

The King who meets us in uncertain times

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[0 : 0 0] well I think it's probably fair to say that in our culture at large something that people really enjoy are origin stories where people came from or where a particular event or thing came from just now in the cinemas I'm told because the last time I was in a cinema I didn't have children spider-man's doing quite well and we all like to know where the great man who climbs walls came from he came from his aunt and uncle's house and he was bitten by what a radioactive spider we need to know that backstory before we see this strange man in lycra with webs coming out of his arms because it doesn't really make sense of where things are going if you want to get a bit of an insight into our home on new year's day I decided that instead of us watching a film like spider-man we would take the time to enjoy a sort of biographical history of the origins of the great game of golf we sat and we in preparation for the 150th open this year which will take place at St Andrews and we watched a two hour biography a history of the origins of the great game and St Andrews and Jennifer was filled with joy and delight spending the year that way origin stories are important there's not a person in this room who doesn't have an origin story there's not a person in this room who doesn't have a beginning doesn't have the challenges brought to the table right at this very moment we've all been traveling along life's road and culturally we've been thinking of a great origin story now I need to correct just some things that could go wrong here because I'm not saying at Christmas that the second person of the trinity began for those who are paying attention but it is one of those great stories which captivates the human mind even in the secular age that we live in in the United Kingdom today Christmas day has not shifted it still exists and that great story of the beginning of what God was doing in time and space to save people is something which still resonates in culture but see this is where I'm a bit awkward and this is something you'll get to know with me going into the next few months and hopefully years is that I go great so we've got an origin we've got a beginning super where's the end now we can't tell what the end is going to be none of us know the very day where everything is going to cease for us but something that we do know is that God is pleased to speak into our lives and into all of the cultures and all of the different peoples of the world and explain where it is that he is taking things to we love to know the beginnings but it is also important for us to have the end game in mind what is the end game of God's purpose and plan for the entirety of the universe it is that Jesus would reign and rule as king unchallenged unopposed and that's what we see in this chapter of the book of revelation in some ways we can't really do this chapter justice in a short 20 to 30 minute period of time because the book of revelation every chapter is like a layer upon a layer upon a layer upon a layer and if I was really bad with illustrations I would say it's something like an onion but I'm not and I'm not going to say that it's like that but there are all of these different dimensions that come in as you read this chapter and as we heard it read aloud you can see these different pictures you can see these different places and these experiences all being brought together and this is just chapter one and so what I think would be good for us to do for these next few minutes is to gather our thoughts under four brief headings that will help us to piece together something of where it is that God is taking

things and what I want us to take away from our time this afternoon is that we have a king who meets with us in our uncertainty we have a king who meets with us in our uncertainty so first thing that I want us to note is that this was an uncertain time make no mistake about it this was not a book written into a time period where people were having a great time of holiday everything was rest they were fed up not not fed up that they were eating well and they were doing all of it this was not an easy time for someone to be a follower of Jesus Christ this was actually a difficult time at the end of the the first century it was a time where following Jesus was challenging the churches as we can see chapter 1 verse 11 these churches in these different cities around about this part of the Roman Empire are the people who are receiving this word from God and they are not finding things

easy a quick glance across the next couple of pages chapter 2 and 3 show us that things are quite hard that the churches are in a point of challenge there is transition there is flux there is opposition there is negligence on part of the believers their hearts are being pulled in a thousand different directions by all sorts of things and for John the person who has received this you see that chapter 1 verse 1 the last part of it for John the person who's been involved in helping to love and serve these different churches is also someone who would have been experiencing something of that uncertainty something of that flux these different people that he knew that he loved that he would have prayed for that he may have preached to what's going to happen to them what's going to take place well we know that John was there when Jesus said that the gates of hell would not prevail against this church he knew that that was what was true but in this moment as he looked out and as he surveyed what was happening in these latter years of his life surely it must have crossed his mind at some point is any of these things going to last what's going to happen to the church who are the people who are going to lead this forward it was an uncertain time and the rest of the book of revelation goes on to explain this and what we see is that the the roman empire were ramping up their opposition to christianity the roman empire were looking to take some of the believers and and put them away in prison it will tell us there is this sense that things are not going to get better better better as if somehow human progress will continue on and on and on unchallenged but that there were going to be challenges ahead for christians that's great okay martin that's fantastic nice lecture on the first century world and all of us are really excited about what was happening to believers in laodicea but what about us why should i care why should we pay attention to this why should we engage with an uncertain time and think about that for ourselves because we live in an uncertain time it's not one of us who has not been infected by what's happened over these last couple of years something that these last few years have shown to us is that as much as we like to think that we have control over the events that will shape and form our lives we actually have very little control our society at large has faced a lot of flux a lot of changes and if you look at where things have been within the church in scotland over the last number of years there have been changes what's it going to look like where are things going the church that would have existed 30 years ago in scotland is very different to the church that exists today and drill this down a little bit more personally for yourself there will be some of us here who personally will be going through an uncertain time and what i want us to see is that god is the god who delights to speak in to uncertain times the people in the churches in chapters two and three may well have thought god's not paying attention to us anymore god's forgotten about me god's forgotten that we exist and yet what is it that jesus says he says write what you see in a book and send it to where the seven churches in these different cities they have not gone past the savior's gaze and that is the case for you and i as well today we may be going through times of uncertainty we may go through times of great challenge where it seems as if we don't know what's going to happen and yet what we hear is that in this time of great uncertainty for god's people he speaks and maybe even today as we gather to hear his word together as we sing as we pray this is the moment where he is speaking into your heart into your life into your situation you see when you've been bitten by the difficulties of life you need a shot in the arm we all kind of know about that over the last few months don't we i know that we will definitely know about that in preparation to go to asia there's a whole list of vaccinations that we need to get and some of them i can't even pronounce and that is going to be for our good what jesus does for john who receives this vision into god's purposes for the future of the universe is that he presents something which is a shot in the arm for those believers for them to be encouraged for them to be reminded of who it is that has saved them for who it is that loves them and gave himself for them and it is that same jesus who in some way is also passing on that shot in the arm to us today so as we go into this next year filled with its uncertainties filled with its challenges that will no doubt come along the road i want us to be really clear we meet with a god who loves us knows us and who speaks into our situations and i want us to see two other things about the one who speaks about jesus i want us to note that he is both a conquering king and a reigning king it's into this uncertain time that jesus speaks with authority and he speaks as a conquering king now let me pause because you may hear the word conquer and think well that sounds a bit militaristic that sounds a bit sort of abrasive and in your face and yet actually when we step back and think about it to conquer something's not always bad to conquer something can be very good i'm sure if any of us got to the top of everest would be quite happy to tell everyone that i conquered the greatest mountain in the world i'm sure if someone said do you know what i think i've found the cure to cancer i think we've conquered it can actually be a

very good thing and not seen as just a word of negativity it can be a very good thing and that's what we see in this chapter jesus conquers humanity's greatest problem jesus seeks to remind the churches that what stood in their way between them and god was sin and that he has dealt with it i don't know about you but when you face times of challenge when things are a little bit difficult you tend to forget some of the most simple and basic details don't you simple things like names phone numbers details where you're meant to be going maybe that's just because of the stage we're at with little children you forget those details but in those times of change we can forget those things and this is where verse five second half of it we're told so clearly that jesus is the one who has done what well john is in this amazing section of praise he is offering up praise to god he says second half of verse five to him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood he reminds them you have a conquering king you have one who has dealt with your greatest problem you see christians love to make a lot about this they love to make a lot about the cross maybe you're listening in online or maybe you're here for the first time and you're thinking about christianity well this little verse is filled with so much of what it is that christians love to celebrate that there is a god who has loved us who frees us from our sins because we are slaves to that and he does that at cost to himself our king conquers sin through the cross there is now hope for hopeless people and as we enter into another new year something that i want us to be really clear about is this we can be changed and i know that we can sit here and go yeah yeah i know that that might be true and theoretically i can see how that might happen i want us to stop and and hear that really clearly the beauty of the grace of god and the gospel of his son jesus christ is that you can be changed you can be transformed we can be made new because he has overcome because his blood has conquered you see the blood of jesus speaks a better word than all the noises of satan's accusations the blood of jesus speaks a better word than our sin the multiple sins that we have stacked up in our lives you see those who know trust and love jesus are those who are free god the son has come to us and said you're free and when i say you're free i mean it what's your struggle what is it that you find really hard what is the thing that you will turn back to again and again and again i don't know you do but what i want to put our finger on today is this as we go into this new year that struggle which you think cannot be overcome that sin which you keep returning to time after time after time because of the one who loves us we are free from sin because of his blood at the cross you see this is where the gospel hits the real road of life we're not just saying things like that because it sounds nice and a nice religious concept we're saying this because it is true it is what god has shown us in his word and it is also the lived experience of his people throughout the world that when they came to a savior they found that there was true freedom to set them free from all sorts of things what is your struggle what is that sin you will return to time after time come me with jesus because his blood speaks a better word you see he has conquered sin but jesus not only has conquered and as a conquering king which you see verse 5 and also if you want to look at verse 17 and 18 we come to the one who is the reigning king the reigning king now you might say okay martin how is that different well you've probably caught me out there because it's not actually hugely different it's just a different perspective it's a different angle on what we're being presented with here and i think that it's an important angle for us to pause and think about for a moment because the majesty of jesus is seen as we think about it from this perspective verse 1 and 19 are the bits where we can kind of pick this up from you see jesus rules he hasn't just conquered sin and death and hell he's not just conquered all of those things and just you know sat down and you know that's just everything's finished and wasn't that a lovely tennis mat that's not what is jesus rules and reigns and that is something which can give us great confidence in the midst of uncertainties how else can he so confidently explain that there are things which are soon to take place verse 1 of chapter 1 there are things which are soon to take place that is because he knows all things because he rules over all things and you see in the uncertain times of the first century world which the people receiving this vision for the first time lived this is what really mattered this is what they really needed to see this is what they really needed to hear there is a god in heaven his plans have never changed he has never been defeated he rules and reigns the cosmos he grants us breath in the present and because of his son's death on the cross there is hope and life forever for those who know him and love him that's what they needed to hear and that's exactly what we need to hear today this truth that our jesus is alive and that he reigns and that he chooses to meet with us is something which is ageless something which is timeless and gets us to the point where our perspective is changed we need a perspective changer when we face difficulty when we face trial when we face those points of uncertainty which will happen this year this is what we need to

know in those moments there is a god in heaven who is good and kind who is filled with love and who rules and reigns you see contrary to popular belief it is not fate or force which ultimately guides the events of human history neither is it the passing political trends of our our day or the economic policies of the present none of these things ultimately rule reign and govern life it is our loving heavenly father who rules the cosmos who sent his son and who gives us the spirit without measure who rules and reigns all things you see friends christ reigns and that is good news for all of us today because it means for those who know and love jesus you have a sure and certain hope that will never fail and for those of us who don't yet follow jesus there is a great offer put on the table then the god who rules and reigns the universe comes to you and says follow me i rule i reign [20 : 10] i know all things that are about to take place therefore write these things that you have seen those that are about to take place after this verse 19 there is an offer on the table for you come to meet the one who rules and reigns and who offers to rule and reign over your life some of us in this coming year will see our greatest fears realized and as i sat down and as i thought about that it filled me with a real sense of weight because i don't know any of you and yet that's the reality of how things work out in life isn't it and it's why as the pastoral application of this section it is so important that you hear right now for the moment when you are crying on the floor because you don't know what you're going to do next because something's come through the letterbox something's come into your inbox something you know has passed on i don't know what it will be but for some of us that may well be what happens this year here is the great and wonderful truth that we have to hold on to even in the dark valley he reigns maybe it's not going to be as serious as that but there's probably not one person in this room or listening online who doesn't have some sort of anxiety about something maybe your work maybe it's the pressure of upcoming exams and performing well because that is going to set a trajectory for your life maybe it's your family life and you just don't know what's going to happen with your children are they ever going to turn back to jesus maybe it's your finances your health maybe it's what's going to happen with the church going into this next year we don't know what all of those things will bring but into our anxieties and into our deepest fears we hear jesus say i know what is going to take place don't fear little flock i know i love you my blood speaks a better word now finally as we finish up we see in chapter 1 verse 6 to 7 that there is an ancient task look at verses 6 to 7 off the back of that section in chapter 1 verse 5 there's an ancient task that is given to god's people once again in that part of of asia in those different cities that are mentioned in verse 11 this revelation of jesus and the things which are about to take place are not a license to sit back and form religious interest groups that's not what the point of revelation that's not what it's about and that was not the that's not the point for the first century roman christians hellenized christians that's not what it's about there would have been plenty of those in their day and sadly it's also the case today there's plenty of religious interest groups that exist throughout scotland people turn up and they say things and they say the set things and they they interact with they might even pick up a bible but ultimately the power and the transforming presence of god by his spirit is not is not there and so there are religious interest groups all over the place and that is not the point of the book of revelation it's not about us sitting back and forming our little clubs where we are nice and safe where we can keep everything ordered where we can keep everything secure this is given to the people of god at that point in time to prepare them for this ancient task yes it is a vision to keep people going in the christian life there is no denying that that is something which it is given to equip the churches in the first century and the 21st century for that's that's that's not under question but it seems to me that even more clearly this vision the book of revelation has been given to inspire us

there's a word that people in the west of scotland love to be inspirational people it's been given to inspire us to press on in the mission of god to see the glory of god known savored and delighted in amongst all the peoples of the world it's a big thing isn't it it's a big goal for this vision to encourage god's people to inspire them to keep going and to make christ known certainly that's where the rest of the book goes a broken and a lost world need to see need to know need to encounter and experience the one who is risen from the dead to know the glory of god which makes people whole why do i say this well the outcome of the work of jesus which you see chapter 1 verse 5 second half of the outcome of that work of jesus at the cross setting us free from our sins through his blood is for them to be given this ancient task once again to be kingly priests look down at that with me chapter 1 verse 6 you see that and he made us a kingdom priests to his god and father to him be glory and dominion forever and ever amen i want us to be clear this is not a new task this is just a

repetition of what has already existed just before the people of god receive the 10 commandments and the law of god in exodus chapter 20 you see in exodus chapter 19 verses 4 to 6 that this great promise is given this great purpose is given to the people of god you are to be a distinct community living out god's righteousness and justice a community who proclaim the goodness of god in the challenges and in the frustrations of life take time this afternoon or this evening to read exodus chapter 19 verses 4 to 6 and you'll see the foundation for this little section in chapter 1 verse 6 of revelation an ancient task to be the people of god living life god's way honoring and worshiping him making much of him so that the peoples who surrounded god's old testament people and the peoples who surround us in glasgow and the peoples who live in god's world today will hear know love and experience the savior jesus christ an ancient task of being kingly priests is what is reissued to these challenged struggling believers in uncertain times is that where we find ourselves uncertain times challenging times difficulties well it's into such a context as that in the first century world that jesus chose to speak to his people and where he continues to choose to speak to his people by his word and say i am present with you isn't that an amazing section where it describes the person of jesus in verses 12 through 16 i've not dwelt on that for too much because in many ways it's quite a straightforward image you don't mess with this person he's all powerful he is glorious and he is good and he comes to meet with us what's the context of that ancient task coming to increased fulfillment it is a world of people who rejected the christ it's a world where it says in verse 7 they will wail at his coming you see that behold he is coming that is jesus with the clouds and every eye will see him even those who have pierced him and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him even so amen there will be many people at the return of christ who will wail at his coming they will not want him to rule they will not want him to reign because that will mean an end to their own little kingdoms and yet we know that that is what is good we know that that is what is ultimately all about but surely as god's people with the short amount of breath that we have been given we want those who at one point would have wailed at the sight of christ's coming to join with us as eternal worshippers of the god who loved us and gave himself for us you know none of us can save anyone that's a great and liberating truth to embrace but we can live and speak for jesus we can live life god's way and we can announce god's truth to people who do not yet know jesus in the spheres of influence and interaction that he has given to us you know those spheres you know where you have influence to speak you know your interactions on a daily basis i don't the encouragement from this section is instead of those people wailing when they see jesus on that last day would you not delight to see them worship alongside you joining in the song of heaven worthy is the lamb to receive all glory honor and praise