

## WELCOME 24<sup>th</sup> April 2022 – 2 Easter '22 C

Revelation 1:4-8 & 12-18

Welcome! It's great to be together again...*Bible Study Qs* are provided to equip you so God can lead you deeper into His word & work in your life, then you can share that w/ someone else. We also use them for our *Zoom Bible Study Catch-up*. (resume May) We're still doing things we need to maintain a level of safety: Hand sanitizer. Masks optional but certainly your choice. Thanks set-up & clean-up folks!

As we move into this week... "They'll have to check Hawk-eye on that one." "They'll review that in the bunker." "Hot-spot & snicko have confirmed the call." We're in an age where the game is played at full speed but slo-motion sometimes determines the outcome.

Life happens for you & me that way...at full speed...@ the speed of life, & we don't have the luxury of slowing down our days or moments to see what really happened or to get insight into the next decision.

But Jesus grants John & the church a stop action view of what's really in play in our world. John is given a granular detailed look into the new reality created by the resurrection & its impact on human life...on you & me & the world around us. Things may look one way on the surface, but Jesus shows us the deeper genuine face of real life...as a result of his victory.

"Don't be afraid! I am the First & the Last. I am the living one.

I died, but look—I am alive forever & ever! I hold the keys of death & the grave."

That's the reality the resurrection reveals. Death could not hold Jesus. The grave could not swallow him. Hell is overthrown in him. All our enemies are defeated.

*THIS* reality means we can see our world, make sense of events, understand our experiences, & begin to live boldly & hopefully in every full-speed moment day after day. We live against the wider backdrop of eternal life w/ the Father filled w/ the power of the Spirit that raised Jesus from the grave.

Christ is alive & present w/ his people & w/ that in view God reveals what's still to be remade in us & builds w/in us a strength of faith that endures & allows us to stand against whatever hardships, difficulties & attacks we might face.

In all things...God spoke the first word & promises the last word is one of abundant life & unending joy. We'll continue to experience that at full speed today...

Let's pray...sing & then hear God's Word...

## PRAYER OF THE DAY

*Heavenly Father...you are Alpha & Omega...the beginning of all things, the end toward which all things are intended & all that is between.*

*We have known your healing. We have known your provision. We know your victory. You turn sorrow into dancing & tears to songs of joy.*

*Fill us with your delight & the power of the Holy Spirit. Renew our strength so the world will see in us the abundant life you provide & glimpse your glory in a world longing for your justice & peace.*

*We pray in the Name of Jesus Christ...Your Son; our Saviour & Lord...Amen*

## FAITH CHAT:

1. What are some things you perhaps take for granted now, but never thought you'd see in your lifetime?
2. If you open your Bible to the book of Revelation, what does chapter 1 verse 1 tell you is the "real" title of this book? How is this book usually read, instead of that?
3. If you could "slow motion" one part of your life right now to gain a better perspective, what would it be?

## 2 EASTER '22 C – IN CHRIST'S HANDS: UNVEILING THE NEW REALITY – LIVING REALITY

(next \_\_\_\_ same slide)

It's been said, that the nature of our 21<sup>st</sup> century world is that it's like people are "watching **two** different movies on the same screen at the same time." That in our public conversation, political discourse, media/entertainment experiences...we can't even agree on the nature of what we're seeing...post-modern view of reality is so fluid individualized/internalized that 2 people can take in the exact same information or experience & define it in completely opposite/irreconcilable ways. Brendan Murphy (Sec Dept Health) under direct questioning in the Senate last week couldn't describe how the health dept defines "man/woman." 5 years ago Parliament changed the aeons-old definition of marriage & now we've lost our ability to explain biology...?

But pick any topic...Ukraine/Russia? I was rolling sausages a few weeks back & a guy I didn't know on the other side of the BBQ was convinced the western nations should just "man up & push Russia back inside their own border like the US did in Kuwait back in the '90s." Climate change? Pandemic response? We almost can't have those conversations in polite language...And about the time I feel my blood pressure rising or the sense of "*what world am I living in?*" about to take over...I remember...

Disciples of Jesus are called to live a worldview contrary to the prevailing culture. We've always been the outsiders in whatever culture we inhabit. In a world shredded by the effect of sin...faith in Jesus as Saviour/Lord & a life built around him will always be peculiar to the surrounding world. Values attitudes beliefs hopes aspirations...anchored in & built on life in Christ...risen & ruling...will always be contrary to the surrounding culture...It has always been so...always...

We sorta get it that as John writes to churches scattered across what we know as Turkey, Christianity (trust in Jesus as God's personal rescue mission to reclaim all creation for himself/his purposes) was a minority expression of faith in the midst of a dog's breakfast of religious belief. Roman Empire was funny like that. The Caesars permitted a wild variety of god-worship...You could worship anything or nothing if that was your preference...but if you wanted to transact business, get married, enter formal education, hold political office, gain citizenship: *Kaesar et Kurios Caesar is Lord* was the required public confession whether you believed it or not. Christ-followers were obvious outsiders who became targets for the powers of the world. **OUR** confession, **JESUS IS LORD** was a slap in the face to Caesar & the other "gods" of this world.

We know that struggle...It is tough to remain in the world but not of it. Engage in normal life & not compromise what you believe just because everyone else is doing

something. To maintain a distinctive life of faith & your unique witness to Christ is tough...which is precisely why John writes & we read...

Most Xns find it hard to make sense of/deal w/ the Revelation mainly because we go looking for stuff that's not there...mysterious codes...identity of the anti-Christ...timing of the end of the world & the return of Christ...What we **DO** find is this: Look at vs 4, 5 & 8: *This letter is from John to the seven churches in the province of Asia. Grace & peace to you from the one who is, who always was, & who is still to come; from the sevenfold Spirit before his throne; & from Jesus Christ. He is the faithful witness to these things, the first to rise from the dead, & the ruler of all the kings of the world... "I am the Alpha & the Omega—the beginning & the end," says the Lord God. "I am the one who is, who always was, & who is still to come—the Almighty One."*

John says...Whatever sort of chaos this world throws up...God is still on his throne, who is, who always was, & who is still to come ...A – Ω...Almighty One... From the Spirit of God hovering over the water @ creation to the final trumpet God is still on his throne. God's Sovereignty is unassailable. God has not retired or given up on his creation. The hands that formed the universe hold it in balance to this day & will not let it slide into oblivion. The voice that called all things into existence still speaks. Try as we might...rage as we do...beginning to end belongs to God the Father.

John slows down the film of our universe so we can see behind the great spasms of armies or thundering of nations or the shuddering & shaking of earth itself...beyond the fretting & fears we're told will be our doom...There is no part of human life or moment of human history that stands apart from the work of the Father to reclaim & restore all creation to himself. All other claims to power authority majesty glory wisdom insight...are vain hollow meaningless...& *from Jesus Christ... the first to rise from the dead, & the ruler of all the kings of the world...Try as we might...rage as we do... beginning to end belongs to God the Father & all things find their fulfillment in the risen reigning Jesus Christ.*

How do I know? John tells us...

*All glory to him who loves us & has freed us from our sins by shedding his blood for us. He has made us a Kingdom of priests for God his Father. All glory & power to him forever & ever! Amen.* Whatever sort of chaos this world throws up...God is still on his throne **AND the love & work of Jesus Christ endures for you for God's purpose here.** ...loved us...freed us from our sin...shed his blood for us...Nothing can take that gift from you...the love & work of Jesus Christ endures for you. But there's more to that...If you've been reading the F260 Bible Reading Plan...one of the vss this week was **2 Tim 4:16-18:** *The first time I was brought before the judge, no one came with me. Everyone abandoned me. May it not be counted against them. But the Lord stood with me & gave me strength so that I might preach the Good News in its entirety for all the Gentiles to hear. And he rescued me from certain death. Yes, & the Lord will deliver me from every evil attack & will*

*bring me safely into his heavenly Kingdom.* Paul writes of his experience of standing trial in a Roman court for his faith in Jesus. All his friends went into hiding. But in that moment he experienced the Presence – Power – Protection – Promise of God for the Purpose of God. *But you are a chosen people. You are royal priests, a holy nation, God's very own possession.* As a result, you can show others the goodness of God, for he called you out of the darkness into his wonderful light. – 1 Pt 2:9 Priests not only stood b/4 God to plead for God's people, they stood b/4 the people to address them on God's behalf...represented the word will desire intention discipline/correction of God to us. God is still on his throne **AND** the love & work of Jesus Christ endures for you for God's purpose here...show others the goodness of God...preach the Good News in its entirety for all the Gentiles to hear...

A couple other things...vs 7: **Look!** He comes with the clouds of heaven. Everyone will see him — even those who pierced him. All the nations of the world will mourn (because of) for him. Even so! Amen! Despite what we see as a delay in Christ's return...He will... & when he does we are all accountable for our lives. We are not unchained from responsibility or culpability. If Mt 25 tells us anything about sheep/goats it's that we do not get to sleepwalk through this life as if we are the only souls on it that matter. We cannot just do whatever the heck we want & not do whatever we don't. Saved by grace absolutely! Saved for God's purposes saved for God's intentions saved for God's pleasure...without question. But everybody who has heard the good news of this salvation of this shed blood & free gift of life & turned their backs on it saying "none for me thanks" or treated it like a voucher they can redeem at their pleasure who have lived complacently instead of urgently faithfully, will mourn their lost opportunity the lost joy the lost reunion with the Father. Sounds pretty threatening...?

John certainly thought so... **When I saw him, I fell at his feet as if I were dead. But he laid his right hand on me saying, "Don't be afraid! I am the First & the Last. I am the living one. I died, but look—I am alive forever & ever! I hold the keys of death & the grave."** Difficult unpredictable realities of life in a fallen world are guaranteed, but those do not have the final word about us. Our Risen Saviour rules over all things & has brought to an end the last enemy; death. That's the reality the resurrection reveals. Death could not hold Jesus. The grave could not swallow him. Hell is overthrown in him. All our enemies are defeated. **THIS** reality means we can see our world, make sense of events, understand our experiences, & begin to live boldly & hopefully in every full-speed moment day after day. We live against the wider backdrop of eternal life w/ the Father filled w/ the power of the Spirit that raised Jesus from the grave.

The "keys" that unlock death/grave so we can be free in Christ to live forever with the Father will in time & in turn lock away forever everything that would deceive capture frighten devour or destroy us. You do not have to live in the shadow of death or death's minions now or ever...not since the stone rolled away & Jesus stepped out of the tomb.

Christ is alive & present w/ his people & w/ that in view God reveals what's still to be remade in us & builds w/in us a strength of faith that endures & allows us to stand against whatever hardships, difficulties & attacks we might face. Christ rose from death, reigns in power, & is coming back again, so we can be the most determined, hopeful, joyful, faithful, loving serving generous community on earth. It's not enough to simply survive. We are a river of life-giving living water that can help others thrive right here, right now, because we live in victory & daily transformation & the promise that God's work will be brought to it glorious triumphant conclusion in us by the One who has thwarted death & driven the devil straight to his fiery end.

In all things...God spoke the first word & promises the last word is one of abundant life & unending joy.

#### **TAKE IT HOME:**

What is one word from Jesus you can claim and hold on to this week when life seems out of control?

(how will the reality of the resurrection strengthen & encourage you)

Let's pray with that in mind... Father, we rejoice that there is a risen King who rules over all things on earth & in heaven. Thank you that Jesus lives in victory over every enemy & grants us His triumph as well. Hold our hearts steady in your great promises & fix our lives on the hope of life with you forever. By your Holy Spirit make our lives radiant with your good news for the sake of those around us... Through Jesus Christ...Amen