

Foundations

OPEN THE CONVERSATION

Take some time to build relationships with the students:

- Ask for each student's high and low from the week.
- Today's RBQ (Relationship Building Question): What's something you used to be really into that you barely care about anymore?

INTRODUCTION

Think back to what your life looked like three or four years ago. You probably cared about some different things, spent time with different people, or had plans that look pretty different now. There may also be things that haven't changed much at all. But a few years is enough time to realize how much of life keeps moving.

That's normal for us. We grow up, friendships change, plans change, and we learn things that change the way we think. Even things that seem permanent usually aren't. We're used to living in a world where almost everything has a beginning and eventually comes to an end.

God is different. There has never been a time when He wasn't God, and there never will be. He was there before any of us were born, He is here now, and He will still be God long after our lives and the world around us look completely different.

Revelation makes that especially clear in the way it talks about Jesus. He died and rose again, He reigns now, and He will come again. He is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. He loves His people and has freed us from our sins.

Those words were first written to churches living in a world that could feel uncertain and powerful around them. They didn't know everything that was coming, but they could know who Jesus was. We don't know everything that is coming either. We follow the same Jesus, and who He is hasn't changed.

READ REVELATION 1:1-2

1. Before John tells us much about what is going to happen, he starts with Jesus. Why do you think who Jesus is matters before we try to understand everything else in Revelation?

READ REVELATION 1:3

2. Verse 3 connects hearing God's Word with keeping it. Why do you think it's possible to hear what God says and still not let it change how we live? What helps you actually put Scripture into practice?

READ REVELATION 1:4-8

3. Which description of Jesus in these verses stands out to you most, and why?
4. These churches lived under rulers who seemed incredibly powerful. What difference do you think it made for them to hear that Jesus is "the ruler of the kings of the earth"?
5. God is described as "the one who is, who was, and who is to come." When life changes or you don't know what comes next, what difference can it make to remember that God doesn't change?

WRAP UP

This week, choose one description of Jesus from Revelation 1:4-8 and spend some time thinking about what it says about Him. Ask God to help you remember who He is when things around you change or you aren't sure what comes next.

Take a moment to share prayer requests and pray together.

EXTENDED CUT

Revelation is a letter written to seven churches in the Roman province of Asia, but it also belongs to a kind of writing called apocalyptic literature. The Greek word *apokalupsis* means an unveiling or revealing, which helps explain the title of the book. Revelation is showing its readers something they could not see on their own, and from the first verse the focus is Jesus Christ.

Apocalyptic writing uses visions, symbols, numbers, and images, so Revelation can feel different from a Gospel or one of Paul's letters. The first readers would have been more familiar with this kind of writing than we are. Revelation also draws heavily from the Old Testament, especially books like Daniel, Ezekiel, Isaiah, and Zechariah. A lot of the imagery makes more sense when we notice those connections.

The writer identifies himself as John, traditionally understood to be the apostle John. He was writing near the end of the first century from the island of Patmos. Church tradition says he had been exiled there because of his testimony about Jesus. The letter was sent to seven real churches in the Roman province of Asia, and some of them were dealing with persecution or pressure to compromise their faith.

Rome was the dominant power in their world, so the way John talks about Jesus would have meant something very real to them. He calls Jesus “the ruler of the kings of the earth.” Rome and its rulers had plenty of power over ordinary life, but they were not above Christ.

Verse 3 says there is a blessing for the person who reads the prophecy aloud and for those who hear it and keep what is written. Revelation would have been read aloud when Christians gathered together. Hearing the words was not the end of what John expected from them. They were supposed to live by what they heard while they waited for Jesus to return.

The greeting in verses 4-5 speaks of “the one who is, who was, and who is to come,” the seven spirits before the throne, and Jesus Christ. Many interpreters understand the seven spirits as a reference to the fullness of the Holy Spirit, while others understand the phrase as referring to angelic beings. Either way, the opening of the letter gives us a picture of the eternal God before John moves further into the visions of Revelation.

John gives several descriptions of Jesus in only a few verses. He is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. “Firstborn” speaks of His place of honor and connects with His resurrection. Jesus had been crucified, but He was alive, and He ruled over every earthly king.

John also tells the churches that Jesus loves them and has freed them from their sins by His blood. He has made His people a kingdom and priests who serve God. Before Revelation gets into many of the visions people usually associate with the book, John has already reminded the churches of what Jesus has done for them.

Verse 7 looks ahead to Jesus coming with the clouds and uses language from Daniel 7 and Zechariah 12. Both passages help give background to the picture John is using here. Revelation will come back to the return of Christ throughout the book.

The passage ends with God calling Himself the Alpha and the Omega, the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet. He is “the one who is, who was, and who is to come, the Almighty.” The churches receiving Revelation could not know what Rome would do next or what following Jesus might cost them. What they could know was that Rome had not always existed and would not always exist. God had, and God would.

1. Before John tells us much about what is going to happen, he starts with Jesus. Why do you think who Jesus is matters before we try to understand everything else in Revelation?

Revelation has a lot in it that can be difficult to understand, and people can spend a lot of time trying to figure out every symbol or event. John starts by showing us Jesus. Knowing who He is gives us a place to stand as we read the rest of the book. Whatever else we come across, Jesus is alive, He rules, and the future belongs to Him.

2. Verse 3 connects hearing God's Word with keeping it. Why do you think it's possible to hear what God says and still not let it change how we live? What helps you actually put Scripture into practice?

We can know what Scripture says without always wanting to do what it asks of us. Forgiving someone, telling the truth, loving someone who is difficult, or trusting God when we don't know what is going to happen can all be harder than knowing the right answer. Keeping God's Word means allowing what we hear to affect the choices we actually make.

3. Which description of Jesus in these verses stands out to you most, and why?

Answers will be different. Someone might notice "faithful witness" because Jesus remained faithful even through suffering. "Firstborn from the dead" points to His resurrection and the hope we have because He rose. Someone else may notice that Jesus rules over the kings of the earth, that He loves us, or that He has freed us from our sins.

4. These churches lived under rulers who seemed incredibly powerful. What difference do you think it made for them to hear that Jesus is "the ruler of the kings of the earth"?

Rome was a real power in their lives, and following Jesus could come with consequences. Hearing that Jesus ruled over every earthly king reminded them that the emperor was not the highest authority. They could keep following Christ even when the world around them seemed to be saying something completely different.

5. God is described as "the one who is, who was, and who is to come." When life changes or you don't know what comes next, what difference can it make to remember that God doesn't change?

It gives us something that does not move every time our circumstances do. We may not know what a friendship will look like a year from now, whether our plans will work out, or what is coming next in life. None of those things change who God is. He was God before any of it happened, He is God in the middle of it, and He will still be God after It all.