

Love From Jesus Christ

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[0 : 00] Well, have you ever wished that God would speak into your situation here and now? That would be wonderful, wouldn't it? What would God have to say to us right at this present point?

Dear Bon Accord, this is the Lord God writing to you to tell you what? But imagine the meeting, okay, that letter was opened and read aloud to the church.

It would be the best attended congregational meeting ever, wouldn't it? No one would miss it, would they? Well, understand that that is what was happening in the seven churches the night that the book of Revelation was first opened and read.

That's what it was originally for. Jesus says to John in verse 11, write on a scroll what you see and send it to the seven churches. And then the churches are named Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea.

So what we call the book of Revelation, it comes at the end of our Bibles, is a letter from Jesus Christ to those churches there and then, speaking into their circumstances.

[1 : 21] But of course, the reason why it's in our Bibles at all is because his voice resounds through those churches down to the church in every time and place.

So in chapters two and three, we have what's sometimes called the letters to the churches. They're going to form our summer evening series the next eight weeks.

But you might wonder, you know, what can we gain by reading somebody else's mail from 2,000 years ago? How relevant are these letters to the churches for the church today?

Well, we need to see at the very beginning that these are not strictly seven letters. But the whole book is one letter to all seven churches.

It's an open letter. Well, you might think of it like this. You know, if you copy in several people to an email, you might kind of include a line for each of them, give instructions for this person or a comment for that person.

[2 : 23] But when you send it, the whole message goes out to the whole team. Well, that is like the book of Revelation. Christ tells each of these churches in a few lines how the whole book needs to kind of cash out in their context.

But when we put it all together, well, we see that chapters one to three are written to teach us what sticking with Jesus through all kinds of temptations and pressures looks like wherever we live and whenever we are.

It is not seven letters, but one letter to the church with seven addresses. Because Jesus knows, okay, what normal churches go through.

He wrote this to all the churches so that all the churches would read everything that he has to say. Because the full spectrum of issues that are suffered by the seven churches are the same set of issues that the church goes through today.

It hasn't changed, and he understands. And brothers and sisters, we are a church like that. We are a normal church.

[3 : 38] We're an extraordinary church. But only in the sense that every church is an extraordinary church. We are a normal church like that. So here then is what Jesus Christ, our Lord and our God, has to say to us here and now.

Bon Accord, free church. Whatever we're going through. Whatever we're struggling with. Whatever we are suffering. And as we take time in Revelation, then this is what we should hear.

Dear Bon Accord, love from Jesus Christ. This is the letter of Jesus Christ to his church. And tonight, he simply wants us to know who it's coming from.

And that he is so deeply involved and present in the life of his church. So he starts with an application. That's unusual, isn't it? We start with an application.

Listen carefully to this letter. And the very first words tell us why the revelation from Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place.

[4 : 47] So it's as if God the Father has told his incarnate, crucified, risen, and glorified Son, now it is time to show your servants what's really going on in the universe.

He draw back the curtains so that they can see behind the veil of reality. That is what the word revelation means. In Greek, it's the word apocalypse.

That's why we get the word apocalypse. That's why in older Bibles, this book is known as the apocalypse. Now, when we think of the apocalypse, we think, right, of the end of the world.

So much of our contemporary media has drawn from this book, right? The end of the world, what it will be like. But at root, the word revelation simply means peeling back the skin of reality to show us the beating heart of what has been and what is and what will be.

So core realities. And that just couldn't be more timely, could it, for the churches back then. On the surface, their struggles and failures were like bruises and gaping wounds on the body of Christ.

[6 : 05] They needed to see that under the surface, something far, far bigger and far more glorious was going on because Christ was risen and reigning over the cosmos from his throne in heaven.

That is the reality. And we need that, don't we? Here tonight, brothers and sisters, do we not need to see that beating heart? To see things as God sees them.

To set our minds on things above where Christ is seated at the right hand of God, rather than through the lens of what we're experiencing here and now.

When things get tough, if we rely on our own understanding and wisdom to navigate it, we will be weak and confused and easily overwhelmed to endure and to overcome the pressures and temptations that we face as Christians.

The Bible says we need revelation from God. We need to see our daily lives through his lens, not our own lens. And so this book is such a gift, isn't it?

[7 : 14] In this book, Christ has given us that God's eye lens, that revelation that we need. He made it known to us. And he did it, he says, by sending his angel to his servant John.

And that's the human writer. And that's another reason why it's worth us listening to this letter carefully, because this is the same John, okay, who wrote the Gospel of John and the letters of John in our Bibles.

He was one of Jesus' very, very first disciples. In fact, he's known as the beloved disciple. He was very, very close to Jesus. He walked with Jesus as a young man.

Now he is a very, very old man. So scholars reckon the book of Revelation was written maybe in the 80s, 90s A.D. And if you think that Jesus called John from his fishing gear in about 30 A.D., well, it tells us, doesn't it, that here's a man who has persevered with Jesus for 50 years.

And not just any 50 years, but the first 50 years of the church's existence. That is somebody who is qualified, isn't it, to deliver to us this message from the Lord Jesus about what it means to stick with him.

[8 : 35] Isn't that someone we would listen to, to teach us what it means to stay faithful to Jesus? In verse 9, he describes himself as your brother and companion in the suffering and kingdom and patient endurance that are ours in Jesus.

So just notice he doesn't foreground the fact that he's an apostle. He doesn't say, I'm speaking to you with great authority. No, he puts forward, doesn't he, that I'm with you in it.

I'm your brother, your companion. I'm suffering with you. He's speaking from a place of hardship.

He is walking our path, what Eugene Peterson called a long obedience in the same direction.

We are on that path with John tonight, aren't we? He's speaking to us from, well, the end of his path. And in fact, he was on the island of Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.

And now Patmos is an island in the Aegean Sea. I looked online. It looks like a real treat, if any of you are yet to book your holiday.

[9 : 46] But back then, it was different. It was the place where the Roman Empire would send people to shut them up. So it's thought that John was on the island of Patmos in exile because he had spoken the word of God and borne witness to Jesus' life, death, and resurrection.

Which makes it all the more remarkable, doesn't it? That in verse 2, he says, even in prison on Patmos, I've been sent here for speaking God's word. What does he say? He testifies to everything he saw, the word of God, and the testimony of Jesus.

That is persevering faith, isn't it? That is patient endurance. That he is still doing what he was sent to prison for doing.

So knowing where this letter comes from, in its divine origin and its human origin, it gives us really good reason, doesn't it, to listen to it carefully and put it into practice.

And given that, it shouldn't surprise us that, as the letter says, we will be blessed in doing so. And so at the start of this series, I want to say, as John does in the prologue of this letter, just that it is an immense blessing for us as a church to get to spend the next eight weeks reading, hearing, and taking to heart what is written here.

[11:14] I don't know how many church services you come to with butterflies in your stomach. Not many, perhaps. That would be too much, wouldn't it, every week.

But do we not come to church expectantly? What did you expect when you came tonight? Did you not come with an anticipation, a hunger?

Here is Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior, drawing back the curtain for us to see what is most true and most real about our life as a church and our lives as Christians.

Can you not wait to see what he has to say? And so if your thoughts, or dare I say it, even your eyes are prone to drift of an evening, well, let me encourage you with these words.

Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it, and take to heart what is written in it. Blessed are ye when you stay awake for the next seven evenings.

[12:19] Okay, so what do you need to be blessed by this book? Okay, bring some water, write some notes, have a lighter lunch, pray in the car on the way, whatever it is that gets you ready.

To hear it, and your heart ready to receive what is read and what is preached. And as I say, I'm not saying that only because I am a preacher. You are actually going to get this book from three of your other elders over the course of this month, Steve and Rob and Norman Lang.

So give them your best concentration. Okay, pray for these brothers as they preach the word, and not because of who it is that is preaching, but because of what it is that is being preached.

The revelation of Jesus Christ that God has given him through his angel to John to show us, his servants, what is most real and what we most need to get through another week of being the church of Christ and his followers.

And in that sense, I wanted to encourage you, actually, by sharing this with you. Last Sunday morning, we were joined by Joe Steele from Alabama.

[13:37] And he stepped down from the pulpit and made his way to the back, and I met him at the door. And do you know what he said to me? Just wonderful words to hear from any visiting preacher. Do you know what he said? He said, you have a very attentive congregation.

You have a very attentive congregation. What wonderful, wonderful words to hear. I was blessed by that, that somebody came from halfway across the world and preached God's word and said, the people here were visibly hungry and visibly hanging on God's word as it was read and preached. What a blessing. And it's true. And I wanted to encourage you in that. And may that ever be true.

May we have a reputation across the world for being a people who are attentive to the word of God. Let me encourage you in that, brothers and sisters. I'm so thankful for that. Secondly, because you are loved by the author of this book.

Now, I don't know if you get personal letters through the post. I have a friend who sends me the odd letter. And it's great just to have a letter drop through the door into my life to tell me someone's thinking of me and praying for me.

[14:55] But imagine getting a letter like that from somebody who's no longer here. I imagine sometimes people may open letters from recently deceased loved ones.

And it must be incredible, mustn't it? I've not had anything like that. But to read the words of somebody who's no longer here, and you would hear their words, wouldn't you?

In their voice. As they would speak it. That is what would be playing in your head. Well, this letter is like that. John heard a voice.

We hear his voice. What does the greeting stress in verses 4, 5, and 6 look? It stresses who the letter is from and his love for them.

And again, just imagine hearing this in the field hospital of a church that is in Pergamum or Philadelphia or one of those cities. Grace and peace to you from him who is and was and is to come and from the seven spirits before his throne and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness,

the firstborn from the dead and the ruler of the kings on earth.

[16:07] Hear that? Greetings to you, church, from the everlasting God and from the Holy Spirit. That's the seven, holiness, okay, completeness.

And from Jesus Christ. It is a letter from the triune God. And his message to you in battled church is grace and peace to you.

Can you hear the voice of the one who died and rose again and lives forevermore speaking grace and peace to you tonight? That is how Father, Son, and Spirit speak to their people, first and foremost, with grace and peace.

He leads with grace for our failings. And he gives peace with himself. Does that not straight away ease the weight on our hearts?

Whatever it is that is pressing on us tonight, does that not lighten the load for us? That whatever we are struggling with, whatever fight you are losing with sin, and whatever pressure that you are under, that God in all the fullness of his being meets you there with grace and peace.

[17:22] Some of the letters or the lines to the churches are hard to hear. They're heavy going. To most of the churches, he says, I have something against you.

But to some of them, he says, I'm going to close the doors unless you change. To the church in Laodicea, he says, I am going to spit you out of my mouth. But behind those stern warnings lies the gracious greeting of God.

Understand, if it weren't for his grace and peace, these churches would not be there. And there would not be Christians at all. And it wouldn't even be worth him calling for their repentance because how can we take to heart what he says apart from his grace?

How can we change apart from his giving us peace with himself, reconciling us to him? Even the hardest words to hear in the next couple of chapters come from the grace and the peace of the triune God.

And so tonight, this greeting gives us hope. Whatever sin that you are stuck in and whatever suffering you are struggling through, this message of grace and peace comes to all the seven churches, however wrong they've gone and whatever it is that they're going through.

[18:48] Grace and peace to you, he says. Now that doesn't excuse those who need to change from actually changing. The warnings are real, but these words assure us that he is for us as we respond to him in repentance, that he gives more grace.

Friends in Christ, you are loved by the author of this letter. You need to know that. He says it outright in verse five. Look, to him who loves us.

And notice it's not loved in the past tense, but loves presently, now, us sitting here tonight, them sitting there in their seven rooms.

To him who loves us. Have you ever thought of Revelation as Jesus' love letter to his church? It is all love from Jesus Christ.

Now, how is that possible? Again, look at the churches that he's speaking to. Look what they're in. Look at us. Look how we come to him. How can we be loved by him?

[19:54] Well, here's a remarkable thing. That who we are to him, our identity before him, even comes from him. To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father.

Who we are to him is who he has made us to be. So John does not start, does he, by holding up a mirror to our failings, nor does he even start by telling us who we are in Christ.

He begins by praising Jesus Christ for who he's made us. That's how deeply rooted your identity is in Christ tonight. If you are a Christian, that you only find out who you really are in a doxology to who he is and what he's done for you.

We are who we are tonight. We are loved as we are because the ruler of the kings of the earth has freed us from our sins by his own blood and made us to be a kingdom.

And made us to be priests to serve God. We have this letter open in front of us tonight. Not for anything that we are in our own right.

[21:19] Not for how well we're doing as a church. We have this letter only for the grace and peace and love of God towards us. I'm sure you've sung these words yourselves if you haven't heard them.

We sing with the boys at home, Jesus loves me. This I know, for the Bible tells me so. And I've wondered, I don't know if you've wondered this, where does the Bible say that so plainly?

I mean, it tells us, doesn't it, on every page. But at what point does the Bible say, Jesus loves you? Well, up until now, I've not been sure.

But where would I take someone as little as Caleb, one year old, and point and say, look, look, there it is. The Bible says, Jesus loves you. Well, I would take him now to Revelation chapter one. To him who loves us. There it is. Yes, Jesus loves you. And the Bible tells you so. You are loved by the author of this letter.

[22 : 27] You need to know that. And all the more important, isn't it, when he has hard things to say to us, he greets us with grace and peace and love.

Lastly then, let's see the voice behind the sender. So the rest of the chapter, as you'll have seen, is just a stunning description of the author, what his voice looks and what it sounds like.

And it's just meant to kind of blow our hearts open. If you're wondering what the application of this sermon is, it is just to be awed. It's just to be overawed by Jesus.

On the Lord's day, says John, I was in the Spirit, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet. If we were doing the whole of Revelation, we would see this again and again.

John hears a voice that's kind of out of sight, and he turns around, but what he sees is different to what he would be expecting to see. So perhaps, you know, in chapter five, he's told, see the lion of the tribe of Judah, the root of David, has triumphed.

[23 : 37] And he turns around, and he sees what? A lamb, looking as though it had been slain. The lion and the lamb.

He hears of a lion, but he sees a lamb. And it's a dramatic way of just showing us truths in pictures that are really hard to put into words. And he does it for the first time here in chapter one.

He heard a voice like a trumpet. Now, what would he have in mind to see? A voice like a trumpet. Where have we heard that before? Well, at the top of Mount Sinai, when God came down to speak to his people, along came a sound like a trumpet blast.

And the mountain was covered, remember, in thick darkness and cloud and thunder and lightning and fire and blasting trumpets. And when the people heard God speak, he gave his Ten Commandments and the people said, Moses, you go for us.

We don't want to hear God speak anymore. They were terrified by it. They were undone. So, that is what John surely would have been expecting to see when he turned around to hear the voice like a trumpet.

[24 : 49] This just terrifyingly raw exposure to God Almighty. But instead, what does he see? Not the thunder at the top of the mountain, but the tent at the bottom of the mountain.

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.

What does he see? It is the tabernacle on steroids. The golden lampstand, remember, with its seven branches reaching up, its candles burning.

And here's the son of man and what is he dressed as? It is none other than a priest. This is what he sees and here's the point that this contrast, it is bigger than the lion and the lamb.

John has heard the voice of the transcendent and holy and terrifyingly glorious God in the thunder and he sees what the intimate, present, sympathetic high priest in the tent.

[26 : 08] And the point is simply this, that they are both one and the same. They are one and the same. The voice that he heard and the voice that he sees.

The glorious God and the high priest in the tent. The son of man. They are one and the same person. He's described as the ancient of days from Daniel with hair like wool, his eyes like a blazing fire, his voice like the sound of rushing waters.

Yet he is also the son of man who receives the kingdom that will never ever end. Here is, here is the Lord God almighty incarnate. And get this, he is dressed in workwear and he has his sleeves rolled up.

And here is what the lampstands are. Verse 20, he is walking among the churches. Look, the seven lampstands are the seven churches. That's where he is.

That's what he is tending. If you think of a menorah, do you know what I am speaking about? Kind of candlestick with the six arms reaching up and the one in the middle. The golden lampstand.

[27 : 17] That is, that is what we are to have in mind. These seven branches are the seven churches. And the seven candles are being kept alive by this son of man. The worldwide church.

In all times and places, the church multiplied by seven. It is cared for and tended by this person. Just look. Just look.

In whose hands we rest tonight. He is so glorious that John cannot even describe him. Whatever picture you have in your head, understand it is only an approximation of what he truly looks like. John says he's like this. He's like that. What color are his eyes? They're not burning fire, but burning fire is as close as John can get to what he sees in his eyes.

What does his voice sound like? Well, not roaring waters, but roaring waters is the only thing that John can think of to compare his voice to.

[28 : 23] You know, Cathy, you stood next to Niagara Falls, didn't you? It's deafening. Deafening. Well, Jesus' voice is not as powerful as Niagara Falls.

It is as close as John can get to comparing to what his voice is like. It is beyond compare. His voice is like a sharp two-edged sword from his mouth, his feet like metal, white hot in a furnace, his face blazing like the sun.

Understand, friends, this is none other than the Lord God Almighty, the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. He is beyond compare. And what is the first thing that he wants us, his church, to know?

That he is with us in the camp and he has his sleeves rolled up and he is looking after the churches. Now, if we look around this room, we don't see him, do we? With our two eyes. I can't even imagine what that would be like.

[29 : 33] But at the start of this letter, we need to see that this same glorious Son of Man is here and he is caring for us as his church.

When you go home tonight or you wake up tomorrow, can you just begin to take that in? Can you read the description of this Son of Man? Can you think that this is our pastor?

This is who looks after the church? John's reaction gives us a sense of how glorious he is. When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. The sight of him understands, just undoes him.

He collapses in his presence. Brothers and sisters, if we could see who is holding up this church, keeping the flame of this family alive, who brings us together into the presence of God, we would collapse.

I don't think I've ever seen someone drop to the ground in a church service, but do we never feel the weight of his presence and the weight of his glory resting on us?

[30 : 42] Are we overwhelmed by him, overawed by him? But here again is his tenderness. When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. Then he placed his right hand on me.

Can you conceive of this? He reached out and touched John. Do not be afraid. Is this not his excellency? That here he is beyond compare and he crouches down to put his hand on this crumpled heap of humanity at his feet.

in order to tell him not to be scared. His right hand is his doing hand. It represents his great power and he puts that hand on his servant to tell him not to be afraid.

To see his holiness and his humility, his incomparable greatness and his condescending care, his deity and his humanity.

If you can take more of this later this week, go and find a sermon by Jonathan Edwards called The Excellency of Christ. It's a wonderful Puritan sermon so you have lots of it to digest but his point is simply that Christ's excellency is not in that he is great and majestic and God only but that he is both great majestic God and the meek humble human.

[32 : 13] That he is both at the same time. Now what does he do? What does he hold in that right hand of his today? Well with his right hand he holds the seven stars.

What are they? The seven angels of the seven churches. That doesn't help us. You say, what does that mean? Well this is revelation. It could be angels, couldn't it?

Angels, angelic beings. But given that later we'll see the seven letters are written to the seven angels, the angel of the church in Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, etc.

and the word angelos in Greek means messenger. My own view is that these are the seven messengers that the letter will be given to you.

You will then get up and read it to the churches. So that that same right hand that lay upon John then now holds on to whom?

[33 : 17] The messengers of the kingdom, the preachers of the word. You know the song that we sing at home is he's got the whole world in his hands and he does.

But what John wants you to know brothers and sisters is that he holds his whole church in his hands. So who is he?

This one like a son of man. Well, if we haven't got there by now, he tells us, doesn't he, I am the first and the last. I am the living one. I was dead and now look, I am alive forever and ever and I hold the keys of death and Hades.

John, he says, it's me, Jesus. Now glorify that the same yesterday, today and forever who died for you, who rose for you, who now lives for you, right there for what you see.

This morning we heard Jesus ask, who do you say that I am? We thought about Jesus, didn't we, that he is the most very important person ever in the world.

[34 : 29] Well, this is what that same Jesus looks like today and you could not mistake him, could you? You could not think that he was anything less than the very, very, most, very important person ever in the world.

Brothers and sisters, it is the Jesus we know and love. It is that very Jesus who speaks to us in this book, who walks among the churches, who holds this church in his hand, who is present with us tonight, who loves us, who gave himself for us to make us what we are, his kingdom and priests to serve God our Father.

to the start of this letter, do you see him in all of his glory? And do you hear this Jesus calling for you to listen, listen, and take to heart what he has to say to the churches?

Let us take this letter to heart because it is love from Jesus Christ. Let's pray to him together now. Let's pray. Amen. Lord, we are overawed by you.

[35 : 56] We worship you from our hearts, Lord, that are broken and overflowing with praise. Lord, we confess that our minds are too small even to conceive of your glory.

glory. You are beyond compare. How we thank you that you have pulled back the curtain to show us, Lord, even a glimpse of your majesty. Lord, we thank you that you are among us, that you present yourself with your people.

We thank you that you uphold us and sustain us. We thank you that you give us all we need for life and godliness. us. Lord, we thank you that you understand what we are tempted by.

You sympathize with us. You understand our trials and you come to us with grace and peace. Lord, how we thank you.

We praise you for your great love and we pray, Lord, that through these chapters of revelation that you would speak to this, your church, Lord, that you would build us up together, that you would speak about what is right among us and that you would challenge us where we are wrong, that you would help us to grow in faith and dependence on you, that you would help us to persevere through many trials.

[37 : 17] Lord, prepare us, we pray, and let us take to heart the words of your spirit to the churches. This we ask in your name. Amen.