

Ps Mike de Vetter - Making sense of the book of Revelation.

Of all the books in the Bible, Revelation has the greatest intrigue factor and I would also say a fear and confusion factor like no other book.

Revelation is a type of Apocalyptic writing which by definition means to 'Forecast the ultimate destiny of the world'. You can understand the concern some have and why many simply don't read it because it's all too much to take in. Don't worry, I've been there, but in recent years I have had a revelation of revelation that has allowed me to read it with fresh eyes and understanding.

Revelation is all about one character, Jesus and it is the highlights package of his ultimate victory, which also means for those who choose to follow him, our victory.

In this room there would be different groups of people who interpret Revelation differently. Some believe all that was spoken of in Revelation was completed in the first century. Others believe that the symbolic pictures speak of the timeless truth of the battle between Good and Evil. Others feel the Book of revelation contains historical events from the first century as well as a forewarning of days still to come.

The final group find it too hard so they just don't care and stick to the other 65 books. Fortunately, the fundamental truths of Revelation do not depend on us taking on a particular point of view.

So whichever category here's my encouragement to you. In all your research and study, don't get so caught up in the finer details to the point where you miss the main character Jesus.

Let me encourage you also right from the start, because a promise is given like any other intro to a book in the Bible. Listen to John's declaration in the 1st Chapter ***Revelation 1:3 (NIV) Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it, because the time is near.***

Any movie fans in the house? I love a good movie, especially with Amy, but one of the problems with watching movies with Amy is that Amy normally makes it to the last scene and then she's gone burger, fast asleep.

Amy fell asleep in the movies watching Guardians of the Galaxy. That shouldn't really happen right? I have no problem with her falling asleep, the problem I have is halfway through the credits she wakes up and asks 'What happened?' My response is normally 'You need to just watch it, you need to experience, be in the middle of it.'

You know what I'm talking about, that final scene where the hero fights the last battle, the guy wins the girl, kicks the goal, lifts the trophy. Missing the last scene or not knowing what happens is horrible. Why? Because in the last scene, the answer to all the questions that have been asked of the main character throughout the movie are about to be answered.

Will they hold to their conviction? Will they count any cost to get the girl? Do they have the courage to go the 12 rounds?

Reading and experiencing Revelation is essential for all followers of Jesus. Don't miss the last scene, because we will discover that Jesus fulfils every prophecy, wins the battle, establishes for all time that he is the undisputed, current and reigning, undefeated, never to be beaten heavyweight champion of the universe.

So in order to view the final scene, let's get a summary of the greatest story ever told in fast forward.

1. God created mankind to walk in relationship with him, In order to make that relationship real he gave them choice. With the power of choice they chose to sin. Their sin affected us all.
2. God loved the people of Israel and continued to forgive and receive them back even though they continued to be unfaithful.
3. Through centuries of slavery, judges, good and evil kings Israel found themselves looking for a Messiah, one that would save them.
4. Jesus came as God's rescue plan as the unlikely hero, not much to look at we're told in Isaiah, not the powerful warrior they expected, but an administrator of Justice, mercy and Grace like they had never experienced before.
5. The Jews couldn't handle Jesus and crucified him. The Devil thought he'd won but 3 days later Jesus arose from the dead, after plundering Hell's keys and access codes to demonstrate not only God's power but to offer humanity Salvation, not through human works but the work of the cross. He appeared to hundreds of people before ascending to heaven with the words 'I'll be back, get yourself ready.'
6. His disciples now filled with the Power of the Holy Spirit fearlessly preach the Gospel, planting Churches and gatherings of Jesus Followers across the globe. Many of them giving their lives for the sake of the Gospel.

So for 65 books God charts the course of humanity through multiple millenniums, setting up the finale, with one last book to read. The book of Revelation.

Hardwired into our minds and emotions is a desire to see Good triumphing over evil and if we miss Revelation we miss God's hope for humanity.

Revelation is the final scene of the greatest story that will ever told.

So let's try to make some sense of it. Revelation is written by John, one of Jesus' Disciples while in exile on the isle of Patmos due to persecution by the Emperor Domitian and also under King Nero.

Revelation 1:1 The revelation from Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place. John has a vision, a revelation. A revelation simply means to 'reveal' something.

Have you ever been to the unveiling of a statue where the object is covered by a cloth and it's unclear as to what's under there. There's a basic shape but you don't really know. When the cloth is lifted the object is revealed. That is John's task, to lift the veil and reveal the final truth, about the Bible's main character. Jesus.

For the sake of today's message I want to break Revelation down like 4 scenes in a movie and as we look at these scenes I want us to see the interaction of the main character and we will see that this is no ordinary lamb, cute and fluffy. We're talking about a lamb with

the roar of a lion. A lamb through which salvation can be found, but a lamb that will ultimately judge a world that refuses to turn from sin.

Chapters 1-6 (The Characters are introduced)

It begins with John having a vision of 7 lampstands, each representing a local church within Asia Minor, similar Whangarei or Auckland.

The first three chapters Jesus writes letters to each of the Churches praising them for their good works and influence but also challenging them in the areas they were failing. After this in the 4th Chapter John enters the throne room of heaven where amongst thunder and lightning, he encounters four living creatures each like a different animal,

In his book Valiant Man Alan Myers describes the four living creatures as having attributes, the lion represents leadership, the Ox represents hard work, our mandate given by God, the human face represents the struggle and reality of man and the eagle represents our ability to see with vision like God.

These creatures along with the 24 elders would fall to the ground in worship declaring to God 'You are Worthy, our Lord and God to receive glory and honour and power.'

Then in Revelation 5, John sees a scroll in God's right hand and a mighty angel proclaims in verse 2 ***Revelation 5:2-4 (NIV) "Who is worthy to break the seals and open the scroll?" 3 But no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth could open the scroll or even look inside it.***

Can you imagine the tension? John didn't just shed a tear, he wept and wept. This vision meant nothing unless someone could be found worthy enough to open the scroll.

Enter our Hero. John Looks and sees the Lamb

5 Then one of the elders said to me, "Do not weep! See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed. He is able to open the scroll and its seven seals."

6 Then I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing at the center of the throne, encircled by the four living creatures and the elders.

John would have been looking for a lion, the greatest of all creatures in the animal kingdom, a symbol of strength and yet what John sees is the very opposite. Jesus presents himself as the Lamb represented as a symbol that now begins to make sense as we read it in the context of the rest of the Bible, the lamb that is sacrificed for the sins of many.

In Chapter 6 the lamb begins to open the seals, one at a time, the first four released 4 horses to the corners of the earth, sent out to begin the judgment of the earth. Seal 5 revealed those that had been martyred for the sake of the gospel, each of these are given a white robe and they waited for the deaths of the rest of their brothers and sisters.

The 6th seal is then opened and there is a great earthquake. Now remember Jesus said there would be earthquakes and famines in Matthew 24.

At this point, the kings of the earth, in our terms today, the Prime Ministers, Presidents hide in the mountains and the rocks crying out for even the mountains to fall on them to hide them from the Judgment and the wrath of the Lamb.

Scene 2 – Revelation 7-14 (The great tribulation)

Chapters 7-14 see an identifying of 144000 who would be sealed, each representing the tribes of Israel. And then a multitude too numerous to count, representing every tribe and language cry out in a loud voice.

“Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.” At this point the 24 elders fall at his feet and worship him. ¹³ *Then one of the elders asked me, “These in white robes—who are they, and where did they come from?”*

¹⁴ *I answered, “Sir, you know.” And he said, “These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. ¹⁵ Therefore, “they are before the throne of God and serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will shelter them with his presence.*

¹⁷ *For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; ‘he will lead them to springs of living water.’ ‘And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.’”*

John looks and sees the Lamb as a Shepherd. What a promise, that the Lamb would bring salvation from evil, the Lamb would be the Shepherd who would cover and protect those that are called by him. The Lamb, Jesus, promises that all who put their trust in him, though they may be persecuted, though they may experience death in this lifetime, they would be with him in Eternity.

When you see what happens next this promise is so important.

At the start of the 8th chapter the Lamb opens the 7th seal and with that 7 angels with seven trumpets offer the prayers and worship of the saints to God as incense. What is then released on earth is God’s Judgment. This is where many say ‘This just proves God is an angry God’ but remember, Salvation has been offered to all mankind and there will be a point of judgment from which every person must give an account of how they received the lamb.

Those that do not, end up facing God in battle, a battle I would not want to fight.

In chapters 8 and 9 the first six trumpets sound and result in various plagues and chastisements on the wicked. In chapter 10, the seven thunders sound to announce the seventh trumpet (the Second Coming of Jesus and the Rapture).

In chapter 11 we are told that two Endtime prophets stand as God’s witnesses in the Tribulation, and that three and a half days after they are killed, the seventh angel sounds his trumpet. In chapter 12 we read of the battle between the dragon and Michael the Arch angel along with other angels.

Then a voice declares an assurance of victory to the end time church in ***Revelation 12:11 (TNIV) They triumphed over him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their own lives so much as to shrink from death.***

My friends, our victory comes by the Blood of the Lamb and by the word of our testimony, a testimony that if lived out is not fearful of death. Chapter 13 we read of the Beast, that comes out of the sea and is given authority by the Dragon (Satan) A fatal wound is healed and the world is captured by the beast and worships the beast.

But the whole world worships the beast, all except those who in verse 8 we're told have their names written in the Lambs book of Life.

Then a beast appears from the earth forcing those on earth to worship the first beast. Then each person is forced to carry the mark which is the number and name of the beast. Anyone not carrying the mark of the beast will not be able to buy and sell.

Books have been written, people have been putting fear into generation after generation. When will this happen? Has it already happened? Don't get caught up in that. Many people stop there and try to build a theory, try to work out what it actually means.

Can I suggest we do what John does as the 3rd scene comes to a close. ***Revelation 14:1 Then I looked, and there before me was the Lamb, standing on Mount Zion, and with him 144,000 who had his name and his Father's name written on their foreheads.***

When fear grips us, when rumours of end times engulf us, Look to the lamb. Cause with him are those who are marked by the father.

I love Toy Story and they mark of acceptance and identity was found in the marking of their bodies. Buzz and Woody longed to have Andy, their Kid owner scrawl his mark.

My friend, do you carry the name of your heavenly father today?

Scene 3 – Revelation 15-20

In these chapters we are taken through the events that occur at the very end of this world's history. In chapters 15 and 16 the Plagues of the Wrath of God are poured out. In chapters 17 and 18 we read of the judgment and destruction of Babylon which describes the spirit of our age.

Babylon described as a woman rides a beast that represents the kings and kingdoms of the earth in that time and a final war is waged against the lamb.

But, again, as fear would try to grip us we look to the lamb.

Revelation 17:14 (NIV) They will wage war against the Lamb, but the Lamb will triumph over them because he is Lord of lords and King of kings—and with him will be his called, chosen and faithful followers."

The lamb of God is also the Lion of Judah. One that roars, the one that fights our battles for us. Whatever you are facing, let the Lamb fight your battle for you. Trust him and follow him.

In chapter 18 God calls his people out one more time, to remove themselves from her influence, before she is destroyed. In chapter 19 a shout roars from heaven 'Hallelujah, salvation, glory and power belong to our God. Another praise party erupts in heaven and the Wedding Supper of the Lamb is announced.

Throughout Scripture we read of the Church being the bride of Christ and Jesus as the bridegroom. Again as the final part of Scene 3 comes to a close we look to the Lamb again now described as the Bridegroom.

Revelation 19:9 (NIV) Then the angel said to me, "Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!" And he added, "These are the true words of God."

Then a white horse with his rider called Justice and True, makes war against the beast and the kings and rulers of the earth. His name is the word of God and he battles and captures the beast along with the false prophet.

Chapter 20 we read of the Battle of the Great Day of the Lord, commonly known as Armageddon. Chapter 20 covers the imprisonment of Satan, the 1,000-year reign of Jesus and His saints on Earth, the Battle of Gog and Magog that occurs at the end of the Millennium when Satan is loosed for a little season, and then the final destruction of the surface of the earth as we now know it. Finally, we are told of the Great White Throne Judgment when all the unsaved are judged.

Final Scene – Revelation 21-22 (A new heaven and Earth)

As the first heaven and earth pass away, out of heaven comes a 'new Jerusalem' prepared as a beautiful bride. That's those who have their names written in the book of the Lamb. Then the promise that should make our hearts leap for joy. God says in verse 3 God will now dwell amongst his people. When relationship was lost in the garden of Eden in Genesis, it is restored in Revelation.

There will be no more pain, death, mourning or crying because the old way has passed away. So then John finally sees a vision of the new Jerusalem, laden with precious jewels and the names of those who faithfully served the Lamb and so one more time we look and we see the Lamb.

But again, not as we would expect. The Lamb that we have seen in Scene one as the one who was slain yet still standing, in scene 2 the shepherd that would cover and protect, to the third scene where the Lamb is presented as the Bridegroom to which we will become his bride.

Let's look to the Lamb one last time, ***Revelation 21:22-23 (NIV) ²²I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. ²³The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp.***

When John looks again he now sees the lamb as the Temple of God which as we read in the epistles we are the living stones that God will build that temple with. But we also see the Lamb as the Lamp through which the glory of God gives heaven it's light.

So Revelation in 4 observations of Jesus, the Lamb of God. Do I see the lamb as:

- 1. The Lamb who overcame death**
- 2. The Lamb who is our Shepherd**
- 3. The Lamb who is the Bridegroom of the Church he loves**
- 4. The Lamb is the temple of God and the Light of heaven**

This morning I cry out like John the Baptist, a voice crying in the wilderness, 'Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world.'

My friend Jesus is the Lamb of God who took the punishment I deserved, you deserved. Would you receive his Salvation today. My friend, Jesus is the Lamb who will walk with you, and protect you, cover you through lifes challenges with his Presence

My Friend, Jesus is the Lamb of God, the Bridegroom that has laid down his life for those he loves, you and me. Would you respond to his love today? And lastly my friend Jesus is the Lamb of God who is also the temple we will dwell in and the light that will shine on us for all of eternity.

Will you continue to walk in the darkness of this world or surrender to him and walk in his light today.