

## Revelation 1:4-8 – John encourages the faith of the early churches

churches in chapters 2-3 and referred to in v.20. The Holy Spirit is one person, Rev. 3:6, 13 and Ephesians 4:4, but “seven spirits” represents His perfection, being everywhere and all-knowing.

To Him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by His blood,

“Freed us from our sins” — but not automatically. Revelation emphasises the need for repentance, Rev. 9:20, and a faith response to the challenge of the gospel, Rev. 14:6-7.

6 and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve His God and Father - to Him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen.

“Made us to be a kingdom... priests to serve... God” — as we are freed from our sins in real time (peace and joy is the experience of the one who has given their life to Jesus) so we are subjects of the new covenant, kingdom order and those who serve God in worship and mission. This does not recreate a Christianised OT priesthood. Hebrews makes it clear that this has passed with the

**IN PRACTICE** Jesus spoke about the kingdom constantly - it was the headline over all of His teaching. So His disciples saw themselves as people of that new rule, or order, under Jesus, King of kings. John references Exodus 19:5-6 which speaks of covenant people who are a holy nation to God and a kingdom of priests. The Old Covenant had given way to the New, and the former priestly order had effectively ceased at Jesus' death, when the great woven curtain of the temple parted from top to bottom. By the time John wrote his letter the Temple had long been destroyed. The Spirit-filled believers from Pentecost onwards had, as those who were 'In Christ', a special and personal relationship with God - the new kind of priest of the New Covenant, always the intention, Isaiah 61:6. Our frequent mistake has been trying to create a kind of Old Testament formal religion with Christ put back in it, rather than living empowered as His ekklesia, influencing the world. Guess which He spoke about, and started!

**QUESTION** Are we freed from our sins and eagerly embracing the new relationship of the New Covenant, or aware of our sins and seeking the predictability of the old order?

**PRAYER** “Lord, increase our faith”! So, “Breathe on me, breath of God”. Help us not to be saying we live by faith, when we are keeping within the limits of our ability. May we see You, and Your kingdom purpose, as we seek to partner with You. In Jesus' name, Amen.

resurrection of Jesus. Representing man to God and God to not-yet-believing mankind is a responsibility shared by every believer, not something reduced to ceremonial.

7 “Look, He is coming with the clouds,” and “every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him”; and all peoples on earth “will mourn because of Him.” So shall it be! Amen.

“Every eye will see Him” — Jesus will come, “with the clouds”, 1 Thess. 4:16-17, as the Son of Man exercising dominion over all, that Daniel saw, Daniel 7:13-14. There will also be the mourning of true repentance, even among “those who pierced Him”, the Jesus, Zechariah 12:10ff.

8 “I am the Alpha and the Omega,” says the Lord God, “who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty.”

“Alpha and Omega” — Jesus is the beginning of history, and also the end purpose to which all history points.

Revised Common Lectionary readings for **April 28** in Bible order

Prepare for Sunday by reading the Bible passages beforehand - read again to reflect on Sunday's teaching

**Easter 2. Theme: The first believers learn to live by faith**

John 20:19-31 – The first impartation strengthens faith in the disciples

Acts 5:27-32 – The apostles stand on their faith in the face of accusations

Revelation 1:4-8 – John encourages the faith of the early churches

Read also: Psalm 118:14-29 or Psalm 150

## John 20:19-31 – The first impartation strengthens faith in the disciples

**Jesus stands among them and breathes the Holy Spirit upon them**

19 On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you!”

“Doors locked” — the disciples feared arrest and prosecution for being followers of Jesus.

“Jesus came and stood among them” — the text does not say or imply that He manifested through a wall, but rather points to a miraculous opening of the locked door, as happened later to Peter, Acts 12:10. If Jesus “stood”, He also walked with a real physical body after He rose from the dead.

20 After He said this, He showed them His hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.

“His hands and His side” — having conquered death, and from death, come alive. Fully God and with God from the beginning, Jesus was also fully human in life, John 1:14, and also in His resurrection.

21 Again Jesus said, “Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.”

“Peace be with you” — Jesus blessed them with the familiar Jewish greeting.

“I am sending you” — John's gospel includes the Lord's 'sending' commission spelt out in more detail in the narrative Gospels (Luke running into Acts 1)

22-23 And with that He breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone's sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.”

“Receive the Holy Spirit” — a pre-experience of the greater and wider outpouring of the Holy Spirit seven weeks later at Pentecost. This energised them to prepare for Pentecost and gave them a faith-raising foretaste of what to expect.

“If you forgive... do not forgive” — the apostles (and all believers) participate in Jesus' saving mission by declaring the grounds of salvation, to repent and believe. Jesus here gives His followers authority to announce access, or to warn of being disbarred, on people's receiving or denying the gospel message.

24-25 Now Thomas (also known as Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord!”

But he said to them, “Unless I see the nail marks in His hands and put my

finger where the nails were, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe."

*"Unless I see the... marks" — Thomas thought the other disciples had seen a ghost. But Jesus' glorified resurrection body is not a spirit apparition but a physical body. John is at pains to emphasise Jesus the incarnate Word.*

• **For further study**, see John 1:14 with 1 John 4:2-3 and 2 John 7.

26 A week later His disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!"

27 Then He said to Thomas, "Put your finger here; see My hands. Reach out your hand and put it into My side. Stop doubting and believe."

28 Thomas said to him, "My Lord and my God!"

*"My Lord..." - Thomas did not need to touch Jesus,*

**IN PRACTICE** The disciples, working through the shock of the Jewish leaders' bullying and twisting of the truth followed by a brutal Roman execution, are overcome by a contrary emotion – the joy of the open tomb and now an encounter with Jesus, risen from death and present in a resurrection body. What do they do now? Jesus wastes no time in telling them, "As the Father has sent Me, I am sending you." They now have the responsibility for telling others to repent and put their whole trust in Jesus, the simple but profound grounds of God's salvation. That responsibility for sharing the Good News continues, generation by generation, not to be held or controlled by the church, but sent out and taken out to the people who need it. It all works on the basis of faith, humanly impossible, but enabled by impartations of the Holy Spirit of Jesus.

**QUESTION** *How do you feel, about having the responsibility of presenting the grounds of forgiveness of sin and salvation? Who enables you to do it?*

### Acts 5:27-32 – The apostles stand on faith in the face of accusations

**"We must obey God," they assert against the high priest's attempts to control them.**

27-28 The apostles were brought in and made to appear before the Sanhedrin to be questioned by the high priest. "We gave you strict orders not to teach in this

*but said these words to Him in declaration of finding faith in Jesus as His Lord, and as God.*

*This climax reveals John's purpose in writing, that every reader comes to Thomas' place of faith and confesses Jesus as their Lord and God, v.31 below.*

29 Then Jesus told him, "Because you have seen Me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

*"Not yet seen" – very few at that time, but from then on, believing in Jesus without seeing Jesus would become the norm.*

30-31 Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in His name.

*"Not recorded in this book" – many scholars consider this to be the original ending, to which John 21 formed an appendix.*

name," he said. "Yet you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and are determined to make us guilty of this man's blood."

*"Before the Sanhedrin" – the highest and largest court (religious and civil combined) in Israel.*

*"Make us guilty of this man's blood" – citing*

*the apostles' public declarations that some of the Jews and their leaders were responsible for having Jesus killed.*

29-30 Peter and the other apostles replied: "We must obey God rather than human beings! The God of our ancestors raised Jesus from the dead – whom you killed by hanging Him on a cross.

*"We must obey God" – the apostles, like Jesus, were law-abiding but conscience dictated that they should reject ungodly control. Christians are to submit to government authorities, Romans' 13:1-7, but recognising the exception of when God's commands are directly contradicted.*

*"Hanging Him on a cross" – or tree, or pole. Deut. 22:23 stated that anyone hung on a pole was under God's curse. Peter boldly accuses the leaders of causing this manner of execution. Christians came to see that Jesus died under a curse for us by taking the penalty of our sins, Galatians 3:13.*

**IN PRACTICE** The faith of those first disciples facing accusation and unjust sentence from the highest court in the land, is a model of our situation. We no longer live in a country of Christian beliefs and values, and to live as a disciple of Jesus will bring us into contention with others who put a higher value on what is politically correct, or what fits with the accepted order of their particular religious institution. Not so very different from those first pioneers of the faith, who had earlier had a prayer meeting which shook the building, a fresh infilling of the Holy Spirit and an impartation of boldness.

**QUESTION** *What are common rebuffs or criticisms levelled against those who seek to follow and serve Jesus as His disciples? What is a graciously firm way of answering them?*

### Revelation 1:4-8 – John encourages the faith of the early churches

**He introduces his vision of Jesus speaking to the new priesthood where all believers serve God**

4-5 John, to the seven churches in the province of Asia:

*"Seven churches" – a circle of centres of seven geographic regions about 50 miles apart in the Roman province of Asia (western Turkey).*

Grace and peace to you from Him who is, and who was, and who is to come, and

31 God exalted him to his own right hand as Prince and Saviour that He might bring Israel to repentance and forgive their sins.

*"God exalted Him... as... Saviour" – in a few words, including v30, "raised Jesus from the dead" Peter summarises His message at Pentecost, explaining how God vindicated His Messiah as "Prince and Saviour" with His intention being (first) to "bring Israel to repentance" and by this means to "forgive their sins".*

32 We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey Him."

*"We are witnesses of these things" – the law also cited the sin of not responding to a public charge and testifying truthfully about what they had seen and heard, Leviticus 5:1.*

• **For further study**, read Lev. 5:1; with Acts 1:8; Matt 28:18-20; Luke 24:44-49 and John 20:21.

from the seven spirits before His throne, and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth.

*"Grace and peace" – a Christian greeting found elsewhere, with the order of the two words consistent in the NT, suggesting that peace is the result of God's grace flowing.*

• **For further study**, 2 Cor. 1:1-2, 2 Thess. 1:1-2.

*"The seven spirits" – the greeting is expressed as from the seven spirits, like the angels of the seven*