

395 A very different perspective

Last week, I read Jesus' final words to his beloved friends,^{John 14-17} but I started from the glorious view of God that's growing within me – 'God looks like Jesus' – and Jesus' words really came alive.^[394] So would Revelation look different now? Not an easy book!

I tried it a while back, helped by Tom Wright's commentary – still very difficult. Some of it is encouragement, advice and warning for those seven churches as they faced terrible persecution by a tyrannous regime, but what about the other stuff?

Oh, hang on! I guess we think of Revelation as, 'How God is going to judge the earth', but would it look different if it were, 'How God is going to *restore* the earth'? Certainly, the very final chapters reveal that God will ultimately restore the whole of creation, but what about all that 'stuff' in the middle?

I guess that those churches needed to be assured (as we do now?) that God will defeat evil, but they perhaps wanted God to do it by smiting those who were persecuting them. Rather, God inspired John to use picture language to show that their *defeat* would be achieved by using the power of 'the Lamb who was *slain*'. That's counter-intuitive! The Lamb does have a sword, but it comes from his mouth; he's not wielding it in a muscular right arm.

This picture language is called 'apocalyptic' writing, which Wright says is not so much about predicting future events (a happy hunting ground for some), but about revealing heavenly realities: 'apocalypse' originally meant a 'revealing', a 'showing'.

John's readers needed to be aware, says Wright, of the way 'the forces of evil were at work in idolatrous and tyrannous political systems'. But those forces could be defeated through the sacrificial love of Jesus, and also through the sacrificial lives of those who believe and trust in the Lamb's method of conquest: love!

One danger with Revelation is that its picture language can be interpreted in a thousand different ways, often to support the views of a particular group. For example, in chapter 7 I just spotted a common misreading: Groups sometimes convince themselves that only *they* have been chosen, seeing themselves as the 144,000!^{Rev 7:4} But just *five verses* later it's: 'a huge gathering which nobody could possibly number, from every nation and tribe and people and language.' Oops!

So I'm carrying on reading, but with the following as my basic assumption: God-like-Jesus loves every single human being and longs for them all to be restored. God-like-Jesus is not into retribution against any human(s). God-like-Jesus wants to defeat (and will ultimately defeat) all evil forces.

I say 'evil forces', because while we tend to refer to 'evil people'; God-like-Jesus sees them as beloved human beings who are sadly doing evil things, and God wants *them* to be restored as much as their victims. That's why Jesus taught us to 'Love your enemies! Pray for people who persecute you!'^{Mt 5:43} A very different perspective!

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