NUMBER 2 – In the Control room

We started with a glorious picture of Jesus in chapter 1. After the initial introductions we saw The Lord Jesus Christ walking among HIS churches. Chapters 2 & 3 gave us an honest evaluation of how those churches can be, warts and all. John’s vision continues in chapter 4 with a glimpse of the glory of heaven which always needs to be on our radar because it’s where we’re going.

1. As a starter, think about heaven. What’s your picture? How much do you long to be there?

Are we too ‘earth-bound’ in our day-to-day world to think of our heavenly destiny very often?

But is it also possible to be so heavenly minded that we’re no earthly use?

At a time of growing Christian persecution, John takes his readers to a place where the sovereign God rules over everything. Oppressive persecutors have no say – the Lord rules over everything and everyone. Everything that happens is part of divine purpose. John will later go on to say much about the great destruction and judgement God will mete out to wicked people. But here, it’s about our God who is sovereign over his creation (chapter 4) and Lord of our salvation (Chapter 5).

1. We often say ‘God is in control’ and here in chapter 4 he clearly is Lord of all he surveys. When the world we live in turns nasty either personally, nationally or globally, do we sometimes doubt that God really is in control?

If he is, why does such evil take place in our world?

Through the open door (4:1) John sees a throne (4:2) and he describes one who sits in great splendour (4:3). The rainbow is a symbol of his covenant faithfulness to his people (Read the story of Noah in Genesis but particularly Gen 9:13). This a reminder that, although judgement is to come, God has not forgotten his promises to his people. The throne is surrounded by 24 elders seated on thrones, probably symbolic of the 12 tribes of Israel + 12 apostles, which covers God’s people from the creation onwards. They are dressed in white because they are ‘worthy’ (See the church in Sardis – 3:4) and they wear crowns as a reward for being faithful to God (2:10 and 3:11). These are God’s faithful people who ‘overcome’ (3:21) and who stay loyal to God ‘to the end’ (2:26) and who will be given ‘authority’ over the nations’ (2:26).

1. Those who are ‘faithful to God to the end’ will be given authority – that’s why they are seated on thrones. That is God‘s promise to faithful people. No longer will earthly powers rule them and persecute them because, now, only God has the ultimate authority.

How should this eternal prospect change the way we view the world in all its turmoil.

Does it change how we currently think about Vladimir Putin?

Does it change the way we see our own current situation?

The wonderful drama continues – there is lightning, thunder and blazing lamps. The ‘seven spirits of God’ are the Holy Spirit’ (see 1:4 and 3:1). The fire points to the purifying work of God’s Spirit and the noise to the amazing power of God. (cf Exodus 19:16 to 19). The ‘sea pf glass’ (4:6a) separates God in his holiness from everything else. The four living creatures represent the universe of God’s created order gathered around the God who made them.

1. Here is the ultimately perfect setting for worship. It is constant (v8), it is spoken and it is active. It is about a God who is HOLY (perfect and untainted by sin), who is ALMIGHTY (the whole of creation was designed to bring praise and glory to God) and who is ETERNAL (for ever and ever).

Does our worship sometimes move away from a focus on who God is and what he is like?

Are we afraid to express our understanding of who God is and what he is like?

Do we too easily drift into saying how we feel?’

Chapter 4 has reminded the suffering church what must ‘take place after this’(4:1). Eternal perspective is vital in a troubled world.

1. You may find it helpful to list some of ways you describe the person and character of Jesus. You could turn them into short prayers of thanks and adoration to God.

In chapter 5 we are still in the throne room but John sees the Lord God with a scroll in his hand. Usually scrolls had writing on one side (not this one) and were wrapped around a pole. But this one is sealed by seven seals. (‘7’ always implies perfection or completeness) and it means that God has sealed it. The content of the scroll concerns God’s whole plan of salvation and judgement for this earth, from the cross to the new heavens and the new earth. Its content will be revealed in the rest of the book (Chs. 6 to 22)

1. Do we sometimes think of our own salvation in a far too narrow way? We may see it as something that happened to us on a particular day or over a period of time.

Should we see God’s plan for us as part of his ‘master plan’ for his world and his people?

How does that change how we see our relationship with God?

As J.B. Philips said – ‘(is) your God too small?’

But no one can be found to open the scroll because no one can implement God’s salvation plan except God himself. John weeps because he cannot read the contents of the salvation plan scroll. But one of the elders comes to the rescue. ‘The Lion of the tribe of Judah (Gen 49:9), the Root of David has triumphed (2 Sam 7:12 to 13)’ (5:5). Jesus is rooted in how God is revealed in the Old Testament.

Christ’s victory over death on the cross and his resurrection is how people can be redeemed. The image is now of a slain lamb (Isaiah 53:7) who, in Isaiah’s day, was the means of sacrifice being made for sin. The whole of Isaiah 53 is worth reading to give you the complete picture of the slain lamb.

1. Look back through chapter 5.

Why is there no one found who is able to open the scroll?

Why does John weep?

How is Jesus described by the elder?

When Jesus takes the scroll what is the reaction that takes place?

A POSSIBLE EXERCISE

During the coming week read these two short chapters in Revelation (chapters 4 and 5)

We have a glorious picture of the God who is Lord of creation and the master planner of salvation through Christ.

How has this expanded you own vision of God?

Spend time saying the ‘worship’ lines in these two chapters. (4:8, 4:11, 5:9, 5:11 and 5:13)

DON’T GIVE UP – once you get into it you will find Revelation such a blessing and, in the end, you’ll get to the wonderful place where you’ll rest in Christ forever and all that is evil will be banished.