**HIS STORY REVELATION**

I’m sure many of you will have seen the attempts people have made to depict the book of Revelation….many of them look like something out of the latest video games! But what is the essential message of Revelation? Attempts to understand this book range from ‘fearful to fanatical’- and almost everything in between. The protestant reformers had a very low view of Revelation – Luther said ‘I cannot understand it’…Calvin omitted it from his New Testament. But the Devil hates this book as he does the first few chapters of Genesis – they tell how he led mankind astray from God and this book tells us how he ends up. But the essential message of Revelation is surprisingly not about war, fighting, and killing – it’s repent and turn towards God and bow your knee to the Lamb King.

Revelation as a book is unlike almost any other book in the Bible. John in a sense is not the author, he is the writer of what he sees. It is pictorial in style, kind of like a movie that he sees and records. But before we look into it we need to understand a little more about biblical history and worldview.

There are four usual views of history: **Cyclic** – history repeats itself, it gets better, then worse, then better etc. **Rhythmic** – the world gets better then worse but does not repeat itself. **Optimistic** – the world is getting better and better – e.g. technology. **Pessimistic** – the world is getting worse and worse – e.g. environment. **Apocalyptic** - the world is getting steadily worse then suddenly better. This view is biblical and under attack today. When you read this book you need to grasp strongly its essential message and central themes…*repent, turn to God and stay faithful even unto death.* There is a blessing for people who read this book but also a curse for people who tamper with it. I think the Devil steers people away from this book….he doesn’t want you to know how this all ends up. The book of revelation is the message to the Church in the end times that Jesus has overcome evil by his death and resurrection and will one day return to rule as King.

The book was originally written by the Apostle John on the Island of Patmos where he had this vision of things to come. The recipients were seven Churches in Asia Minor and the message was both encouragement and warning. We need to remember this right through the book not just the first few chapters. An apocalyptic letter in genre style, it relies on visions, and symbolic language to tell its message. The Old Testament is also referred to as foretelling the ultimate fulfilment of God's promise given to Abraham in Genesis. The book then is not a secret code that allows believers to decipher the timeline of Jesus' return. Instead, it shows that every human kingdom eventually exhibits the character of Babylon and must be resisted. Jesus, the slain Lamb who died for the sins of the world, will return one day as King with His followers to prompt repentance. He will remove evil permanently and make all things new.

**The Seven Letters - Revelation Ch 1-3**

In the letters to the seven Churches they are encouraged to resist sin, remain faithful and although facing persecution await Jesus’ return as King. Each is commended and then some are warned of issues they need to address and the consequences if they don’t change. The first few chapters are the easiest – they are historical Churches with specific locations and the literary style is straight talk.

**The Sacrificed Lamb – Revelation Ch 4-5**

The Old Testament promised a triumphant victor who would reign…the surprise is that the only one worthy of opening the scroll is a crucified lamb! The opening of the scroll would unleash God’s judgements upon the earth. So here we have the quandary that shows Jesus in weakness and vulnerability before he returns in power and might. Yet this weakness qualifies him to unleash the final catastrophic events in world history. It is a reminder to us that the humanity of Jesus is never lost, even upon his return.

**The Judgements - Revelation Ch 6-17**

Three sets of seven divine judgements (seals, trumpets and bowls) are unleashed on the world as people stubbornly refuse to repent and turn back to God. Instead God’s mercy is shown through Jesus and meanwhile followers of Jesus die for their faith. So there is the demise of those who follow Jesus before there is their resurrection and triumph. There is an apparent failure of victory for the faithful who look like being slaughtered for their faithfulness. And this is the point of this whole fury of end times…..can you hang in there while everything looks like its failing and falling apart?

Revelation is written to show you a sneak preview into the future so that in the midst of trial, persecution opposition and even martyrdom – the Church stays faithful. So, you will not be caught off guard thinking that being a follower of Jesus is an easy way to heaven.

**The Final Battle – Revelation Ch 18 – 20**

This is a symbolic depiction of a final spiritual battle. Now here is an interesting crossroads….the Church can choose between resisting the earthly Babylon and following the Lamb or follow the beast and suffer defeat. Guess what, the Bible predicts that many people will fall away from faith when it starts to cost them dearly to follow Jesus. And my question to you today in the light of this. What are you in this for? How strong and determined is your faith? Are you a fair weather follower of Jesus? Because your faith is going to be tested and if you are finding it hard to follow now – how will you survive when things start hotting up? A 1000 year reign on earth is foretold and at the end of it Satan is loosed again on the earth in one final attempt to bring followers of Jesus to apostasy and renouncing their faith. The demise of Satan and his kingdom is foretold in a final battle where he is bound and the scene is set for God’s reign to be established without those who oppose and resit him.

**Gods Kingdom – Revelation Ch 21-22**

After the rebellion and final battle, King Jesus returns to punish evil and vindicate his followers, and reign forever in the New Jerusalem. Where this is we don’t know, some suggest it may be here on earth where a new earth is remade.

Now before we sum up the application of this book…..we need to ask some questions about the literary content of it.

**Is Revelation symbolic or literal?**

Apocalyptic literature is symbolic for a reason. There is a hidden-ness about the contents that only those with the insight of the Holy Spirit can correctly understand the content.

So there is a progressive revelation of the book as events in the world move towards the climax. This does not mean that God is going to add anything further by another revelation but that what we have here will be more understood and clarity will come. The book makes more sense the closer we get towards the end. And here is exactly the problem with trying to understand the book out of context. Quite frankly I **don’t think it really matters what** position you take on the tribulation and the rapture…what is clear is that it will happen, get ready and understand the signs of the times. Most of you will know that there are three positions on the rapture; **pre tribulation** which means the Church is taken before the seven years of final judgements of God are unleashed, **mid tribulation** is a view that the Church will face a period of intense persecution but the faithful will be raptured before the final battle, and **post tribulation** view is that the Church will be tested right through this period of intense opposition and persecution and only those who are faithful to the end will be saved. The battle and judgements result in a 1000-year reign of Jesus or millennium. And then the final demise of Satan and his demonic realm will occur. Here is the challenge – the language is pictorial and symbolic yet we try to make sense of something that only time will enable its message to become clear.

So if there are still many questions to be answered. What then can we say with certainty?

Jesus is the central figure in the book of Revelation. The intensity and opposition towards those who profess Jesus will increase. Evil and injustice will be overthrown. Those who stubbornly refuse Jesus and the Gospel will be punished for their refusal to accept the offer God makes. There are severe warnings here in the book as the judgements of God are designed to turn people’s hearts towards him, equally people’s hearts can become more stubborn! The mercy of God holds out for people to repent and turn to him. A day of reckoning is coming and Jesus will triumph. There will be a new heaven and earth where Jesus will reign. Revelation points towards a climax where Jesus will reign and his kingdom will be established. There will be no tears, sickness, disease, sorrow or heartache…..

**The essential message is not that – it’s the triumph of Jesus**

Behold I make all things new, a New Heaven and earth, I am alpha and omega – beginning and the end. A new Garden of Eden – are you thirsty – come to Him and drink freely from the water of Life. A new city – God is making a New Jerusalem – the glory of God is its light,

people from all nations will walk there. Its gates will never be closed – no one to close them against! Only those whose names are in the Lamb’s book of life will walk in this city.

Flowing down Main Street of this city was a river, the source of life. This river healed the nations and produced fruitful crops. Blessed are those who wash their robes (get ready for the King). And the book finishes with this great exhortation…. Come, come, come, ….

The Bride says come, the Spirit says come. This is the day of the invitation to come into God’s presence.

**I don’t believe we are at these end times yet** that this book predicts. This book would have made more sense during the time of Nero and the intense opposition believers faced towards the end of first century. So friends….let this book encourage you. Lift up your eyes to the plan of God which will not be thwarted. Thank God that he has made a way for you….his name is Jesus. And his Kingdom and rule and reign knows no end.

And being part of that kingdom, you are if your name is written in the Lamb’s Book of Life!