

Revelation 1v1-8

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 12 July 2026

Preacher: Paul Levy

[0:00] If you've got a Bible, turn to Revelation chapter 1. Revelation chapter 1. I want to start by saying I don't assume in a congregation like this! that everyone is a Christian.

I probably don't say that enough. I don't assume that you're convinced. You're really welcome. But it is right, I think, to remind myself as a preacher that not everyone will be sitting there thinking, yeah, I'm for this. I'm with this. You might be here with lots and lots of questions. And so maybe the things that I'm going to talk about and we talk about on Sunday mornings are about something you are not yet or you're considering becoming one. But for the Christian who's here this morning, there are things about you that are different, whether you feel it or not. Whether you're experiencing it or not at this moment, whether you feel it or not. And so I think we're going to kind of go through that and that juxtaposition that there are things that are true of us that we don't feel.

[1:22] There are things, for those of us who are in Christ, that are true of us that we don't experience. It's really important to understand that in the Christian life. And we're doing a little mini-series, I'm going to do about three or four, I think, or four or five, on doxology.

Doxology just means praise. A doxology, whether it's a long one or a short one, is ascribing praise to God. So the direction is from us to God. It usually has language like, unto him be these things. Unto you, O God, be these things. And so the doxology this morning, it is to Jesus Christ in particular. It is to God. But it is in particular to Jesus Christ.

So look at verse, the middle of verse 6. The middle of verse 5 of Revelation chapter 1. To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood.

It's to Jesus Christ. And the doxology is taken from the book of Revelation. If you've never read Revelation, or you've only read a little bit of it, it can be frightening, can't it?

[2:32] It can be intimidating. It's full of frightening images. Dragons. But the intention of Revelation is that it's a book of comfort. The book of Revelation is not a puzzle book.

And we're not meant to read it and think, how does it fit in with all the charts and everything that's going on in the Middle East. And it's there to tell us what's going to happen. That's not the purpose of Revelation.

The book of Revelation is, it is to be a book that comforts and strengthens Christians. And if it isn't doing that, you've completely misunderstood it. So the very beginning of the book of Revelation tells you what it is.

It is a revealing of Jesus Christ. It's not primarily there to get you to think of unfulfilled prophecy.

Revelation is primarily in the Bible to get you thinking about Jesus Christ.

Not the end of time. It's about the Lord Jesus. And it's about his victory. And this doxology from the middle of verse 5 and all of verse 6 is to Jesus.

[3:33] The first hearers of the book of Revelation would have been first century Christians who were under intense persecution. And when I say intense persecution, I don't mean that they were shunned and made to feel that they were outsiders in a culture.

That isn't the case. It is those who were facing imprisonment and martyrdom. And so Revelation is to remind them of who they are and who Jesus is.

So let me read you these amazing words from the middle of verse 5. To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father.

To him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. Amen. Amen. I don't know if you've heard of the name M. Scott Peck. Anyone heard of the name M. Scott Peck?

There was an Australian friend of Judy's, David, who used to come every summer. And he'd every summer give me a book of Scott Peck's, which I didn't particularly appreciate. He's not very well

known anymore. But he was very popular 20 years ago.

[4:44] M. Scott Peck was a psychiatrist. He came up with a book. His most famous book was *The Road Less Travelled*. And that was really popular. Another book which is really thoughtful, although I probably wouldn't recommend it, is a book called *The People of the Lie*.

It's really a book about human evil. It recounts the exchanges that he had with his patients and his clients. How Scott Peck came face to face with evil in different forms.

And I want to read to you an exchange that he had with a patient named Charlene. It goes like this. Charlene is from a religious and a church background.

Everything seems meaningless. Charlene complained to me one day. What is the meaning of life? I asked her with seeming innocence.

How should I know? She replied with obvious irritation. You're a dedicated religious person, I responded. Surely your religion must have something to say about the meaning of life.

[5:46] You are trying to trap me, Charlene countered. That's right, I acknowledged. I am trying to trap you into seeing your problem clearly.

What does your religion hold to be the meaning of life? I'm not a Christian, Charlene proclaimed. My religion speaks of love, not of meaning.

Well, what do Christians say as to the meaning of life? Even if it isn't what you believe. At least it's a model. I'm not interested in models.

You were raised in the Christian church. You spent almost two years as a teacher of professional Christian doctrine. I went on goading her. Surely you're not so dumb as to be unaware of what Christians say is the meaning of life, the purpose of human existence.

We exist for the glory of God. Charlene said in a flat, low monotone, as if she was sullenly repeating an alien catechism learned by rote and extracted from her by gunpoint.

[6:51] The purpose of our life is to glorify God. Well, I asked. There was a short silence. For a brief moment, I thought she might cry.

The one time in our work together. I can't do it. There's no room for me in that. That would be my death, she said in a quavering voice. And then with a suddenness that frightened me, what seemed to be her choked-backed sobs turned into a roar.

I don't want to live for God. I will not. I want to live for me. My own sake. It was another session in the middle of which Charlene walked out.

That is honest, isn't it? That is jarringly honest. That is candid. And you may not be sitting here this morning with that level of anger or disconnect.

But I wouldn't be surprised if more of us than we care to admit when we hear the language of, to God be the glory, or we sing a song like, glory to the king of angels, or glory to the king of kings.

[8:01] Actually, when we hear things like that, be exalted, O God, above the heavens and the earth, I suspect a lot of us might think, I don't want to say that. I may be saying it, I may be singing it, but I don't connect with that at all.

And really, at some level, I don't actually know what that means. Does it mean that I'm giving something to God that he doesn't have? Does it mean when I give glory to God and praise to God, am I helping God?

If I don't say those things, or I don't sing those things, does he have less glory? What are we doing when we do doxology? Where there is that overt language to God, to Jesus Christ.

Here's how I want us to look at this. I want us to see, first of all, the active son of God, and then the worthy son of God, and then we'll circle back to that question. First of all, the active son of God.

If I asked you this morning, what is a Christian? More often, we come up with an answer that is answering another question. Usually what we do is we say, a Christian is somebody who believes the Bible, believes the Bible is true, and that they believe the Bible is authoritative, and they believe that God exists, they believe that Jesus died on the cross, they believe that Jesus came to save his people from their sins.

[9:36] A Christian is someone who prays, a Christian is someone who goes to church, a Christian is someone who does good things in their community, they show the fruit of what they believe, and all those things are good, and all those things are true, but is that answering the question, what is a Christian?

That is answering the question, what a Christian does. What is a Christian? To answer that is actually to talk about how a Christian is someone who has had things done to them.

A Christian is someone for whom things have been done, and to whom things have been done. I heard someone put it like this, a saint. When we think of saints, we often think of saints canonized by the church.

That isn't how the Bible puts it. Think of the way that the New Testament and the Old Testament use saint. A saint is just one of God's people. Here's what it says, a saint is not someone who has done great things for God, a saint is someone for whom God has done great things.

A saint is not someone who's done great things for God, but a saint is someone for whom God has done great things. The Christian, if you are a Christian this morning, you are someone for whom things have been done, and they've been done by Jesus Christ.

[10 : 59] So what has been done? And what is he doing right now? Let's divide it in those two ways. What has been done? If Jesus Christ is active, what has he already done? What is he doing? You get what he's done already right at the beginning in the doxology.

Look at verse 5. It says, doesn't it, he has freed us from our sins by his blood. He has freed us from our sins by his blood.

We talk a lot about sin. We preach a lot about sin. And we confess our sins like we did this morning. And we know, don't we, that sin is something that brings guilt. So we talk a lot about the need for cleansing and for forgiveness.

But actually, Revelation 1 is thinking about sin in a different way. It's thinking of sin like a captor. Sin as an enslaver. And John didn't invent this.

It's how Jesus spoke about sin in John's Gospel. In chapter 8, listen to this. Jesus answers them, truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who practices sin, which is you and I, is a slave to sin.

[12 : 12] So if the Son sets you free, you are free indeed. Let me read that to you again. Truly, truly, that is Jesus saying, this is important, you can trust me on this one.

Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin. And so if the sin sets you free, you will be free indeed. If we don't fear God with that life-giving fear that the Bible talks about, not a tormented fear, not a slavish fear, not that he's going to crush me kind of fear, but fear as an appropriate awe of God is and who I am, if that fear doesn't rule our hearts, then other fears will. The fear that we won't be a success, the fear that other people won't think well of us. We think of the fear of people pleasing or the need for approval.

Think with me on this. When you are really fearful of others and when you are fearful of people pleasing and when you're chasing the approval of others, you will feel slavery.

You'll feel what slavery is like. And Jesus says, if you practice sin, you are a slave to sin. And then he says this, so if the son sets you free from that, you'll be free indeed.

[13 : 39] It doesn't mean, does it, that you'll never sin again. It doesn't mean that you'll be perfect. It means that you will be free from that sin being king in your life and dominating your life.

This doxology says that Jesus shed his blood for us, he died on the cross and he rose for us, and so not only is our sin forgiven and we are cleansed, but we are free.

We are not captives of sin anymore. And then it says this, he has freed us from our sins by his blood and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father. He's made us a kingdom, what is a kingdom?

What kind of kingdom? A kingdom of priests to his God and Father. And again, Revelation, as you read it, it's full of the Old Testament. In fact, I'd argue there's nothing in Revelation that isn't in the Old Testament. So a kingdom of priests, wherever you heard that language before.

It comes from a really important moment in Israel's history when the Israelites had been enslaved. They were literally, weren't they, under physical slavery in Egypt. Do you remember? And what did God do?

[14 : 49] God freed them. He broke the power of their captives, captors, and they come into the wilderness and after a few days, they come to Mount Sinai and God speaks to them from Mount Sinai and this is before he gives them the Ten Commandments.

And it's so terrifying to the Israelites, God speaking to them, they say to Moses, their leader, you go and talk to him, we'll do anything he says, but if we keep hearing that voice, we're going to die.

And so what does the voice say? One of the things that God said to his people was this, you are my treasured possession and then he says, you will be to me a kingdom of priests, a holy nation.

Why is that interesting? It's interesting on loads of levels, but think about this, he says to all of Israel, to hundreds of thousands of people at the foot of a mountain, at the base of Mount Sinai, you

will be to me, a lot of you, a kingdom of priests.

But some of the law that God gives on Mount Sinai is very specific that not everyone can be a priest. Do you remember that? In the Old Testament, it wasn't like you went to a careers fair and said, I want to become a priest in Israel.

[16:03] God was really specific, isn't it? He had to be from the tribe of Levi. He had to be in a particular family, he had to do it in a particular way. But God says, at Sinai, all my people are priests.

He says, men and women, boys and girls are priests. What does that mean? Why? It means this. It means that Israel, the people of God as a nation in the Old Testament, that they were his people, men and women and children.

And as a priest was to represent the people before God, so Israel was to represent God before all the peoples of the world. And so you, as a people, the people of God, men and women, boys and girls, all the tribes, you are to represent me to the world.

You are to be a light to the nations. You are to be a holy people, different, a treasured possession. The people of God in the Old Testament, Israel, were to show the rest of the world what I am to like. And that is why they were to love the Lord their God with all their heart and mind and soul and strength and to love their neighbor as themselves. And so when the people of God fear God and when they love their neighbor as themselves, when they keep his holy law, you show to the nations of the world what I am like.

[17:23] All of you will be priests. And this doxology in Revelation reaches back to Mount Sinai, takes this exact language and says, Jesus Christ has already made us priests.

A kingdom of priests. And so that means this morning, if you believe in Jesus Christ and if you have entrusted yourself to Jesus, it means in your home, in your street, in your workplace, in your school, you are a priest there.

Whether you feel like it or not, he has made you a priest to represent him. And you are called as a child of God, as someone who knows the Lord Jesus Christ, to represent to the people in your life what God is like.

And Jesus has made you that. He's not saying try to be that, he's saying I've made you this. And so don't lose sight of the fact that he has made us a kingdom of priests.

And so when those Israelites came out of slavery, did they have to worry about who was king in Egypt? There was zero doubt, was that, who was king in Egypt? Pharaoh was king, they felt it in their bodies.

[18:48] But they'd been delivered from that. They had a new king. And when this verse says Christ has made us a kingdom, it is saying far more I think that we are comfortable with.

It is saying we have been delivered. There is a new sheriff in town, there is a new master, that Christ has conquered us. He's conquered us body and soul in the same way that the slaves in Egypt belong to Pharaoh.

We now belong to Jesus Christ. And so everything, my friendship, my money, my secrets, my solitude, my sexuality, the way I describe myself, my future, I hear his, he conquered me.

And that is already done. It doesn't say Jesus is doing that, he says it is done. But then the doxology moves on to what Jesus is doing now, what the Son of God is doing, present tense.

What does it say? Just look at the middle, the start of the doxology in verse five. What does it say? To him who loves us.

[19:59] To him who loves us. Can you imagine what it would have been like if you were a first century Christian? You didn't grow up with Christian parents and Christian role models.

You didn't have Christian grandparents. You're the first one ever. You come from a long line of people that worshipped other gods and other temples.

angels. And now you gather on a Sunday, on the Lord's Day, a different day to how you always worshipped and you gather with the people of God and you meet in a room and they are the oddest bunch of people.

You hear someone preach, you share bread and wine together. And now you claim that your God is a man who you've never seen physically and you can't see him and he's called Jesus Christ and he grew up in Nazareth and he was a carpenter for many years.

And can you imagine you go down that road of discipleship, you start to follow Jesus of Nazareth and you meet with pushback and arrest and violence and unemployment and they confiscate your

bank account and they confiscate your property and the friends that also believed in Jesus are dragged off to prison and some have actually been killed for the sake of the Lord Jesus.

[21:22] And you live every day with the pressure of that. Can you imagine how badly you need to hear that Jesus Christ loves you? He loves you right now.

And you may this week get led off to a place you don't want to go to and it'll be a one-way trip if you're arrested and you're not coming back but you must understand he loves you.

And when a 21st century congregation gathers in leafy West London with all the pressures of life we need it too, don't we? That right now, present tense, the Son of God loves you.

He loves the people he bled for. He loves us right now. Think about this for a moment.

We want to be sane people, don't we? I hope you don't want to be insane. And part of what sanity is, is dealing, trafficking in what is real in the truth.

[22:37] What is necessary, what is trafficking and dealing with what is true, not necessarily how you feel. I don't know how you feel this morning, but what I do know about my own heart is my own feelings don't always line up with the truth.

They don't line up, my feelings don't line up with what I'm told about who I am in God's word. And so here is what is real this morning, here's what is true, if you belong to Jesus Christ, you are free.

And if right now your mind goes to that sin which always gets to you, that pattern, that addiction, you are freed by his blood. And you are a priest, and you might think I'm the most rubbish priest of all.

But you are a priest, and you are loved. And you don't have to jump through a hoop to earn it. you are loved right here, right now.

And you do have a king. And you are loved by the king. And so you stay in that reality. You live out of that reality.

[24:01] And that is what Jesus is doing. That is what the son of God is doing. The active son of God, and then the worthy son of God. God is doing it. And that is what the And that is what the word is. The word worship is really two words, worth-ship.

To worship something is to ascribe worth to them or to it. And the danger I fear is that we hear this word of worship and that we are called to worship, and we think this is something that doesn't come naturally to us.

We need to learn this new behavior to worship. But that misses the point. We are worshipers, every single one of us. We have worshipped this morning.

We worship when our heart says, this is how the universe works, this is how it operates. I've got to have something that makes my life worth living. And if I find the thing that makes my life worth living, I'm going to praise it.

Whatever that is, you don't find it hard to talk about that. You don't find it hard to think about that. You don't find it hard to give money towards that, to buy what it is.

[25:18] You don't find it hard to bend towards it, to give energy to it. In fact, when that person or when that subject comes up, you light up. Those of you who are parents, it's a really good thing, isn't it, to say I love my child.

You're more than one to say I love my children. Of course it is. That's what we want. But it's another thing, isn't it, for a parent to say, my kids are my everything.

My kids are my everything. Because when you say that, in so many words, you are saying glory and honor be unto my children.

Or let's go back to people pleasing, that needing the approval of others, not just wanting it, but needing it. And if I don't get it, I'm devastated. And a lot of us struggle with that, don't we?

A lot of us do it. A lot of us have done that. A lot of us know in our heart of hearts what a slavery that is, to be defined by the need for approval. And what we're saying when we fall for that is all authority be unto them.

[26:36] That is worship. It's bad worship. But this is life-giving worship in Revelation 1. Let me come back to the point. What is doxology doing?

If God doesn't need us, if Jesus Christ doesn't need us, then why am I saying glory be to you, O God? Dominion, authority be to you. Does that give God something he doesn't have?

If I say dominion be to you, Lord Jesus, does that give him more dominion? Hopefully you know the answer is no. So is what we're doing this morning a colossal waste of time?

Is this just a religious way of talking that's outdated? Why do we do doxology? Why do we do praise? It's because of this. We are worshipping beings. Because if we don't find something or someone to say this is why life is worth living, this is why it is worth getting up in the morning. If we cannot find that thing, what happens is we despair. And we may despair to the point of taking our own lives. If we cannot identify that thing.

[27 : 53] Or if they failed us or we failed them. Or if it is punishing them. glory be to you. All of us, with all of our lives, our money, our priorities, our to-do lists, are saying to something or someone, glory be to you.

Do you know what? We might be saying it to ourselves. I want every conversation to bend towards me. I want all the attention to bend towards me.

I want people to talk about me, to think about me. glory be to me. And that is life-robbing worship. And if nothing else, to say glory and dominion be unto Jesus Christ is a way of saying glory and dominion not be to us, not be to me, but unto him be dominion and authority and honor forever. Let me be honest with you. If you want a recipe for boredom, of boredom for Christianity, just do this.

Whatever this looks like for you, just pull up at the end of the day and dwell on the grind of life and think of the 11 things on your to-do list and the five things that you haven't done and so you feel like a failure.

[29 : 22] And think about the ways your body, your marriage, your family, your house compares with others. And then, when you've got all of that, try to wedge in just a little bit of Bible and a little bit of prayer and a little bit of church.

And that is a recipe for boredom for the gospel. Boredom with the gospel. It's another thing entirely to engage in doxology.

To actually do this in private this week. We do it in corporate worship. But we need to do it with our mouths this week. To say, Jesus Christ, to you be glory and dominion and authority forever.

And I don't care how I feel right now. I'm a priest and you've made me a priest. And you've made me your subject. And I have a king and that king loves me. And glory be to him.

And if you and I do this, we will actually be engaging with our real selves. And we will be doing what God put us on this earth to do. To know him and to delight in him.

[30 : 26] I was reading around this week and I came across a sonnet by John Dunn. It's from his holy sonnets.

I don't often give you poetry like this. But it's a remarkable poem and it's called this. Batter my heart, three persons God. Batter means rough up.

John Dunn in this sonnet is saying, Beat up my heart, oh three persons God. It's a really beautiful and a jarring sonnet. It's saying, quite shockingly, Lord, don't play nice.

I am not going to know you. And you are not going to be king unless you take over. Let me read to you just the last three lines. Take me to you.

Imprison me for I. Except you enthrall me. Never shall be free. Nor ever chaste. C-H-A-S-T-E.

[31 : 35] That means pure. Nor ever chaste. Except you ravish me. End of sonnet. Nor ever chaste.

Except you ravish me. I think the danger for churches like ours is that we are playing it safe. And we want God, but not too much.

But this is radical, extreme language. And so let me say to you, as I finish, if you are not a Christian, if that's, you're here and you're just exploring, or if you are a Christian, you do not need a little help here and a little help there.

God needs to do everything. And we need, we have a saviour who does that for us. And that is not saying that we don't exert ourselves, but he has done everything that was necessary, and he loves us.

And so to him who loves us, and has freed us from our sins, by his blood, and made us a kingdom priest, to his God and Father, to him, be glory and dominion, forever and ever.

[32 : 50] Amen. Let's pray.