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**Sunday 28 January 2024 to**

**Sunday 4 February 2024**

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Sunday 28 January 2024

**A new teaching**

by Tatiana Overduin

***He taught them as one who had authority (Mark 1:22).***

Read [Mark 1:21–28](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Mark+1%3A21-28&version=NRSVUE)

Today’s devotional reading begins with an account of Jesus in the synagogue on the Sabbath day. We read that the people were amazed because he taught differently to the teachers of the law: Jesus taught with authority. The people present at that event identified something very different, something new. ‘What is this?’ they exclaimed. ‘A new teaching … with authority!’ Just as Jesus’ teaching was clearly different for the people then, so Jesus’ teaching should be clearly different for us today. Jesus’ teaching is distinctive from the world’s teaching, and that is what makes it always refreshingly new. We can take great comfort in trusting that Jesus has all authority over heaven and earth (Matthew 28:18–20).

Many people assume authority over others: parents, pastors, teachers, employers, prime ministers, police officers, and the list continues. During the COVID pandemic, ordinary people were also given authority over others for a time, and perhaps you experienced that some could be quite insistent! With authority comes power, and human nature loves power and having control over others. All too often, we witness this power misused sinfully. However, genuine authority is different from just having a controlling power over others. Real authority comes with the responsibility to provide support, encouragement and safety for others; it isn’t an abusive power. Jesus’ authority is never abusive or sinful. Perhaps that is why the people thought it was new, as the Pharisees were renowned for being oppressive.

Having met people who have come to faith as adults, what is often obvious is how they begin to live in a completely new way: with a new sense of freedom and an assuredness of God’s forgiveness through the cross. They live with a deep, fulfilling peace. Living faithfully in God’s word does provide a new way of living because we live as repentant, forgiven, saved people despite having to live in opposition to what the world teaches. God’s grace offered to us through the Scriptures, gifted by the Holy Spirit, is a new way to live with forgiveness, love and kindness in all our relationships. Jesus’ authority continues to be new for us all, even today, every morning because despite our sinful human nature, we can look to his complete authority. Jesus provides the perfect way.

***Lord Jesus, we are forever thankful that you have authority over all things. Amen.***

*Tatiana is married to Jim, and they live in Largs North, a seaside location in Adelaide. They have two adult children and six grandchildren, who are a wonderful blessing to them both. Tatiana teaches full-time as an English, History and Religion teacher; she gained a Bachelor of Arts in Theology from Australian Lutheran College in 1996, and in her spare time, she enjoys knitting, gardening, singing for church, writing and swimming. Her home congregation is Bethlehem Lutheran Church, Adelaide.*

Monday 29 January 2024

**The prayers of God’s people**

by Tatiana Overduin

***Worthy is the Lamb … praise and honour and glory and power, forever and ever (Revelation 5:12,13)!***

Read [Revelation 5:6–14](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Revelation+5%3A6-14&version=NRSVUE)

The Lamb of God, at the centre of the throne of God, surrounded by the four living creatures, and the elders, representatives chosen by God, holding bowls of incense filled with the prayers of God’s people. What an extraordinary picture these holy words paint for us today!

And we hear that these chosen ambassadors sang a *new* song: for Jesus makes all things *new* (Revelation 21:5). The lyrics of this ‘*new* song’ voice the sacrifice of the Lamb, he who is worthy because of his blood shed for us – his people! These lyrics include something about us too: ‘… persons of every tribe and language and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God …’ (verses 9 and 10). We, too, are ambassadors in relationship with, and serving, our Triune God.

Our prayers are acknowledged here. They are collected and held like incense rising to God. A holy stockpile – have you ever considered this? God hears our prayers; God listens to the person who does his will (John 9:31). Our prayers are, therefore, not pointless. What do we pray for then? In our church community, our prayers come together to rise as incense to his holy throne. And what of our personal prayers? Let us not ignore their value and importance to God, who is pleased by them (Proverbs 15:8).

We have been given biblical instruction to pray for all people: ‘I urge, then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for all people … this is good and pleases our God and Saviour’ (1 Timothy 2:1,3).

So may we offer our prayers, and together with the angels, a multitude of angels, who already encircle the throne of God, and who worship in a loud voice, together with them proclaim ‘… honour and glory and praise to the Lamb who was slain … forever and ever … Amen’ (verses 12 to 14).

***O holy God, we stand in awe and humility before you, as you reveal such wondrous things to us through your holy word. May the prayers that we offer be pleasing in your sight. We pray that our eyes be opened to your majesty. Lord, help us to worship Jesus in spirit and in truth; He who is the holy Lamb of God. In your holy name we humbly pray. Amen.***

Tuesday 30 January 2024

**Who can withstand the wrath of the Lamb?**

by Tatiana Overduin

***Then the kings of the earth … and everyone else, both slave and free, hid … and called ‘… hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb’ (Revelation 6:15–17).***

Read [Revelation 6:1-17](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Revelation+6%3A1-17&version=NRSVUE)

Wrath and Lamb; these two words don’t seem to fit together, do they? What a contrast! The meek sacrificial Lamb, who bore our sins upon the cross at Calvary, stands here now, as the all-powerful, victorious judge!

The visual imagery depicted in today’s reading is terrifying: who will be able to withstand the wrath of the Lamb? Powerful horsemen bringing doom and destruction upon the earth, and a Lamb, a triumphant Lamb, who has the power and authority over all the universe, the only one worthy to open the scrolls – he who has the power to unveil a future of annihilation upon humanity as we now know it. ‘Heaven and earth will pass away, but God’s word will remain forever’ (Matthew 24:35). And despite the cry for peace in our world, God discloses this future to us. Why? So that we might prepare our souls for deliverance from the Great Tribulation (Matthew 24:15–41).

At this point, we pause and take a deep breath because, again, we may ponder the question: ‘Who then will be able to withstand the wrath of the Lamb?’ The Bible informs us that those who are called by God (2 Chronicles 7:14); those who believe and are baptised in Christ’s name (Mark 16:16); those who daily repent (Acts 2:38,39); those who remain faithful to God’s teachings (John 8:31); and those who endure to the end will be saved (Matthew 24:13).

‘Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!’ (John 1:29).

The gospel is worth our lives for eternity! We are to love Jesus, with heart, mind and soul. The day of the Lord will come, and then we will meet the Judge. Expert biblical scholars would educate us that the Book of Revelation is not just about symbolic representation. This scriptural book reveals more than myths and legends of long ago, of fairytales and dreams. Here we have God’s word, revealed to us. And God’s word contains a clear warning. In our present time, Christ defers punishment, but sin will run its course. We are reminded, here, of the Parable of the Ten Virgins (Matthew 25): Have you enough oil? Are you prepared? Are you ready?

***O Lamb of God, slain for our sin, we come before your throne with grateful hearts. O Lord of all truth, teach us your way, so we may be ready for the great day of the Lord. Lord have mercy, Christ have mercy, Lord have mercy on us. Amen.***

Wednesday 31 January 2024

**A seal on our foreheads**

by Tatiana Overduin

***Then I heard the number of those who were sealed … (Revelation 7:4).***

Read [Revelation 7:1–8](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Revelation+7%3A1-8&version=NRSVUE)

Which tribe are you? It’s interesting to have met people in my life who have used this expression that they have ‘found their tribe’. This expression is meant to indicate that a person has found other people with whom they are comfortable and with whom they share common interests. The way we spend our time and the people we generally spend our time with also reflects the sort of people we ourselves are and where our interests lie.

Jesus teaches the people in the Sermon on the Mount of those who are blessed and thirst for righteousness, and in 1 Corinthians 6:9, we read that we ought not be deceived, for the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God.

If we now reflect on today’s reference regarding the ‘seal on our foreheads’, we may question, ‘What is this "seal" that Revelation speaks of here?’ Just like a seal on an envelope that closes the paper firmly together or ‘sealing a deal’, a binding agreement is made. Through baptism, God grants us his Holy Spirit as a promise that we are his forever and shall be saved on the last day. Daily repentance, living in the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22,23) and trusting in God’s teaching through his word – these lifestyles witness to a living, faithful relationship with a heart for God, sealed for the day of our redemption. He has bought us with a price (1 Corinthians 6:20).

There are many different scholarly interpretations about the actual number mentioned in today’s reading of 144,000, but ultimately, this number largely remains a mystery. The number may be literal, or it may represent the Christian church, a complete and very great number of those who are saved.  The seal on our forehead identifies us as belonging to God the Father. We read in Genesis 22:17 that the descendants of Abraham will indeed be more ‘numerous than the stars in the sky, and the grains on the beaches’, so our full understanding and preoccupation with this number of 144,000 is largely irrelevant. What is important is that we continue to honour, praise and worship our God in our lives, trusting in his promises for us.

***Holy Creator God, we worship you in spirit and in truth. Reassure us in your promises, trusting that we belong to you. Help us to live lives that reflect our belonging to ‘your tribe: your family’. Keep us from fearing those things we do not fully understand, the mysteries that only you alone know. We ask for your mercy, upon our lives and those of our loved ones, and that one day, we may be joined together with you in our eternal home. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.***

Thursday 1 February 2024

**White robes**

by Tatiana Overduin

***These in white robes – who are they, and where did they come from (Revelation 7:13)?***

Read [Revelation 7:9–17](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Revelation+7%3A9-17&version=NRSVUE)

What a magnificent sight! A great multitude, so many that no-one could count, standing before heaven’s throne: before God and the Lamb. ‘Where did they come from?’ This text informs us that ‘These are they who have come out of the Great Tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb’ (verse 14).

These people are God’s servants, those who have served God, continuously, as we are informed through the text, in the day and throughout the night, and God shelters his people with his presence. How do we receive God’s presence? We read the Bible, we call on him in prayer, we worship him, we give him thanks, and we know and believe and trust in his promises. Through trial and temptation, through hardship and through the tears that we shed, all are wiped away by his gentle, compassionate hand.

Never again will there be hunger or thirst. Never again will we experience the scorching heat of the sun. ‘For the Lamb at the centre of the throne will be their Shepherd’ (verse 17).

Multitudes of those who have passed through the Great Tribulation will be satiated through ‘springs of living water’ (verse 17).

In Psalm 56 (NLT), verse 8 shares a poignant message of comfort, ‘You keep track of all my sorrows. You have collected all my tears in your bottle. You have recorded each one in your book’.

We, who seek the Lord, can take great consolation in the truth that whatever our deep concerns, we can take them to Jesus, our Shepherd. Whatever our conflicts and troubles and whether we suffer persecution, we are calmed with the knowledge that the Lord is our Shepherd. ‘God will wipe away every tear from their eyes’ (Revelation 21:4).

***O Holy God, we pray that our hearts and minds are assured daily having faith in you, and we look forward to the great day we stand before your throne, with the great multitude. Wash us, Lord, with your blood, feed us with Jesus: who is the Bread of Life. Help us to turn to you for all things as we journey through great tribulations, daily seeking your perfect way. Lord, give us faith. In your holy name, we pray. Amen.***

Friday 2 February 2024

**Fire and blood**

by Tatiana Overduin

***Woe! Woe! Woe to the inhabitants of the earth … (Revelation 8:13).***

Read [Revelation 8:1-13](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Revelation+8%3A1-13+&version=NRSVUE)

Today the Revelation story continues and intensifies.

Again, I sit and ponder. Silence. The images revealed in this text, flash before my eyes, like a cinema blockbuster – all the thrills and screams. But this is no movie.

The description is so unpleasant that I struggle to believe it’s true. But it is true because it’s God’s word. ‘All Scripture is God-breathed, and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness’ (2 Timothy 3:16). What we have here is a holy calamity.

‘Woe! Woe! Woe to the inhabitants of the earth …’ (verse 13).

Who can be saved from this desolation? Our hearts turn to those we love and care for, who do not live lives that honour God. We grieve. What can we do to be saved? We read in verse 4, that our prayers are valuable to God, so valuable that they are held. *'*The smoke of the incense, together with the prayers of God’s people, went up before God from the angel's hand’. This is the second time this week that we are reminded that our heartfelt prayers are precious to God.

We have read and meditated upon many extraordinary topics and themes: angels, incense, prayers held in golden bowls, the four living beings, the elders, the throne of God and the Lamb of God. Binding seals, the heralding of trumpets, the golden censer of the Kings of kings, the response of nature as thunder peals, fire mixed with blood … but we need not fear what is to come, as Christ has made us co-heirs with him in his heavenly kingdom.

‘But we are citizens of heaven, where the Lord Jesus Christ lives. And we eagerly wait for him to return as our Saviour. He will take our weak mortal bodies, and change them into glorious bodies like his own, using the same power with which he will bring everything under his control’ (Philippians 3:20,21).

***We pray: all-powerful God, we come humbly before you, seeking to understand your works and all your ways. Help us, Lord, to believe, so that we may stand before your throne in heaven, with the multitude, before the Lamb. Have mercy on us, Lord. We especially pray for our loved ones; that they may also believe in you. We seek you, to grow in faith, so as to stand atoned before heaven’s throne, together with you. Amen.***

Saturday 3 February 2024

**His steadfast love: God in action**

by Tatiana Overduin

***The Lord takes pleasure in those who … hope in his steadfast love (Psalm 147:11).***

Read [Psalm 147:1–11,20c](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Psalm+147%3A+1-11%2C+20c&version=NRSVUE)

Sometimes it’s so challenging to have hope. As we view the world around us, we can easily become despondent, calling, 'Where are you, Lord?' But despite experiencing a heart that aches for a failing world, this day, and every day, we can be reassured that our God ‘… takes pleasure in those who continue to hope in his steadfast love’.

Our God is a God of action!

Our God continues to be active, even when our eyes do not see it. He does not abandon us (Hebrews 13:5). In Psalm 147, we read that he is *building* his kingdom; *gathering* unto himself those who are outcasts, *healing* the brokenhearted and *binding* their wounds. And while the Lord has *determined* the number of stars in the sky and *given* them their names, he *continues to exercise* his immeasurable understanding over our lives, our world. Our God is such that he *lifts* the humble while *casting* out the wicked. *Covering, preparing, making* all things new – God is in action, even while we may doubt or fail to trust and believe that he is always at work.

And, in response, God wants us to continue to trust him and live in faith, to sing praises to him, make melodies to him and worship him above all things (Philippians 2:9).

‘God takes pleasure in those who fear him, in those who hope in his steadfast love’ (Psalm 147:11).

When the world around us, glorifies the ‘strength of a horse, or the legs of a man’ (verse 10), we can remember that what God wants from us mostly, is to also take action: to honour him with humility, and we will recognise that he will lift us up. ‘Praise the Lord!’ (verse 20).

'If you look at the world, you’ll be distressed. If you look within, you’ll be depressed. If you look at God, you’ll be at rest' – Corrie Ten Boom.

***God of action: satisfy us with your truth. Supply us with your power, so that we, too, take righteous action in our lives to withstand the challenges that confront us. O Lord, teach us to revere you, but especially, provide for us with your hope. Thank you for bestowing on us the richness that the psalms offer, everything to fulfil in us faith and love toward you and for one another. May our lives be a witness to your saving gospel truth that illuminates this dark world. In your holy name, we pray. Amen.***

Sunday 4 February 2024

**A solitary place**

by Pastor Jim Strelan

***Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went to a solitary place, where he prayed (Mark 1:35).***

Read [Mark 1:29–39](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Mark+1%3A29-39&version=NRSVUE)

Do you feel the need to just keep going, keep doing? So much demanded of you, so much you demand of yourself. Not enough hours in the day to get everything done. Some days it seems like we just can’t find a moment to be still. And then some of that exhaustive behaviour we bring on ourselves. If you’re into social media, then you can easily get caught up in feeling the need for constant contact and continuous interaction, to the point that you can get edgy if no-one is responding to anything. Then there’s the question only you can answer: What is it that is demanding so much of you?

Jesus had constant crowds following him, demanding his attention. He healed, he alleviated suffering, and the crowds demanded more and more of him. At the end of Mark chapter 1, we read ‘Jesus could no longer enter a town openly but stayed outside in lonely places. Yet the people still came to him from everywhere’ (1:45b).

Jesus chose to find time to be alone. He chose to find time to spend with his Heavenly Father. He chose to find time to pray. He knew what the demands of the day ahead were going to be, so he chose to find a solitary place. He got up while it was still dark so that he could be still before the day began. To just be instead of having always to do. To draw strength. To stay focused. To hear from his Father and align with his will. Especially important for Jesus because what demanded so much of his energy was his ministry of bringing God’s wholeness to as many as possible.

In that solitary place, Jesus received the sure hand of his Father on him for the day ahead. Is that what you need? So you can distinguish between what is important and what is just time-consuming. So you can align your day with God’s will for you and for others. A solitary place. A God-place.

***Father, it all gets a bit much sometimes. When I look for a place to set aside to tune in to you, be there. Be there and give me what I need for the day ahead. Amen.***

*Pastor Jim is a retired pastor living on Brisbane Northside. He served in Papua New Guinea and as school pastor in a number of schools and congregations with schools. He is married to Ruth and has three children and seven grandchildren and loves them all unconditionally. He loves to share the gospel as simply and clearly as he can.*