

### **Introduction to Revelation 2 – 3: Jesus speaks to the local church**

*I remember once as a young teenager, seeing a school production of the Gilbert and Sullivan musical 'Iolanthe'. During the overture we could see what we thought was the fire curtain with the title on Iolanthe on it. However, as the overture came to an end, instead of the curtain being raised the lighting was gradually changed from front of house to on stage lighting and we found ourselves looking through what had always been a gauze curtain to the opening scene of the show. This is Revelation: the sudden revealing or seeing of something that was always there.*

*The context of the local church – when John wrote his book of Revelation in the late first century AD*

- *persecution,*
- *rapidly growing religion of worshipping Caesar*
- *the church was relatively poor (certainly compared to state religion)*

*John exiled on Isle of Patmos 35 miles off coast of Western Turkey near Ephesus*

*Four stage revelation:*

*God → Jesus → angel → John → local churches*

Revelation is an example of “apocalyptic” writing – name is confusing because these days “apocalypse” tends to mean total destruction and disaster and that idea has come from some of the events that take place in this book e.g. *the 4 horsemen of the apocalypse* but this was because the book was called the Apocalypse of St John from the Greek and in Greek the word simply means *Revelation*. Apocalyptic writing is usually accounts of dreams or visions and full of vivid symbolism and imagery. Often that imagery will draw imagery from earlier prophetic and apocalyptic writing in the Bible.

Now this imagery is not to make the writing difficult or obscure but grab hold of our imagination. *Eugene Peterson said: “I read Revelation not to get more information but to revive my imagination [for that’s the route into God’s imagination]”*



We are in fact far more used to images and symbols than maybe we realise e.g. *poppies* or road signs

*So if you get stuck do look up cross-references in your Bible, especially OT ones (or put the word or phrase in your Bible word search engine on Bible Gateway or other app!)*

The vision doesn't always seem to make sense: John hears a trumpet which is also the voice of Jesus which is like the *sound of many waters* and sees a sword coming out of the mouth of Jesus. The sort of thing that a person saturated in scripture might dream about – full of (biblical) symbols.



Remembering the context of these small scattered house-churches of Christians – often poor in a world where Caesar was seen as the most powerful person on the planet *Jesus is revealed as someone like a son of man, dressed in a robe reaching down to his feet and with a golden sash round his chest.* <sup>14</sup> *The hair on his head was white like wool, as white as snow, and his eyes were like blazing fire.* <sup>15</sup> *His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of rushing waters.* <sup>16</sup> *In his right hand he held seven stars, and coming out of his mouth was a sharp, double-edged sword. His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance.*

<sup>17</sup> *When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead.*

In a world where friends and family were losing their lives either to disease or childbirth or persecution, Jesus is revealed as the one who is risen from the dead and who will live for evermore

*Then he placed his right hand on me and said: ‘Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last.* <sup>18</sup> *I am the Living One; I was dead, and now look, I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades. (the keys to the means of escape!)*

In a world where the world is perplexing and no-one knows what is going to happen next, Jesus is revealed as the one who *can explain both what is going on in the world and what is going to happen*

<sup>1</sup>: <sup>19</sup> *Write, therefore, what you have seen, what is now and what will take place later.*

In a world where the churches are small and obscure and unrecognized *Jesus is in the midst of the churches;* <sup>20</sup> *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.*

Being held in the right hand both protected but also ready for use. The way Jesus is going to continue to be at work in the world and to bring about his purpose is through the churches. The stars are the *angels* of the churches. *Angel* means *messenger* – maybe the one bringing the message of the gospel to the churches; maybe representing the message that we as a church give to the world.



We are going to focus on Jesus’ message to 7 particular local churches *John in Patmos.* *Ephesus was John’s home church (? buried there – with Mary)*

**But** presumably John – and therefore Jesus - wants everyone else to read as well. (not Bcc!)

*7 is the number of perfection and so the 7 churches together represent the whole church.*

So yes Jesus was speaking to a particular church in a particular historical context, but it is a message he wants his

whole church to hear and that includes us in Cholsey in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

So this is our series: looking at what does each of these messages have to say to our local church here in Cholsey today?