that the persecutions and martyrdoms of Nero and Domitian,
- Where nothing compared to the persecutions and martyrdoms that are occurring right now?
- More Christians have probably been put to death in the last year in Africa or parts of Asia,
- Than died in the first century.
- More Christians live in fear of persecution now than they did in the first two centuries of Christendom.
- And what about our own lives.
- Has your life been made easier by being a Christian?
- Have all your fears and worries been assuaged by a commitment to Jesus?
- Have all your tears been wiped away?
- All your sorrows comforted?
- We don't live in a rosy world do we?
- Our friends die tragically,
- Our children are injured,
- Our families break up.
- We know, don't we,
- That we're going to have to wait until Revelation 21 to hear that God's dwelling is now with men,
- We have to wait till Rev 21 before every tear will be wiped away,
- That death and mourning and crying and pain,
- All the realities of the old order of things,
- Will have passed away.

- So what do we have in this world?
- What do we have in common with those first century Christians?
- We have Jesus standing amongst his church,
- We have the presence of Jesus with his powerful word and his divine authority.
- We have Jesus holding his angels, his messengers, you and me,

-In his right hand.

-We have the promise of Jesus that he has conquered death,

-And although we will face it in our friends, our families and ourselves,

-It has no power over us and we need have no fear of it.

-Because we have the promise that the time is near when he will return not to save the world,

-But bring his final judgement up on evil and all those who rebel against his divine majesty,

"Because he is;

". . . the Alpha and the Omega, who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty." Revelation 1:8

-And we are loved by him.