

Introduction

Grace to you and peace from Him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven Spirits who are before His throne, and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler over the kings of the earth. To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and has made us kings and priests to His God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

Behold He is coming with clouds, and every will see Him. And all the tribes of the earth will mourn because of Him. Even so, Amen. (Rev. 1:4-7)

The opening chapter of Revelation has much to say about the Lord Jesus, and it is an introduction and preparation for the rest of the book. It is as if God is saying to us, “Look carefully at My Son, see Him as He truly is, know Him and honour Him; He is the Alpha and Omega and all things are in His hands. Before you try to understand the things that are written here, be sure you know Him in truth, and be sure that He is truly Lord of your life.” The implication is here, in Revelation chapter 1, that true and deep understanding and insight into all that is written in Revelation depends on knowing Jesus, and in knowing Him, living in submissive trust and obedience to Him. Such deep, spiritual insight cannot be entrusted to the intellectually wise but cold mind, but only to those whose hearts are filled with genuine, loyal, deep and pure love for the One who loved them and gave Himself for them. It should be no surprise then, to see that God committed such precious revelation to the Apostle John, the man who, of all the apostles, had the deepest love for Jesus, who leant on the breast of Jesus, whose own heart was filled with an almost inexpressible wonder that he had known Jesus in the flesh, and who now knowing fellowship with Him in the spirit, longed for others to enter into, and enjoy, as he did, wonderful, divine fellowship with the Father and Son (see 1Jn. 1:1-4).

So we are given a glorious sight of our Saviour, aspects of His work (vv. 5-7), and of His character (vv. 12-16) are presented for us to meditate upon, we are drawn deeper in our knowledge and understanding of Him, and therefore, as so wonderfully expressed in Wesley’s hymn Love Divine, we also ought to be “lost in wonder, love and praise” for Him who first loved us. It is from that place of love and wonder, that the Holy Spirit will lead the sincere student of the Scriptures to greater depths of knowledge and understanding of the workings of the kingdom of God.

Much of the symbolism of Revelation is taken from the Old Testament, and we find that

Jesus is presented as the Messiah,¹ the One who fulfils the Messianic prophecies. We see Him as the eternally existent Son of God, the Alpha and Omega who rules over history, we see Him as the Lamb slain, as the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root and the Offspring of David, the Bright and Morning Star; and as the all conquering Messiah who will rule the nations with a rod of iron, and ultimately dwell among His people in the new heaven and earth. All these images are rooted in Old Testament, Messianic prophecy.

The content of the following studies is based on Rev. 1:5-7, each of seven chapters presenting a study and discussion on one of seven aspects of the Messiah's work, and showing how such works fulfil Old Testament prophecies regarding the Messiah.

With the Lord's help, may we be led to a deeper understanding of the Messiah, and of the work He accomplished on behalf of the lost souls of our world; and so like the Apostle John, may we too, learn to love Him with deep and indescribable love.

¹ Throughout, the Hebrew, "Messiah" and the Greek, "Christ" are used interchangeably, both words having the same meaning, i.e. anointed.

Chapter 1

The Faithful Witness

Incline your ear to Me, and come to Me. Hear and your soul shall live; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, the sure mercies of David. Indeed I have given him as a witness to the people, a leader and commander for the people. (Isa. 55:3,4)²

In his gospel John wrote that while no one has seen God at any time, Jesus would declare Him (Jn. 1:18); the writer of Hebrews tells us that Jesus is the brightness of God's glory and the express image of His person (Heb. 1:3); in Revelation John tells us that Jesus Christ is the faithful witness; Jesus talking to Pilate said, "For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth" (Jn. 18:37). It is an essential aspect of Jesus' Messianic ministry that He was sent to the earth to bear witness to the truth about God and His kingdom, and to explain the implications of such truth for the people of this world.

Witness

What is a witness? Simply put, it is someone who provides evidence, or gives testimony to settle a matter that may be deemed contestable. In human terms, we can easily understand the use of witnesses in a court of law. A man is accused of a crime, but protests his innocence, the court must decide if the man is innocent or guilty, witnesses are called by the lawyers to support their case for his acquittal or punishment. The witnesses are cross-examined on the basis of the evidence they present, and the jury and the judge make their decisions based on that evidence.

In the patriarchal period of the Old Testament, witnesses were often called to provide testimony to agreements made between men, sometimes those witnesses were inanimate objects such as a heap of stones, or animals, sometimes God was called upon to be a witness (cf. Gen. 21:22ff; 31:43ff). It was important then, as it is now, that where there remained the possibility of doubt or subsequent controversy over a crucial matter, irrefutable evidence could be provided to settle any disagreement.

² Mentions of David in the prophetic writings of the Old Testament often carry a Messianic theme. These verses of Isaiah show that the Messiah is to be a witness to the people on behalf of God.

The law made the bearing of false witness a punishable sin (Deut. 5:20; 19:18,19), which shows God's deep disapproval of lies and dishonest testimony (those who love and practice lies are numbered among those who have no part in the heavenly city, Rev. 22:15).

In Scriptural and spiritual terms the contestable matters concern God and His kingdom; questions are raised by the human race as to whether God exists, and if so which of the many gods presented are true? Are there really such places as heaven and hell? Is it true that human beings have an eternal soul? etc., etc. The human race has wrestled with such questions since it lost its relationship with the true God through Adam's fall. God however, is very gracious, not desiring humankind to be lost forever in a sea of doubt and confusion, He has given true witnesses and provided the evidence we need to be assured of His existence.

Creation, God's Witness

The first witness we are confronted with is creation: Psalm 19:1 tells us, "The heavens declare the glory of God: and the firmament shows His handiwork," and Paul contending with the idolators at Lystra stated that God, "did not leave Himself without witness, in that He did good, gave us rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness" (Acts 14:17). The creation itself testifies to the existence of God, it is His witness, and it is tragic how men have attempted to suppress that witness and deny its evidence, trying to explain it away with the lie of evolution.

Romans 1:20 tells us that the invisible God is so clearly seen in His creation that people are without excuse. Paul goes on to show that when that revelation of God's being is intentionally denied, thoughts become futile and hearts are darkened; there follows a sure slide down into ever deeper and fouler sin and immorality, men and women given over to vile passions, commit every form of wickedness, and eventually become unloving, unforgiving and unmerciful (Rom. 1:20-32). Where there is no acknowledgement of the Creator God, there is no accountability for actions, no corresponding boundaries on behaviour, no understanding of right and wrong, and no sense of self-worth or respect for others. There is a sad loss of human dignity as the understanding of the high place of humanity in God's creation is lost, and instead of believing life to be a precious gift from God, life becomes a throw-away commodity of little value, the consequences of which are very plain to be seen in the world today.

Israel, God's Witness

Another witness God has given is the nation of Israel, Isaiah records God's words to Israel:

"You are My witnesses," says the LORD, "and My servant whom I have chosen, that you may know and believe Me, and understand that I am He. Before Me there was no God formed, nor shall there be after Me. I, even I, am the Lord, and besides Me there is no saviour. I have declared and saved, I have proclaimed, and there was no foreign god among

you; therefore you are My witnesses,” says the LORD, “that I am God.” (Isa. 43:10-12).

Israel was called by God to be His covenant people, and as they lived their lives under the terms of the covenant they would present His case, and give the evidence that the LORD was the true and only God. The terms of the covenant ensured that Israel would be God’s witnesses, either by blessing them when they were obedient, or by cursing them when they were disobedient. Moses, on completing the Book of the Law, placed it besides the ark of the covenant, “that it may be a witness against you” (Deut. 31:29), the words contained within it being proof of the covenant that God made with Israel. The subsequent periods of blessing and cursing that came upon Israel are proof of the reality, power and infallible word of their God. Israel today maintains its position as God’s witness, after nearly 2,000 years absent from their land, the Jews have returned, and today are an established nation in the land promised to them by their God, thereby testifying to the truth of God’s ancient promises.

In the wilderness Israel built the Tabernacle of Testimony which contained the Ark of Testimony (Ex. 25:10ff), and in the ark were placed the Tablets of Testimony (Ex. 31:18), these things being signs and evidence that God had met with His chosen people, and that He was present among them. When the work of building the tabernacle was finished according to the pattern, the cloud covered it, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle (Ex. 40:30); God manifested His presence and made known the reality of His being.

Throughout the history of the Old Testament we see God revealing Himself to Israel through His acts: delivering them from Egypt and bringing them into the land of Canaan; miraculously defeating their enemies when they were walking with Him in righteousness; giving them over to their enemies when they were in rebellion; taking them away to Babylon in His wrath and restoring them to the land of Israel at the appointed time. All these things give evidence that He is truly God.

Through the written and spoken prophetic word God gave promises, some of which were fulfilled before their eyes during their lifetimes, some which are still yet to be fulfilled. Some of the most important prophecies concern the Messiah, many were fulfilled by Jesus’ arrival on earth and in His ministry which followed. Jesus often referred to such prophetic Scriptures, citing them as evidence (Jn. 5:39,46), they are proof of the existence of the God of Israel - for who else could declare such things with such accuracy long before they came to pass (Isa. 48:3-8).

The LORD gave comprehensive evidence through the nation of Israel that He is truly God and there is no other. But Israel is not His best witness, that position would, in the fullness of time, be taken by Jesus the Messiah.

Jesus, the Faithful Witness

In John 18:37, Jesus stated that He came to earth to bear witness to the truth. That witness which He fulfilled faithfully and perfectly, provides evidence; the testimony of His life on earth, in both word and deed, giving proof: to the existence of God (Jn. 1:18; Heb. 1:3); to spiritual realities of the

kingdom of God (Jn. 3:11,12; 31,32); and to the evil of the world (Jn. 7:7). That testimony given so that lost souls may believe and be saved, and enter into eternal life (Jn. 3:36). Like many a good witness Jesus found His testimony to truth was not well received by those who stood to be condemned by it, and so He was and is rejected by many, “the world hates Me,” He said, “because I testify of it that its works are evil” (Jn. 7:7).

Jesus said many things about Himself and the kingdom of God which are not easily accepted by the human mind, and cannot be ascertained by human intellect, and so the accusation was thrown at him by the Pharisees, “You bear witness of Yourself, Your witness is not true” (Jn. 8:11). The Pharisees made reference to an aspect of the law stated in Deuteronomy 19:15, that by the mouth of two or three witnesses a matter would be established. However, Jesus could provide ample evidence to back up His claims, and in John chapter 5, in acknowledgement of the validity of the law of witnesses, He presents 4 witnesses of his own:

1. John the Baptist (Jn. 5:33): He came to bear witness of the true Light (Jn. 1:7-9); he bore witness to seeing the Spirit descend on Jesus, which gave him confirmation of the things God had shown him previously. John could say with great confidence, “I have seen and testified that this is the Son of God” (Jn. 1:32-34).
2. His works (Jn. 5:36): Jesus did many miraculous works, the like of which if written in books the world could not contain (Jn. 21:25): healing the sick, deliverance from demons, calming the storms, etc. Of such great works Nicodemus could say, “no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him” (Jn. 3:2); likewise, the healed blind man could say, “If this Man were not from God He could do nothing” (Jn. 9:33). Jesus faithfully did all that the Father asked of Him, miraculous works that ought to have convinced all who saw or heard of them that He had been sent from heaven by the Father, and that He was indeed the Son of God. These works were done in the world that, in the face of such overwhelming evidence, people might believe and receive eternal life (Jn. 10:25; 35). It is a sad commentary on the human condition that many refused the evidence, and could not believe in Jesus, but heartening too to see there were believers, convinced by His signs, who did indeed believe because of them (Jn. 10:41,42).
3. The Father (Jn. 5:37): Jesus said the Father who sent Him, testified of Him, and we have the record of the Father’s audible voice giving approval, “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased” (Mk. 1:11). Peter, preaching on the Day of Pentecost, announced that Jesus was attested by God by miracles, wonders and signs (Acts 2:22); and Jesus had great assurance and awareness Himself of His unity with the Father, and of the Father’s presence with Him as He went about doing those things that pleased the Father. Jesus, in faithfully doing all that the Father asked of Him; in faithfully declaring truths of His Father’s kingdom; and in being the express image of His Father, could say, “He who has seen Me has seen the Father” (Jn. 14:8-11). Jesus lived His life on earth in such faithful obedience to His Father’s will, and in such close communion with His Father that they both bore witness to one another, and when Jesus

died, the Father gave powerful testimony and evidence to the truth of all that Jesus had said by raising Him from the dead (Jn. 10:17,18; Acts 2:22-24).

4. Scripture (Jn. 5:39, 46): Many Old Testament Scriptures point prophetically to Jesus and His ministry on earth as the Messiah. Many of them were fulfilled by Jesus during His earthly ministry, and some still await fulfilment. Matthew in his gospel mentions ten of these Messianic prophecies and highlights Jesus' fulfilment of them.³ There is a tremendous power in these scriptures, which in having been declared hundreds, even thousands of years before their fulfilment, testify to truth, to the fact of God's existence and as a guarantee of His word. Peter gives testimony to the power of the Holy Spirit inspired prophetic Scriptures, having been an eyewitness to the majesty of the Lord Jesus Christ, he can say that, "the prophetic voice was confirmed," and that it is like a "light shining in a dark place" (2Pet. 1:16-21), with such compelling evidence before us he exhorts us to, "take heed." The Messianic prophecies are a wonderful tool for understanding the Messianic ministry of Jesus, and can be used evangelistically to prove that He is the Messiah - as Apollos was very adept at doing (Acts 18:28); Jesus pointed to them as a convincing witness to Himself.⁴

It was Jesus' faithful service to His Father while here on earth that gave His testimony and that of His witnesses their compelling power. If Jesus had failed to do His Father's will, He would have lost the Father's seal of approval, and His works would not have been possible. Failure to live in such a way as to fulfil the Messianic prophecies would have invalidated the prophetic word of God, and brought disrepute to the Scriptures. Anything less than complete obedience to His Father's will, and eternal life would not be offered in Jesus' name to the sinners of this world. Without the obedience which took Him to the cross, there would not be the greatest evidence of all that Jesus is the Son of God who came to save us from our sins - His resurrection from the dead (Acts 3:33).

Believers' Witness

Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And you are witnesses of these things. (Lk. 24:46-48)

After His resurrection Jesus told His disciples that he was sending them in the same way as His Father sent Him (Jn. 20:21), and as Jesus came to bear witness to the truth, so His disciples are called to testify to truth. Their testimony is to Jesus, to the facts and significance of His death and resurrection, and to the realities of the kingdom of God. The disciple's task is not an easy one, the

³ For Matthew's use of Messianic prophecy in his gospel see his ten "formula quotations": 1:22-23; 2:5,6; 2:15; 2:17-18; 2:23; 4:14-16; 8:17; 12:17-21; 21:4,5; 27:9,10

⁴ See appendix for a list of Messianic prophecies.

world doubts and throws mockery on his testimony, where is the proof they ask, what evidence can you show that the things you believe are true?

The scriptural principle of a matter being established by two or three witnesses remains valid (cf. 2Cor. 13:1), and the disciple has at his disposal certain items of evidence to present to an unbelieving world:

- The assurance of eternal life gives freedom from the fear of death, the believer living life with the peace and quiet assurance that this brings, testifies to the world of the reality of such belief (1Jn. 5:11).
- The disciple's acts of faith in obeying all that the Lord calls him to do testify to his belief in God. Great examples are supplied in Hebrews chapter 11 of those who disdained worldly wisdom and reasoning, preferring to trust and obey the voice of God, and do what He asked of them; in relation to which we are told that being "surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses" we too should "run the race that is set before us" (Heb. 12:1).
- The help and power of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8; Rom. 8:10,11), who along with the gifts and fruit He imparts, enables the disciple to live a supernatural and holy life very unlike that of worldly people. Believers, being "renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him" (Col. 3:10), have in their hearts the light of the glory of God (2Cor. 4:6), and with the Holy Spirit helping them to live a new, holy life, they are effective witnesses to the truth and transforming power of the gospel.
- The disciple overcomes the Devil by the word of his testimony, and because he loves not life unto death (Rev. 12:11). For some that means physical death at the hand of persecutors, but for every believer there ought to be a dying to all that the world deems valuable and precious in order to show that he lives for Christ, and deems that life which is heavenly in its outlook a far greater treasure than anything this world has to offer. Every believer, of course, should be able to give testimony to others of salvation in Jesus, and of the things God has done for them in their lives, such testimonies speak to unbelievers and present them with evidence that God is real. The Greek words used in the New Testament for witness and testimony come from the word *martureo*, from which we have the English word martyr, and it impresses upon us something of the high value that God places on truthful witness to Him and His Word. For their faithful testimony to that truth many have indeed paid the ultimate price.

The Lord Jesus Christ, the Faithful Witness, in obedience to His Father's will, left heaven, becoming poor for our sakes, taking on the form of a bondservant and living His life on earth in faithful obedience to His Father's will, that will took Him to the cross to pay the price for the sins of the world. The Father, being well pleased with Jesus, attested to Him with miracles, wonders and signs, thereby supplying the world with evidence of Jesus' faithful witness to truth.

In the courtroom, the true and faithful testimony of a witness may well deliver an innocent

from the consequences of a false verdict, saving him from a terrible punishment. Jesus came to bear witness to the truth so that guilty sinners may believe in Him, be saved from eternal punishment, and receive the gift of eternal life. Jesus' faithful disciples, themselves called to be His witnesses, their lives giving testimony to their salvation, may themselves be used by God to lead lost souls to the Saviour and His cross, there the lost can find redemption, and escape the condemnation of their sin.

A true witness delivers souls. (Proverbs 14:15)