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## THE EARLY CHURCH OF JESUS

When we moved back to Pennsylvania several years ago, our family had to find a new church. So for about a year we visited various congregations near our home. This gave us an opportunity to participate in a variety of Christian traditions and worship styles. I was encouraged to discover that there were many Christ-centred churches in our area.

Our search for a new church home also gave us a feel for the unique dynamics within each one. One church had great financial security but a small congregation and no full-time pastor. Another church had a great preacher with many full services on Sunday and lots of activities throughout the week – but it was such a busy place that we found it hard to connect with anyone. Another had a wonderful liturgy but the people didn't seem interested, as if they were just going through the motions.

Our next section covers the first three chapters in the Book of Revelation, which is the record of a vision that John had nearly sixty years after the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. In the vision it's as if Jesus himself has been a newcomer in seven first-century churches, and he describes the unique dynamics within each one. Imagine what Jesus would say if he visited your local church next Sunday!

Of the seven churches mentioned in Revelation, five fall into a 'good news/ bad news' category; Jesus commends them for some things but criticises them for others. Only two of the churches fall into an 'all good' category; Jesus praises them in spite of the fact that they are both facing severe struggles.

As you'll discover, some of the details in the Book of Revelation are difficult to understand. That's because it's the record of a vision. But concentrate on the main point. After all, when you wake from a dream, it's generally only the main point that you remember. And the main point of the next five readings is this: Jesus knows what's going on in the Church and he really, really cares. So let's get going, to see if we can piece together what Jesus thinks about *his* Church.

Date:

*The early Church of Jesus*

**PRAY** Father, give me a clearer vision of your Son Jesus Christ as I read and pray today.

**READ** Revelation 1

### REFLECT

People sometimes refer to the last book of the Bible as 'John's Revelation'. But that's a little misleading because in fact, it is 'the revelation about Jesus Christ', as the opening sentence makes clear. What we need to understand as we begin our exploration of this challenging book is that although the writer John recorded this incredible vision, the Book of Revelation is all about Jesus.

And right away we notice the consistency between John's perspective and the rest of the New Testament. Jesus is '*the firstborn from the dead*' – he has been raised to everlasting life beyond physical death and we can experience that too (1:5; Colossians 1:15,18); he has freed us from sin '*by his blood*' – by paying the price a holy God required (1:5; Romans 5:9; Ephesians 1:7); his followers are '*a kingdom and priests*' – they can have a special and intimate relationship with God (1:6; 1 Peter 2:9); and someday Jesus will come again and '*every eye will see him*' (1:7; Philippians 2:9–11).

But John also gives us plenty of new information about Jesus.

*He is majestic in appearance and his voice is powerful* (1:12–15). When Jesus was on earth, John got as close to him as anyone (John 13:23–25). But, in this vision, John sees Jesus in all his heavenly glory. That contrast only highlights the miracle of the incarnation; in Jesus, the God of the universe became one of us.

*He will decide who goes to heaven or hell* (1:18). That's why we must take our decision about him very seriously. It will have eternal consequences.

*He cares passionately about the Church* (1:11). Jesus has something to say about the emerging Church of the first century (1:11). It reminds us that he knows and cares what goes on in our churches too, which is a sobering thought.

**APPLY** How do you view Jesus – as majestic and powerful or close and friendly?

**PRAY** Spend a few minutes thanking Jesus for the things you learned about him in this passage.