



1. I Fell as Dead (Rev 1:9-20)

God is wanting to do a new thing in His church here in Swaffham. We are a people that need to prepare for what He wants to do. The Way Forward is part of that way in which we are considering what God is doing. But in moving forward we need to reflect upon ourselves, on who we are, what we're like and what we should be. Part of our teaching over the next three months involves that process of reflection. Over Lent we shall be looking at the Purpose Driven Life and asking the question to ourselves individually what we should be in Christ. In our Sunday mornings I shall be going through the first three chapters of Revelation.

Why Revelation you may ask? It's because the Seven Churches referred to were not like many of the others in the NT. They had been around a while. They had made an impact in their area, but problems were starting to creep in. Some of the problems were not of their making. They were persecuted and error had been brought into some of the fellowships. But worse, many of their problems came from within – their own lack of faith and enthusiasm and their tendency to compromise. They were churches on a precipice and they needed to understand their perspective before God and this is what Revelation is about.

What is Revelation? It's actually a letter and a prophecy. The word Revelation is the word apokalupsis - apocalypse - which just means that which has been hitherto unknown is now revealed. I was a letter principally to Seven Churches in the Roman province of Asia. Chapters 2 and 3 are sometimes called the letters to the seven churches. They are addressed individually, but the 21 chapters are for all of them so they go to read one another's letters! Revelation contains information about God and things to come which would shake them from their complacency.

As you know, Revelation is a book about prophecy. It is a picture of the glory of Christ, the awesomeness of God and his sovereignty over creation, over time and over every living thing. It was a wake up call for the seven churches. There they were, tied up with their own issues and attitudes to see the big picture. Not only is it a book about the awesomeness of God and the sovereignty of God, but it is a book about His holiness and the inevitability of judgment for all people. And there is the inevitability that those who have not believed will be lost.

Why all this? To make it an interesting subject for Christians to study, to read books on, to watch TV programs and have theological arguments? There's quite an industry in books, videos, TV programs and the like on last things and Revelation always looms large. But there is always the danger that we take so much time to speculate about what it all means in relation to the last days, that we miss the point of why John was commanded to tell all this to the Seven Churches (and to us) in the first place.

The message is this: **WAKE UP. Strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have not found your deeds complete in the sight of my God. (3:2)**

But surely we don't need to wake up. We are an evangelical church. We preach the gospel. We believe in the authority of the word of God. We're sound. I know lots of sound believers. Sound asleep. The Way Forward involves a sea change in us not just in those we want to reach. And Revelation speaks to old churches like ours and says WAKE UP. And what would make me think that any of that applies to us.

Because they were established churches that needed to take a long hard look at what they were doing if they were to go anywhere and so do we because we have been around even longer.

I blinded you with a few statistics last week about the decline of church. Actually I read out one figure wrong from my list. I said that some 70,000 people in Britain at least once a month. The figure in front of me was actually 700,000. Before you sigh with relief, that's still pretty depressing. A report by the University of Manchester recently found that in 1999 belief in God was down to it's lowest ever in Britain – 32.5% down 5.3% from 1991. They concluded that Britain was in an advanced stage of secularization.

The tiny figure of 700,000 reflects this. The church in Britain is in decline. We know that. In a church I was once a member, people often used to pray "Lord, we do not understand why our church is not growing, why no-one wants to hear the gospel, why we are struggling. Please reveal your sovereign purposes to us." I was young and shy then and didn't feel bold enough to say "Why don't you look in the Bible and then look at yourselves. God isn't revealing anything to you now because He has spoken already. So why don't you WAKE UP and see what the Spirit is saying to the churches! A whole book in scripture is given over to the subject – Revelation.

So where do we start in finding out what God is saying to us; a declining church. Where do we start? Where John started on the Isle of Patmos. *10 On the Lord's Day I was in the Spirit, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet, 11 which said: "Write on a scroll what you see and send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea."*

God speaks when we are open to listen to Him. Here he was – exiled as an old man on Patmos. What was he doing. Praying. He was in the Spirit. If you want to know the mind and presence of God, you need to be praying asking to be one in mind with the Spirit of God. He was open and ready to listen to the Spirit – and what happened.

12 I turned around to see the voice that was speaking to me. And when I turned I saw seven golden lamp stands, 13 and among the lamp stands was someone "like a son of man," dressed in a robe reaching down to his feet and with a golden sash around his chest. 14 His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and his eyes were like blazing fire. 15 His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of rushing waters. 16 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.

The Spirit reveals an awesome vision. You can see by the words he uses that he was awestruck and you can see that in his description of who he saw.

In the Way Forward meeting on Tuesday, the worship team said that as a church we need to have worship that reflects the fact that we are in the presence of an awesome God. True. In fact, I'd say that Revelation shows us that we can't move on without a conception of the awesomeness of God.

How do we do that? First of all we must be people that are in the Spirit. How do we do that? By spending time in His presence – alone and as a people. Our Sunday worship should be a reflection of our devotional life. We spend time with God and it tells when we are together. Perhaps the fact that many of us often find collective worship unsatisfying reflects on our devotional life. Reflect on that one yourself. What is my relationship with God? There's an old hymn that gives some lovely truths. pity it didn't get into this morning:

**Take time to be holy, speak oft with the Lord,
abide in Him always, and feed on His word.**

**Take time to be holy, be calm in thy soul,
each thought and each temper, beneath His control
Thus led by His Spirit, to fountains of love,
thou soon shall be fitted for service above.**

Have we taken time to let God minister to us? To challenge our lives as we meditate on Him? John did. *On the Lord's Day I was in the Spirit...*

Do you seriously want to understand and experience the awesomeness of God. God wants you to. It starts in that quiet place in your home or wherever where you spend time with God, where you read His word, pray, and most importantly to wait on Him and let His Spirit speak to you. You'll get much more out of corporate worship if you have spent time in the presence of God. Whether its formal worship lie this morning or open worship like this evening, you'll find corporate worship, what you experience and what you may contribute, will find a resonance in your heart to time you spend with God. Take time to be holy. There's no substitute to God's presence.

To John it was even more of an amazing experience that I would suggest it usually was. He was a privileged man, He was the disciple whom Jesus loved – yet even he was struck with the awesomeness of God as he received this vision.

So you want to experience the awesomeness of God? Good. It will give you a taste of eternity! And you'll know when you have.

What do I mean? Let's read on - 17 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. 18 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.

It's one thing to aspire to knowing God in His awesomeness - but it's another thing to experience it. You'll know when you do – because you'll fall at His feet as dead! You won't be standing or sitting or meditating on the word of God. When you understand His awesomeness, His holiness, His glory there is only one place you'll be – on the ground as dead. That was the experience of Isaiah: he saw God in His glory and he said, "Woe is me, for I am ruined! Because I am a man of unclean lips, And I live among a people of unclean lips; For my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts." Because when we understand the awesomeness, the holiness, the glory and the power of God, we realize how unworthy we are to be there! How little do we understand of this matter. I can say that safely, because if we did, we would not be in the spiritual state that we are.

But as he contemplates his imperfection, the hand reaches out to his shoulder and John understands who is speaking to him. In Jesus there is acceptance because he has the authority to make us acceptable to the Father. He was dead and is alive and in His possession are the keys of death and hell.

To study the seven churches we need to understand just how awesome God is, Just what an awesome Saviour we have and that he has authority over death.

The seven churches in Asia had their problems and as a result were facing problems. Why? Because they had stopped understanding the nature of the God who was their Father, the amazing authority and power of their Saviour, the Spirit who could make it all real to them, and the reality that they needed to deal with the issues of eternity; not just for their sake, but for those who were lost.

We are faced with a wake up call. Time is short. Jesus is coming soon – if not we may be taken to Him through death. We need to deal with matters of life and death. Where does that wake up start? In the Spirit – on the Lord's day or otherwise. Let's pray.

Time of quiet.

Prayer of Penitence



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Scripture Quotes NIV