

Unlocking Revelation

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Preacher: Nick Louw

[0 : 0 0] Yeah, so Revelation. We're starting the new series, as you would have picked up by now, and I don't think there's been as much interest in Revelation in recent years as there has been in end of 2020, 2021. Just, you know, with all the talk of the end of the world, and even our Chief Justice praying against the 666 vaccine, if there is one, people asking, and legitimate Christians asking questions like, is the coronavirus vaccine the mark of the beast?

You know, is this the fulfillment of Revelation? Are we in the end times? All those questions in people's minds, and so hopefully, with some hard work on the side of the preachers, and also hard work on the side of the listeners, we'll decode what's going on in Revelation, and what you'll find is that it's not as hard as you think it is. Okay, so my first question to you is, how important is it to you to read Revelation? Not how interested are you in reading Revelation, but how important do you think it actually is to read Revelation and for, you know, for it in your life? How much do you expect it to change your life? How vital is it? When last did you decide to read through the book of Revelation yourself? The reason I ask is because I'm not sure we all treat Revelation like we should, as a book in the Bible. So, think about it like this. You may remember back in the day, people got most of their news from newspapers. For those who were born after 2000, newspapers are these big pieces of paper with news in them, and pictures, and you can even see them in the shops to this day. Anyway, I remember when I was growing up, my dad used to get a newspaper once a week, and it would be quite interesting. When you brought it home, we'd look, we'd catch up with the news, but what you'll see in newspapers, there are different sections, right, with different messages and different things to say, and you treat the different sections in different ways.

So, on the front page, you've got all the important stuff that you need to catch up on, that you need to know now. And then, there's other sections like the sports for those who are interested in that, and then right at the back, you get the cartoons and the crosswords and the Sudoku, where, you know, you'll get around to that if you've got time for it, and if you want to stretch your mind a bit, but it's not that important. I think a lot of Christians treat Revelation like that section in the newspaper, like the Sudoku and the cartoons, where there's interesting stuff to read, and it'll stretch your mind a bit, but only really if you have some time for it. If you don't, then concentrate on the front page stuff. Although, when we start reading Revelation, these first few paragraphs we read in the book, what we discover is that John, who writes it, wants us to realize this is actually front page news going on here. And so, we've got to, as we study these first eight verses this morning, my goal is to, in our minds, move Revelation from the back page of the newspaper to the front page, and help us to realize that God has inspired this to be in the Bible because you and I need it more than we think we do. And in these first few verses, we'll discover the type of writing that we're dealing with, and why we must pay attention to it. And so, there's three things that Revelation says about itself in these first few verses, which is vital for us to understand. The first thing, obviously, that it calls itself is a revelation. And we saw from the video, I'll remind you again, that that word revelation is quite an important word. It actually means an uncovering, a revealing of new information that is not known elsewhere. New information that you can't get anywhere else in the

Bible or in the world around us. And so, that's the importance of revelation, the word, and it's calling itself that, that in this book, you will discover truths that you can find nowhere else.

And so, that should make it already quite important. But more than that, it's not just any truth that it uncovers. What it uncovers is it pulls back the curtain to show us behind the scenes of human history. It's fascinating. It shows us what's going on in the spiritual realms, which are as real as the physical realm that we walk around in every day. But we don't see it. And so, we don't know what's happening there. But revelation draws back the curtains and shows us what's happening behind the scenes. It's kind of like a backstage pass into human history. You know, you go to a music concert and some people, the lucky ones, have a backstage pass, which means not only do they get to see what's going on on stage, but they get to go and look backstage and see all the activity that's happening around there to produce what people are seeing on stage. Well, in that way, we've got to consider revelation. Revelation is a backstage pass into human history in that it draws back the curtain and shows us what's going on and what has been going on for the last 2,000 years behind the scenes, which produces what we see in the world around us. And so, that's what it means, that it's a revelation.

[5 : 14] And not only that, but we also discover in these first few verses that God went to great trouble to make sure that you, sitting in the pew of St. Mark's Church in Plumstead in 2021, get this message intact. So, what you'll see in the first three verses, have a look at them in your Bibles, just notice the chain, the careful chain of transmission of this message. The revelation of Jesus Christ that God gave him, so the Father gave Jesus certain information to pass on to his angel, verse 1, sending his angel to the servant John, who then testified of everything he saw. And then he says, verse 3, blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, those who proclaim and declare it, the preachers, and blessed are those who hear the words, you, sitting in the pew. Hear the words of this prophecy and keep what is written in them. So, here we see God's careful chain of transmission. It's like tracking information for a package that you order from overseas. You know when you buy something expensive overseas on Amazon or whatever, and you pay shipping charges which are more even than the thing you bought. But anyway, when you fork out those shipping charges, they'll send you a tracking number so that your valuable package, you'll be able to put that tracking number on their web page and you'll be able to track it as it travels across the world to get to you. And you'll see at each stage of the journey so you'll know that it arrives to you without being tampered with and it arrives to you intact. Well, God wants you to know the same thing about revelation. That's why you have this tracking information at the beginning.

So, he wants to convince you that this message has not been tampered with and it is arriving to you intact. And it is a valuable package that has been sent through couriers, John and the angels, Jesus Christ himself, to arrive to your doorstep, to arrive to you sitting in the pew right now.

That's how valuable it is and that's how much God wants you to hear what's in this book. Okay, so it seems just from these first few verses that God is quite adamant that you hear and understand what this book says, confusing as it might seem to you. It's important. It's valuable.

But that's not the only thing that revelation calls itself. As we read on, verse 3, it's also called a prophecy. Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy. And a prophecy is a slightly different thing to a revelation. Prophecy was, there's a lot of prophecy in the Old Testament. And the purpose of prophecy was to help God's people make sense of what's going on around them in the world and then act accordingly. Interestingly, the word prophecy isn't what people think it means today. When we think of prophecy or prophet, we think of someone who predicts the future, like a kind of a Nostradamus type. But actually, biblical prophecy is more about explaining the present than predicting the future. Most of biblical prophecy in the Old Testament is telling the Israelites, God's people, what's going on around them and why it's happening and what they must do about it. So you'll read a lot. If you look at Old Testament prophecy, you'll read a lot about the Assyrians and a lot about the Babylonians and a lot about ancient Near Eastern politics.

Because prophecy was to reveal to God's people what they're seeing around them. So think of it like this. Whereas revelation or apocalypse shows you backstage what's going on, prophecy explains what's going on on the stage in the actual world that you can see. And this book of revelation has bits of both of that. But important as that is, because it's a prophecy to explain what we see around us, and it's a revelation to reveal things that we wouldn't ordinarily see, and therefore it's important, and God wants us to know about it. Despite that, most Christians don't pay it that much attention.

[9 : 32] Revelation. Because let's be honest, it's weird. Okay, you read it, especially, you know, from chapter four onwards, things get really strange. And then you try to work it out. You listen to Bible teachers, and one guy says one thing, another guy says another thing, and you go, there's so many different interpretations, I can't possibly know what revelation's talking about. And then you close it, and you read the Psalms, or Mark, or something that's more understandable. And so I think a lot of Christians are too put off by the book of revelation. And so they don't really get into it, even though from these first few verses, it's clear that God wants us to hear what's in it, and he wants us to understand it. But I'll tell you the reason why most people are confused about revelation today. It's a simple reason. And the reason is because we don't read our Old Testaments.

That's it. We don't know our Old Testament. If you knew your Old Testament, you would, the revelation would be much clearer. Because, get this, of the 404 verses in the book of Revelation, there are allusions to over 500 Old Testament references. And yet we, most people pick it up, and they try to figure out what's going on in Revelation without actually reading the Old Testament references that it's referring to. And people will then come up with all these weird and wonderful ideas of what it's talking about. Here's an example. In 1997, a guy called Hal Lindsay wrote a book called The Apocalypse Code. I don't know if you've ever come across it. It was quite a famous book, very sensational. And he claims in this book that it's only now in the 20th, in the 21st century or 20th century when he wrote it, that we can figure out what John's visions were all about. Because what he was seeing is things in the modern world and he couldn't understand them. But we can now and we can unlock the code. As if revelation in the Bible wasn't sort of applicable to the last 2,000 years of Christians. But what he says is, he takes an example. Here's an example of what he says. Revelation 9, there's this, it describes an army of locusts. And it describes them this way. The appearance of the locusts was like horses prepared for battle. Something like golden crowns was on their heads. Their faces were like human faces. They had hair like women's hair. Their teeth were like lion's teeth. They had chests like iron breastplates. The sound of their wings was like the sound of many chariots with horses rushing into battle. So this is John's vision. This is what he's seeing. What is he talking about? It's weird language. How old Lindsay? Helicopters. Attack helicopters.

Look, they look like locusts, don't they? The sound of their wings is like the sound of many chariots. It must be 20th century attack helicopters. That's his meaning of it. And lots of people go with that. Oh, it's talking about the, so Revelation must be talking about modern times and the Middle East and all that. Well, actually, no, it's rubbish. Because if only you read the Old Testament, what you'll realize is that Joel chapter two talks about these exact things. Let me read it to you. He's talking about an army of locusts to describe the armies invading Israel. And he says, Joel chapter two, verse four and five, their appearance is like that of horses and they gallop like war horses. They bound on the tops of mountains. Their sound is like the sound of chariots. John is just using the language of Joel. And if we understand what Joel is saying, we'll understand what John is saying. My point is that the best way to decode these weird pictures in Revelation is to read the Old Testament. And if you do, they all have meanings that make sense. You've just got to do the work on them. Okay. So Revelation is not as obscure as you think it is. It is understandable. And when you understand it, look at verse three of

Revelation chapter one, when you understand it and you actually hear what it's saying, you will be blessed. Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy. So I hope there's going to be a lot of volunteers for New Testament readings in the next few weeks. And those who, who declare it and proclaim what it actually says and go in their studies, the preachers and do the work in their offices that you pay me for. Blessed am I when I actually do the work to properly understand and preach Revelation. And blessed are those who hear the words of this prophecy and keep or take to heart what is written in it because the time is near. So there's a blessing for you if you are willing to hear what this book is actually saying and to keep it. That's an interesting word. In some translations, it's blessed as those who keep. In others, it's blessed as are those who take to heart. But the original word is to hold on to, to keep, to guard from loss. That's what the original word there translated keep means. To keep in your mind this outlook on the world as you go about life. So Revelation as an apocalypse, as a prophecy, it's going to reveal a lot of things to you about why the world is like it is and the mechanics working in the spiritual realm. And as you train your mind to see the world in that framework, it will benefit you. You will be blessed. It will benefit you and how you live and the decisions you make in your life because you'll actually know why we're in the situation we're in and what's working behind the scenes. You will be greatly blessed if you get what Revelation is saying. And also not just get it and understand it, but live, act appropriately. That's the constant challenge in the book of Revelation as we read it over the next few months is the challenge as to whether our lives are actually lining up to what God is doing in this world. And I think that is a constant challenge to Christians who live in a culture where the culture is telling you this is how you should live and this is what your priorities should be. And then as we open the Bible, we see, no, God is doing this. This is what the world is actually about. And this is how we should be living. We need to line up our lives more and more as we grow as believers. We need to learn how to line up our lives to what God is doing in the world. And that's what the book of Revelation challenges us to do. But it's not only a prophecy and a revelation. It doesn't only show us what's going on behind the scenes. It doesn't only make sense of what's going on on stage. But there's a third way it's described here, or alluded to at least, and that is from verse 4, where John starts it as an ordinary letter.

Have a look from verse 4. John to the seven churches in Asia, grace and peace to you. And off he goes. Now this, if you know New Testament biblical literature, you'll know that that's the way that Paul and John and Peter all started their letters, specific letters to the churches. So they wrote the letters that we have in the Bible, Ephesians, Corinthians, all of those. And they started them in exactly the same way. And so John starting Revelation like this, which is unknown in any of the other Jewish apocalyptic writings. It's unique that he starts it not only as a revelation and a prophecy, but also as a letter to ordinary, everyday Christians. John is telling us that this revelation is not just going to tell us about the world around us and what's going on in the big picture. It's also going to tell us about ourselves as Christians, and it's going to tell us how we should be living practically. He writes to the seven churches. We'll discover next week what those seven churches are. But that's the first number actually we come across in Revelation that has symbolism significance. And there's a lot of numbers that have important symbolism. This, the number seven in Hebrew literature, is a number that describes completion or totality. Seven days of creation is the completion of creation, for example. And so most scholars understand that the seven churches here that John chose, and there were a lot of other churches around at that time, but he chose these seven because they are representative of all churches in every age. So he goes on in chapter two and three about the different challenges that the different seven churches were facing. But actually, as you read them, you discover that those are challenges which encompass all of the challenges that the church has faced for the last 2,000 years. And so these seven churches are actually chosen to be representative of all churches in every generation, which means that John's letter to the seven churches is to also St. Mark's Church in Plumstead. He's written a letter to us, guys. Isn't that exciting? And so what he says in it, there's some real practical application. And he wants to tell us something about us, which he even starts in these opening verses. What does he say about us?

[18 : 46] Look at verse 5, halfway down verse 5, the new paragraph there. To him who loves us and has set us free from our sins by his blood and made us a kingdom of priests to his God and Father. To him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

A kingdom of priests, that's what we're described as. That's what Israel was described as in Exodus, right? Because they were a people who were rescued by God from the Egyptians. They were slaves. They were pathetic slaves that couldn't save themselves. And God miraculously rescued them out of Egypt and he set them apart as his own people and he gave them a task to do, to be priests, to represent him, just like a priest used to represent God to the congregation. So a nation of a priesthood nation is to be a group of people on earth that represents God to the world. And we have now taken that responsibility, that baton in this age. You and me, the church, ordinary day-to-day Christians, we are a kingdom of priests, the Bible calls us. And Peter also reminds us of this. And we've just got to stop and think about that. A kingdom means that we're under the service of a king. We're in the service of a king and we're under the rule of a king. No longer a Christian. If you become a

Christian, you join the church. No longer are you your own master. Well, you never were actually, but you thought you were. Until you become a Christian, you realize, no, I serve a new master. Consciously, I'm now submitting to the living Lord Jesus Christ who is returning and who died for me because we weren't saved for no reason. God saved us. If you are a believer and you are saved of your sins and you know that your sins are washed away through what Jesus did, God didn't save you for no reason. He saved you because he's calling you to a purpose in life, to be part of this kingdom of priests, to represent him to the world in your words and in your actions. But that's quite a call, isn't it? It's quite an ask, quite a mission. So what does he do to help us on that mission?

He gives us inside information in the book of Revelation. Look at the first verse. It says, the revelation of Jesus Christ that God gave to show his servants, not anyone.

This book and what's contained in here is not for anyone and lots of people will just not understand it when they read it. This is specifically for his servants who have been given a task on this earth.

[21 : 28] To fulfill that task, we've been given this very important inside information as to what's going on behind the scenes. And so it's very precious information that this book has and it's going to help us to do our task as Christians. It's going to help us and it's necessary for us to have this new outlook on our world if we're going to be effective Christians. I think, you know, there's a lot of self-help books and a lot of books about how to be a better person. There's a lot of Christian versions of self-help books, how to be a better Christian. But actually, it all starts with a different, a changed outlook on the world that we live in. As we read the newspapers, as we, you know, look at our social feeds and look at what's going on in the world around us, as we look at the world in a perspective. That changes how we live naturally. And so God has given us inside information to change our perspective on this world that we need for the task he's given us to be a kingdom of priests. But before we finish, so we've seen what Revelation says about itself by way of introduction.

It calls itself a revelation, helps us to see what's going on behind the scenes. It calls itself a prophecy, helps us to see what's going on in the world around us and make sense of it. It calls itself a letter because it has specific things to say to us as Christians. But this perspective that we need to get if we're going to be effective for God on earth starts with your perspective on God himself.

And I can't emphasize this enough, and John can't as well. That's why he talks a lot about God in these opening verses. Because how you live, really, at the end of the day, comes down to how you see God, who you think God actually is. And so John does not waste any time. He dives right into some of the deepest and most awesome and profound descriptions of our God in these verses. Let's have a look at them.

Verse 4. John, to the seven churches in Asia, grace and peace to you from... Now, he talks about God in his Trinitarian form, Father, Son, and Spirit. And he starts by saying, he starts by describing the Father from the one who is, who was, and who is to come. Let's pause there. What does that tell us about God the Father? It tells us that he's eternal. Before anything was made, God was.

In his name, Yahweh, implies his eternity. I am. I am who I am. I never was created. I've always been there. And it blows our mind when we think God was there before the before of the before of the before of what we can even think about. But that's one of the attributes of God. And we've just got to realize that about God. It's mind-boggling. But God is eternal, which also means if he was there in the past, he's there in the present, he's going to be there in the future. It means that he hasn't missed anything. There was no time in history where God went to sleep or, you know, wasn't there.

[24 : 38] He's been involved since the creation of the world. He was. He is involved still. And he will be involved until all his plans have come to pass. And he's not going to step back from it. And he hasn't stepped back since Bible times. He's still as involved in history as he was when Jesus was on earth and when Israel was doing its thing. And we've got to realize that. It's not that God is less involved in the politics of the world. It's just that we don't see how until we actually read and understand Revelation. Okay, so God, the Father, this eternal God, who's been here all along, and still is. But we read more about him if you just skip over to verse 8, where God himself describes himself. He says, I am the Alpha and the Omega. Okay, that's another fridge magnet kind of verse.

People often, Alpha and Omega, but people often don't understand even what it means. It just sounds pretty. But Alpha and the Omega are the first and the last letters of the Greek alphabet. And by calling himself that, he's basically saying that he is the beginning and the end of all things. He is the source of history and the goal of history. So all the stuff that's happened in our world has come because God has set things in place, and God is fulfilling his plan, and he will achieve his plans, and everything will eventually tie up to exactly what God wants. Because here's another thing we learn about him.

End of verse 8, he calls himself the Almighty. That's another thing he wants you to remember about him. He is Almighty. He is sovereign. He rules over all things that happen on earth, and he is all-powerful to make them happen the way he wants them to. Now, if that's the case about God the Father, then this is who we need to hear the news from, right? If we're wondering where to listen, and today, people are wondering a lot, where do I find truth from? Where do I listen to the news? There's so many different media outlets, and there's so many different people saying different things, and you know, CNN, or Sky News, or News 24, or Fox News, they're all saying different things. They all have different interpretations. My friends on Facebook seem to know more than the news channels. Who do I listen to? Who's got an accurate interpretation of what's going on in our world? Well, I'll tell you.

The one who is, and was, and is to come. The one who is Almighty. The Alpha and the Omega. The beginning and end of history. He is the one we should listen to the news from. And that's exactly what he gives us in the book of Revelation. But he's also God the Spirit. Verse 4. This is a description of the Holy Spirit.

Admittedly, a weird one. And from the seven spirits before his throne. Okay, I thought there was, there's only one Holy Spirit. Where did the seven spirits come from? Well, again, numbers, important.

[27 : 41] Numbers are important in Revelation. Seven spirits refer to the totality, the completeness, and the involvement of the Holy Spirit in each of the local churches that are the expressions of the worldwide church. So in here, there were seven churches. And in the same way, there were seven spirits, but it was the Holy Spirit involved and in each of those expressions of the church on earth. And so I think the importance of John describing the Spirit as the seven, the multiplicity of Holy Spirit who is in each of the local churches is to remind us that God is not just out there involved in the world, the big picture, but it's to remind us He's on the ground here with us, involved in our lives, involved in our churches, doing His work from grassroots level, if you like.

Okay, so that's, that's God the Spirit. And then we get this amazing description of, of God, the Son, Jesus Christ. Verse five, and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead and the ruler of the kings of the earth. This reminds us of the role of Jesus in the past, in history, the role of Jesus in the present, in history, and the role of Jesus in the future of this world. In the past, to come witness God's truth, His salvation, to die for the sins of His people, and then to rise, to bring about, to, to break in eternity into this falling away, broken world, and to break the new age of resurrection and life and restoration into this passing away world.

That's what He did in His bodily, physical resurrection. And to then, through His Spirit, give that resurrection power to all who are His. But then, in the present, look what He's doing.

The ruler of the kings of the earth, now, it's the very thing He told His disciples when He gave them the Great Commission. He started it, Matthew 28, all authority has been given to me. Therefore, go and make disciples. And Psalm 2 tells us that from His throne in heaven, Jesus is actually, currently, currently, right now, engineering the defeat of His enemies. Through His church, through the weakness of His church, He is engineering the new creation and the defeat of His enemies.

It's an amazing picture that we have of what Jesus is doing now. But then we also see Jesus' involvement in the future of this world. Verse 7, Look, He is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him, and all the tribes of the earth will mourn over Him. So it is to be. Amen. You know, John stresses at the end there, so this is actually going to happen. It's not just nice words in your Bible. That's why He says, that's why He ends it off. So it is to be. Amen. He's saying, guys, Jesus will come back.

[30 : 52] And when He does, nobody will be able to ignore Him. He will completely upend all the plans of everyone on earth, and everybody is going to see Him, and everybody is going to acknowledge that He is the authority of this earth, that God has made Him the Son of God. And those who haven't mourned in repentance before His coming will mourn in judgment on His coming. And this is a certainty.

It is as certain as the sun rising. In fact, more so. And therefore, we need to live in line with that.

We need to live each day in light of the imminent return of Christ. That's what John is challenging us to do here. And that's the big picture. So you see how John gives us an understanding in these opening verses of Revelation. He gives us an understanding of what this book is, why we need to understand it. And then he gives us this big cosmic picture of God that we need to hold in our minds as we go about our daily lives. I found one of the best ways to do that this last week is to pray, but start your prayer addressing God in these words from Revelation 1 verse 4 to 5.

Highlight them in your Bible. You're allowed to do that, by the way. You can scribble away all that you want. There's a lot more copies of the Bible out there if you destroy yours. But highlight this verse and use it in your prayers. Start your prayer in the morning like this. I promise you, you do this and you think about what these words mean. It's going to change the way you go about your day.

Lord God, God, the one who is and who was and who is to come. Holy Spirit involved here on earth, the seven spirits before the throne, and Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. Please help me at work today as I go about my day. Whatever you're going to pray, just get that picture of God in your mind before you do, and it will change the way you pray. Okay, so I've got to wrap it up. So that's the picture that's painted here in these opening few verses. But how do we respond to that? What can we take away from that? Well, I think there's three applications, three ways we can respond to it. Firstly, we've got to hear. We've got to learn how to hear what this is saying. Verse 3, blessed is the one who hears the words of this prophecy. So we've actually, before we do anything, we've got to hear what Revelation is saying properly, which means we've got to be discriminating as to who we listen to. We've got to listen carefully. You've got to do as much work as we work through Revelation as I've got to do.

[33 : 40] Listen carefully to sensible teaching that's based in an Old Testament understanding of what Revelation is saying, that's understood in its context. Don't listen to every WhatsApp message and Facebook post you see or hear that comes up with these wacky interpretations of Revelation. Listen carefully. Hear what Revelation is saying because it's actually simpler than you think. Secondly, then you've got to keep it. Again, verse 3, blessed are those not just who hear the words of this prophecy, but keep what is written in them. Who guard from loss, who hold in their hearts and in their minds and learn each day to look at the world and what's going on around us in this biblical framework that God has given us. And then thirdly, we've got to, once we discover what the truth is, more and more, we've got to learn how to pass that on. Look at what John says in verse 2. His servant John, who testified to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, whatever he saw. So as he got this great vision from God, explaining to him the workings, the inner workings of God's plan unfolding in history, he did not keep it to himself. And thanks for that, John, because now we can read Revelation, because he wrote this down. He testified to it. That word that we'll come across a lot in Revelation. The word testifier or witness is also the word martyr. It's the same word in the original, because as you testify to the truth of God, there will be people who don't want to hear it.

As you testify to what is true and real in the world, there will be people who it rubs up against their reality, and they don't want to hear it, and they'll try to shut you up. It's happened any time Christians, in any significant way, testify to the truth that they hear. And so you've got to be ready for that. But we are morally responsible when we hear life-changing stuff to pass it on. And therefore, not only are we challenged, as we read Revelation for the next few months, not only are we challenged to get in line with what God is doing, but to help others to get in line with what God is doing before the return of Jesus Christ. And that, with God's help, is what Revelation is going to help us to do. Let's pray. Lord, we thank you again for just opening up truth that we could not get anywhere else but from your word, and but from careful and intelligent study of your word. Help us, Lord, as we read your word, not to interpret it in any way we want to, but to realize that you have very important information you want to pass on to us, and you made sure arrives to us in 2021. And help us, Lord, to read our Bibles in that way, realizing that there are important truths that you want us to hear and live by. And we pray, Lord, over these next few weeks and months, that you would help us to know how to see the world around us the way you see it, in line with the divine plan, what you are doing, from your perspective, Lord. Thank you for giving us your perspective on this world. Help us to have that perspective, and then to know how to line our lives up appropriately, how to act appropriately and speak appropriately, and how to help others to line their lives up with what you're doing in your world. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.