

Revelation 1:4b-8 – The freedom to serve God as His priests now

Jesus, present from the beginning will return as the completion of truth

4 To the seven churches in the province of Asia:

"The seven churches" – the letters were addressed so they could be passed on via the Roman road, connecting the Roman province called Asia in modern western Turkey.

4 Grace and peace to you from Him who is, and who was, and who is to come, and from the seven spirits before His throne, *"Seven spirits before His throne" – 'sevenfold' symbolises completeness and perfection; also an allusion to 'angels of the seven churches, Rev. 1:20.*

5-6 and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. 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 – to Him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen.

"Who loves us... has freed us...has made us..." – stated as present-time blessings, emphasising the present dimension of the kingdom of God (God's reign

IN PRACTICE The third aspect of who Jesus is, also says a lot about the new identity we have in Him. "Freed from our sins by His blood" is a practical truth – the accusations of the enemy trying to gain a point of access into our thought lives find their traction in unconfessed sin. Knowing and confessing the power of the blood is a powerful remedy. Jesus needs people who know the freedom he has won for them to be His partners in bringing His kingdom, a new kind of priesthood, a holy fellowship in the Great High Priest – the highest distinction. It's easy to look around and see where the believers are bringing the presence of Jesus and making a difference in the world. It looks different from the hierarchy of the institutional church – regular people who know they have been freed, who know they are loved, and who are serving the Lord in worship and mission through transformed lives.

QUESTION *What is meant by priesthood in the post-resurrection New Testament? What should we call those who are set apart and trained as preachers, shepherds and leaders in the church?*

PRAYER Lord God, may we grow in loving You and walking in awe of You, as we seek to represent You to our world, and bring the needs of our world to You.

bringing God's order) as well as future fulfilment.

*"A kingdom and priests to serve" – the essential difference between: the **Old Covenant** way of relating to God, through rules, hierarchical and formal rituals, led by a special order of priests as intermediaries with God; and the **New Covenant** way through Jesus, personally, freed from the guilt of sin by His blood, able to draw close to God to serve Him directly in worship and mission.*

7 'Look, He is coming with the clouds,' and 'every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him'; and all peoples on earth 'will mourn because of Him.' So shall it be! Amen.

8 'I am the Alpha and the Omega,' says the Lord God, 'who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty.'

"The Alpha and the Omega" – Christ, the Living Word, is sovereign over past-to-future human history.

"All peoples on earth will mourn" – the contrast, those that are His swept up in the air rejoicing to meet the returning Messiah, 1 Thess. 4:16-17.

Others, still on earth, sorrowing for their sin in the face of One so holy, Daniel 7:13, but also finding grace, Zechariah 12:10.

The Living Word

The Bible readings for Sunday, November 25, 2018, with commentary

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Revised Common Lectionary readings for **Sunday, November 25**, in Bible order

Prepare for Sunday by reading the Bible passages beforehand – read again to reflect on Sunday's teaching

Theme: **The devil's works are overturned by faith in God's purpose**

2 Samuel 23:1-7 – Testimony from a renowned and godly ruler of Israel

Daniel 7:9-10, 13-14 – The majesty of the Ancient of Days

John 18:33-37 – Jesus is questioned by Pilate about who He is

Revelation 1:4b-8 – The freedom to serve God as His priests now

Also: Psalm 132:1-18

2 Samuel 23:1-7 – Testimony from a renowned and godly ruler of Israel

David recalls God's covenant with him, a Messianic king for Israel to come

23 These are the last words of David: 'The inspired utterance of David son of Jesse, the utterance of the man exalted by the Most High, the man anointed by the God of Jacob, the hero of Israel's songs:

"The utterance of the man exalted" – testimony to God's work through his life, raised up from shepherd to king of Israel, 2 Samuel 7ff and contrasting just rule in the fear of God, with unrighteous leadership.

2 'The Spirit of the Lord spoke through me; His word was on my tongue.

"Spoke through me" – in awe of God using Him prophetically.

3-4 The God of Israel spoke, the Rock of Israel said to me: "When one rules over people in righteousness, when he rules in the fear of God, he is like the light of morning at sunrise on a cloudless morning, like the brightness after rain that brings grass from the earth."

"When one rules... in righteousness... in the fear of God" – in the style of a prophet, David sets out in bold strokes a picture of a God-centred ruler – alluding to the One he foreshadowed, Jesus Christ.

5 'If my house were not right with God, surely He would not have made with me an everlasting covenant, arranged and secured in every part; surely He would not bring to fruition my salvation and grant me my every desire.

"An everlasting covenant... secured in every part" – despite his family failures, David believes rightly that God's promise recorded in 2 Sam. 7:12-16 will hold good with his descendant as the Eternal King; to be fulfilled in Christ's return to rule perfectly.

For further study, similar prophecies in Isaiah 11:1-10; Jeremiah 23:5-6; Jer. 33:15-18; Zech. 9:9-10. Fulfilled in part, Matt. 4:14-16; Luke 24:25-27, 44-49; John 5:45-47; John 8:28-29.

6-7 But evil men are all to be cast aside like thorns, which are not gathered with the hand. Whoever touches thorns uses a tool of iron or the shaft of a spear; they are burned up where they lie.'

"Thorns" – worthless but also dangerous, needing to be shifted with a weapon or implement. "Burned up", literally 'consumed with fire in the sitting' or as we would say, on the spot. For God's judgment as fire, see Isaiah 9:18; 10:17. The fate of the rebellious when the Messiah establishes His rule on earth, Isa. 63:1-6.

Daniel 7:9-10, 13-14 – The majesty of the Ancient of Days

Daniel sees into heaven amid a myriad angels attending the throne of God, the honouring of one like a son of man

9 'As I looked, 'thrones were set in place, and the Ancient of Days took His seat. His clothing was as white as snow; the hair of His head was white like wool. His throne was flaming with fire, and its wheels were all ablaze.

"The Ancient of Days" – pictures God as a king of great power and immense maturity giving judgment in court. The description symbolises His wisdom in white hair; righteousness by white clothing; and power in judgment, as fire. The description is similar to that of an angel in Matthew 28:3 and Jesus in Revelation 1:14.

10 A river of fire was flowing, coming out from before Him. Thousands upon thousands attended Him; ten thousand times ten thousand stood before Him. The court was seated, and the books were opened.

"Thousands attended" – a very great number of angelic beings stood before Him. John also recorded that there were 'thousands and millions', i.e. too many to count, surrounding God's throne and ministering to Him. Angels are spiritual beings created by God for worship and for mission (like us) who, largely

IN PRACTICE The first aspect of who God is comes through David's final testimony about ruling in the fear of God, and also Daniel's prophetic vision of the Ancient of Days within the awe of the heavenly courts. Is living in the fear of God, let alone leading in it, too high risk a venture? Do we bring on ourselves destruction if we get it wrong? The Bible history of Israel falling, and being exiled, underlines the cost of rejecting God, but only after countless appeals by God's prophets. The Bible teaches us plainly that God is love, and his overriding character is mercy and truth. The question is not whether we narrowly escape failure, but whether we really know and love God, and want more than anything else to live out of His nature. When relationships get strained, or vision confused, it is a fair assumption that what has slipped, has been the awe, or fear, of God through knowing Him and loving His ways.

QUESTION *Daniel's vision of millions in the heavenly court was extraordinary and unrepeatable. What kinds of spiritual practice help us to have a glimpse of heaven and the majesty of the heavenly court?*

unseen, help in carrying out God's work on earth.

13-14 'In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into His presence. He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all nations and peoples of every language worshipped Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and His kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.

"One like a son of man" – an Aramaic phrase, 'bar enash' meaning a human being, a phrase used throughout Ezekiel e.g. Ezek 2:1,3,6,8. But this appearance is clearly not a human being, but "one like a son of man", a description that the various authors of the NT were quite sure referred to Jesus Christ and probably what was in Jesus' mind when He used this of Himself, Matt. 8:20. Hence the translation used here. There is more than one time-frame in view. At the end of history, the NT references these verses to teach us that Christ will return, riding the clouds to finally confront evil and enforce its defeat.

For further study: Matt. 24:30; Mark 13:26; Mark 14:62; Luke 21:27; Rev. 1:7.

John 18:33-37 – Jesus is questioned by Pilate about who He is

Jesus says He is no political figurehead; His kind of kingdom is rooted elsewhere

33 Pilate then went back inside the palace, summoned Jesus and asked him, 'Are you the king of the Jews?'

34 'Is that your own idea,' Jesus asked, 'or did others talk to you about Me?'

"Are you..." – Pilate's first words to Jesus are the same in each of the four gospels. There were two questions here with different political overtones – was Jesus a rebel leader in opposition to Roman rule, or was He the Jews' religious leader, the Messiah?

35 'Am I a Jew?' Pilate replied. 'Your own people and chief priests handed you over to me. What is it you have done?'

"Pilate replied" – exasperated, despising the ways of the Jews and not wanting to get involved with their affairs, yet seeing no basis for their extreme animosity. Ironically, he ends up supporting their position and sending Jesus for crucifixion, fulfilling the prophecy.

36 Jesus said, 'My kingdom is not of this

world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent My arrest by the Jewish leaders. But now My kingdom is from another place.'

37 'You are a king, then!' said Pilate.

Jesus answered, 'You say that I am a king. In fact, the reason I was born and came into the world is to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to Me.'

"My kingdom is from another place" – heaven is the place of eternal and absolute truth. Jesus came as the Way, the Truth and the Life, John 14:6. Relationship with Him is the only way to God and the only means of that life-bringing truth being revealed – a problem for intellectual theologians because it is beyond logic and mere knowledge. Jesus came as living truth for all who would receive Him. Pilate, a politician, considered truth relative in the shifting sands of people's opinions; however Jesus of Nazareth did not present a threat to law and order.

IN PRACTICE The second aspect of who God is concerns the Son of Man who Daniel sees in his vision, approaching the Ancient of Days. On earth this picture is recalled, ironically, as Jesus of Nazareth is brought before Pontius Pilate. The Roman governor Pilate was used to factions, pressure-groups and politics in general. Appointed as Prefect of the Roman province of Judea, he encountered the religious politics of Jews and Samaritans, eventually being recalled to Rome after complaints from both. So it is not surprising that when Jesus of Nazareth was brought before him by the Jews, he saw Him at first as yet another political activist. Jesus immediately corrected that perception with His statement: "My kingdom is from another place". The lesson for us is that human politics on earth and heaven's purposes follow different agendas. There are spiritual connections – and tensions – between the two. We often pray and expect answers as though the kingdom of God and our world dominated by man's organisation and control were the same, but the reality is that we pray through Jesus, who is the king of "a kingdom not of this world". The better we know Jesus, the more we will discern His kingdom, and the more clearly we'll see the difference – and learn to live and pray in the right alignment with what He is doing.

PRAYER Lord, I say you are a king – the king, King Jesus, to whom all authority is given. Help me to hold less tightly the priorities that seem to apply on earth, and to begin to see matters from a different perspective – Your heavenly perspective.