

The Vision of the Exalted Christ (Part 1)

Revelation 1:9-20

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Well, I invite you to take your copy of God's Word and turn with me to Revelation 1. I've already thoroughly enjoyed our study of this great book and we've just gotten started. And I'm excited about tonight.

At the end of the first century, living under the reign of Domitian, the Christians alive at that time desperately needed to be reminded - reminded that Jesus Christ our Lord had not abandoned His church. He had been gone for some 65 years and the circumstances had gone from bad to worse. Christianity had become despised. Tacitus, the Roman historian, said that Christians were "hated for their abominations". Pliny called Christianity "a depraved and extravagant superstition". The Romans actually referred to Christians in the first century as atheists because they rejected the pantheon of Roman gods and instead worshipped an invisible God. Christians were even blamed for natural disasters. You know, some things never change - Christians get blamed for everything. And they were blamed for natural disasters because they refused to acknowledge the gods of Rome. Tertullian, one of the early Church fathers who lived and ministered in the third century, wrote this, "If the Tiber [the river there] reaches the walls, if the Nile does not rise to the fields, if the sky doesn't move, or the earth does, if there is famine, if there is plague, the cry is at once 'Christians to the lions!'" Christians were considered disloyal to the state for their refusal to accept emperor worship and to acknowledge the lordship of Caesar. And of course, **the** man on the throne was one of the worst that Rome produced. The Emperor, Domitian, was not like his father, Vespasian, nor his brother, Titus, both of whom had ruled before him. Instead, Domitian was a cruel, vindictive, little man. He demanded emperor worship and was especially angered at the Christians who, to a man, refused to do so. So, he initiated official state persecution of Christians. It reached throughout the empire including to Asia Minor, modern Turkey. There, even the Apostle John was swept up in the persecution and he was exiled to Patmos. The believers in the churches, where John had previously ministered throughout that area - they needed to be reminded that Christ was still on His throne, that He hadn't abandoned His people or His promises, and that He was still head of the church. That's the context in which the Apostle John was granted one of the few biblical visions of God

Himself. There's Isaiah 6, there's Ezekiel. And Revelation 1 ranks as one of the greatest of the visions of God and it is our privilege to examine it together tonight.

Now let me just remind you of the outline of this book as far as where we are so far. Jesus' words in chapter 1:19 provide a natural framework for the book: "Therefore write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after these things." We're considering the first major section of the book: the things which you have seen, the setting of Jesus' prophecy. This is the first chapter of this book. Last time, we finished the introduction to the book in verses 1 through 8.

And tonight, we encounter a vision of the exalted Christ, a vision of the exalted Christ. It begins in verse 9 and runs down through verse 20 although, as we will discover tonight, technically, it doesn't end at chapter 1:20. It goes all the way to the end of chapter 3. So, we sort of segment those chapters because of the messages to the churches, but this vision begins here and continues all the way through the end of chapter 3. But we're going to take it **as a unit** because the description of Christ is here in this passage. Let's read it together. Revelation 1, I'll begin reading in verse 9: "I, John, your brother and fellow partaker in the tribulation and kingdom and perseverance which are in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like the sound of a trumpet, saying, 'Write in a book what you see, and send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamum and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea.' Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking with me. And having turned I saw seven golden lampstands; and in the middle of the lampstands I saw one like a son of man, clothed in a robe reaching to the feet, and girded across His chest with a golden sash. His head and His hair were white like white wool, like snow; and His eyes were like a flame of fire. His feet were like burnished bronze, when it has been made to glow in a furnace, and His voice was like the sound of many waters. In His right hand He held seven stars, and out of His mouth came a sharp two-edged sword; and His face was like the sun shining in its strength." When I saw Him, I fell at His feet like a dead man. And He placed His right hand on me, saying, 'Do not be afraid; I am the first and the last, and the living One; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of death and of Hades. Therefore write the

things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after these things. As for the mystery of the seven stars which you saw in My right hand, and the seven golden lampstands: the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches.”

This is a vision. It is a vision, not of our Lord as He appeared on the earth in His humiliation, but it is a vision of the exalted Christ. Now as this vision unfolds, first we see the circumstances that provide the backdrop for the vision and then the spotlight comes on and turns and pivots and the focus is on our risen Lord. Those are really the two parts of the section. So, let's look at it together. First of all, let's consider the setting of the vision. We see this in verses 9 through 11, the setting of the vision. It begins with the physical setting in verse 9. John begins by introducing himself, giving us his really humble credentials here. Verse 9: “I, John, your brother and fellow partaker in the tribulation and kingdom and perseverance which are in Jesus...” Three times in the first nine verses, John refers to himself by name - in verse 1, verse 4, and here in verse 9. But it's interesting, when he introduces himself, you see his humility because **he doesn't** refer to himself here as an Apostle, or as a member of the inner circle of the Twelve or is the author of the gospel of John. Instead, he simply refers to himself as “your brother”. There's a clear implication in this introduction and that is that he wasn't chosen to write this book because he was John, because he was special, because he was somehow personally superior. He's just our brother but, in God's sovereign grace, he was chosen to do this. Notice he also refers to himself, as he writes to these churches, as “your fellow partaker in the tribulation and kingdom and perseverance which are in Jesus”.

Now the construction makes the point **that** John has a share in all three of these realities. So, we can take **the** partaker, the fellow partaker, and make it apply to each of those three terms. So, first of all, he is a fellow partaker in the tribulation. His point is: I'm suffering the same tribulation that you are. I'm suffering the same difficulties and troubles that result from faithfulness to Christ in a sinful, pagan, wicked world that you're suffering where you are there in Ephesus, and Smyrna, and the other cities. John says it's the same. I'm a fellow partaker in the tribulation. Then he says I'm a fellow partaker in the kingdom. Just like those to whom he wrote, John currently, when he wrote this, belonged to the spiritual kingdom over which Christ

rules now. You understand that the moment you trust in Christ as Colossians puts it, “you are transferred by God out of the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of His beloved Son”. The moment you were converted you became a part of that kingdom; you are in Jesus’ spiritual kingdom. But if you are in Jesus spiritual kingdom now, you will be in his literal kingdom that’s coming. And that’s also implied here. John says, ‘I’m a fellow partaker in the spiritual kingdom now and I will, with you, inherit the future kingdom our Lord will establish on earth’ - the kingdom he’s going to describe later in this very book. And then he says, ‘I am a fellow partaker in the perseverance’. This is that word we’ve met in Romans. It means to remain under. Like them, John says I have been forced to remain under tribulation even as I anticipate belonging to that future kingdom.

Now don’t miss the significance of the order of these three expressions. Think of it this way: in this life, right now, we experience tribulation as we anticipate the kingdom that’s to come. So, how do we live in the middle? How do we live in the interim between the nasty now-and-now and the sweet-by-and-by? The answer is: perseverance. Just keep on putting one foot in front of the other. Keep on believing and trusting in God, and obeying, and doing what you’re called to do. Persevere. John says, ‘I’m just like you in that way. I’m experiencing tribulation now. I’m looking forward to the kingdom then. And in the middle, I’m just living in trust in my Lord.’

Next, we discover John’s location in verse 9. He says that he was on the island called Patmos. Literally, ‘I came to be on the island called Patmos.’ It’s an interesting expression because, for many years before this, church tradition tells us and **it’s** trustworthy, that John had, when he left Palestine, when he left Israel, he had traveled to Asia Minor, to those churches that Paul had planted on his missionary journeys. And there, John lived the last years of his life with his ministry base in Ephesus. He said, ‘I used to be there, but I came to be on the island called Patmos.’ Patmos is an island in the Aegean Sea, about 40 miles west southwest of Miletus. You can see on this map where Patmos is, where the red circle is. **It’s** a tiny little, crescent shaped island. The two horns of the crescent point toward the mainland. That’s where he was kept. You can see, if you go east from that circle, you can see Miletus and that’s where the port was for Ephesus. And then you go north, and you can see Ephesus, and then Smyrna above it, and you can see the seven churches in sort of a half circle. Patmos is a barren, rocky, volcanic island

about ten miles long and six miles wide at its widest points. It's about 25 miles in circumference. I've been there and this is what it looks like. This is the harbor that is a natural harbor and was undoubtedly the harbor into which all of the Roman vessels sailed at the time of the first century. By the way, Patmos was a stopping off place between Miletus and points west. And so, **it was** a place where harbor was sought, and this harbor was a natural harbor. So, when John was brought from the mainland, from Miletus, he would have been brought to this natural harbor. This gives you a little further picture of it. It's just a rocky outcropping of an island, a little crescent that's rugged. According to Eusebius, the church historian, John was exiled to Patmos by Domitian in the year 95 AD. This was common by the way. Tacitus, the historian, tells us that Domitian did this often. In fact, he's such a wonderful, lovable guy he even did so to his own niece. He exiled her to, not to Patmos, but to another island. By the way, Patmos is not listed in some of the ancient records so, while it's popular to say that it was a penal colony in the first century, there's no obvious record of that. It seems that John may have been a special political prisoner and sent there to a place where those...where others were not sent.

Now we can't be sure what John's conditions on Patmos were. Some argue that he lived as a prisoner under harsh conditions, possibly even walk working in the salt mines without sufficient water, food, and clothing. That's certainly possible. We really don't know. Others argue that his conditions may have been more like Paul's in Rome where he lived in his own rented quarters but under guard. Doesn't really matter. Regardless, remember we're talking about a man who is nearly 90 years old, exiled. Why was John there? What were the horrific crimes that he committed? Verse 9 says: "...because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus." - because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. In the Book of Revelation, the word of God often refers to the gospel. It's the word of God, that is, it's the word that originated with God. And then he goes on to say, it is the "testimony of Jesus". In other words, the gospel originated with God and Jesus testified to that gospel. When? Well, certainly He did when He was here on earth during His earthly ministry. But many commentators believe, and I tend to agree, that he's talking here about John's preaching. Jesus testified through John's preaching. It's interesting. Even in the book of Ephesians it talks about the Ephesians who never saw **the** person of Christ during His earthly ministry. It says when you heard the gospel, you heard Jesus. How did they hear Jesus? Through the message preached. And John preached the gospel, and it

was testified through him by Jesus. The Roman authorities had apparently interpreted John's preaching of the gospel as seditious. You remember, early on, Christianity was considered to be a sect of Judaism and therefore was accepted in the Roman Empire. But eventually, it was considered to be a separate religion. And then, it became a religion that was off limits because of some of the things I mentioned earlier. And with Domitian, it began to be persecuted directly. And so, the authorities had apparently said the gospel and John's ministry is seditious and they exiled him to Patmos to marginalize his influence and to thwart the growth of the churches in that part of the world.

Now, folks, this is part of what it means to be a Christian. We have lived, during my lifetime, we've lived in a culture where, for the most part, that has not been a reality for us. But it's a reality for most Christians around the world. And we were told by our Lord to expect it. John 16:33: "In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world." 2 Timothy 3:12: "Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted. Tonight, as we gather here in relative freedom, our brothers and sisters in Christ all over the world are in prison. They've lost their jobs. Some have been beaten. Some have had their homes destroyed, their churches have been ransacked and burned. Christians are persecuted. They're hated. Why? Jesus said if they hated Me, they're going to hate you. But our Lord is faithful and He either chooses to protect us from the persecution at times, as we see in the New Testament, and other times He chooses to sustain us in it, as He did the Apostle John in this case. Sometimes He uses it, as He did, with the man we'll meet in chapter 2; a man called Antipas who He used it to usher him into the Lord's presence because he was martyred for his faith. But here's the key: because our Lord is so powerful, whatever course He takes, He always uses it for good. I mean think about this. From John Bunyan's imprisonment in the Bedford prison, the Christian world got Pilgrim's Progress. And from John's exile on this windswept, barren, desolate island, seven little churches in Asia Minor got Revelation, as did the rest of the churches until our Lord returns. Our Lord has a way to overrule the wrath of men to accomplish His purposes. So that's the physical setting.

Let's continue and think about the spiritual setting in verses 10 and 11. Verse 10 says, "I was in the Spirit..." Again, literally the Greek text says 'I became in the Spirit'. This doesn't mean he

became spirit-filled or some of the other language that's popular for all believers in the New Testament. This was a unique and unusual experience. What John experienced - it wasn't a dream. He wasn't asleep. It was more like a trance. Bill Mounts writes, "John's experience was a state in which the Holy Spirit replaced normal sensory experiences with visions and voices that spoke to him." Another author describes it as, "trance-like suspension of normal consciousness." By the way, what Ezekiel experienced in Ezekiel 1 seems to be very similar to this experience. Verse 10 says, "I was in the Spirit..." He was in this trance-like state, initiated by the Holy Spirit on the Lord's day. Now scholars have suggested two possible meanings for this expression, "the Lord's day". One of them is that it means the "Day of the Lord" - you know that eschatological phrase, that phrase that describes last things. But the Greek phrase that's used here is not the one that used in the New Testament for that time of future judgment. I have several references in my notes **where** that phrase does occur and it's not this one. The second option is that it's Sunday. "The Lord's day" is simply Sunday, the first day of the week. This is the only time this expression occurs in the New Testament but, by the 2nd century, this expression, "the Lord's day", was used commonly by Christians for Sunday. Why? Sunday came to be called the Lord's day because it was the day on which Jesus was raised from the dead. Therefore, it became the day on which He was worshipped. So, John received this vision on Sunday while he was in a kind of trance-like state produced by the Holy Spirit.

Verse 10 goes on to say: "...and I heard behind me a loud voice like the sound of a trumpet..." Notice, before John sees anything, he hears. He hears a - literally the Greek text says a "mega voice" behind him. And it's a voice like the sound of a trumpet blowing. If you're thinking, you remember that even at Mount Sinai, when God appeared, there was the sound of this trumpet that just kept getting louder and louder and louder. Trumpets appear more often in Revelation than any other book and when they appear they're usually announcing something solemn, something important. So, John hears this mega voice behind him, and the voice was so clear and so unmistakable like the sound of a trumpet.

And notice the voice was saying, verse 11: "Write in a book what you see..." This is the first of twelve times in Revelation that John is told to write what he sees. By the way, the word "book" here is "biblion". It refers not to a book like you and I have (those came along later), but rather

to a scroll, a scroll made **from** paper and the paper was made from the papyrus reed that grows in Egypt. They would take that reed that grows on the banks of the Nile and other places, **and they would** cut it into very thin strips. And then **they would** lay them contrary to each other **and** put them under a weight. And as they dried, it would form a writing surface. That was the common writing surface of the day and **this is** what he's told to write in. Write it down on scroll made from the papyrus reed. The finished scroll by the way, it has been estimated by scholars, if you took the typical way that they wrote in the 1st century on scrolls and you wrote this book in Greek on a scroll, the end result would have been around 15 feet long.

Verse 11 says: "and send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamum and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea." Once John wrote down everything that he saw, he was to send the finished scroll to the seven churches that are named here. Now, as I noted a couple of weeks ago, these were the key cities in seven postal districts. So, think of them as sort of the hubs in this massive wheel. And from those postal centers, word spread out to the smaller cities around them. Each of these cities, that's listed here, were between 30 and 50 miles apart. So, you can see how information was distributed. Now the order of the cities listed here would have been the natural order of someone delivering this scroll. You remember our little map. If you start...let me see if I can indicate this for you. **If** you leave Patmos and you go to Miletus, the port here, head up to Ephesus, then you just keep going up to Smyrna, to Pergamum, then you turn to Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and down to Laodicea. So, that's the route that you would have taken and that's why the cities are listed in the order that they are here. The entire scroll then **was to be** sent by John once it was completed and it was to be delivered, one at a time, to each of these churches where the entire scroll, not just **the** brief message to each of the churches but this entire scroll, this entire book, was to be read to each of the churches and undoubtedly copies were made in each place so they could keep their own. And then the messenger continued in that circular route to deliver it to the next church, in the next city. So that's the setting of this vision.

Now, the spotlight comes on and we go beyond the setting of the vision to the focal point of the vision, the focus of the vision which is Jesus Christ glorified. We see Him in verses 12 to 16. Let's consider Him together. First of all, notice His unique identity. Verse 12 says, "Then I

turned to see the voice that was speaking with me. And having turned I saw seven golden lampstands and in the middle of the lampstands [watch this] I saw one like a son of man...” Now why would you say it that way - “one like a son of man”. The point is He was human like, but He was apparently something more. Who is this? Well, remember, this letter is, verse one: “the revelation of Jesus Christ”. It’s the revelation of Jesus Christ that comes from Him, about Him. And the letters to the seven churches make it very obvious that this person is in fact Jesus Christ. But it stated specifically in chapter 2. Notice verse 18. Here’s the person whose...whom we see. Verse 18 says, “And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write: The Son of God...say this...” So, clearly and obviously, we’re talking here about our Lord. Now think about this moment. John is 90 years old. He has been exiled from his ministry to a little rocky island in the Aegean Sea. He hasn’t seen the risen Lord for 65 years. 65 years! The last time he saw Him, you remember, it was on the Mount of Olives as Jesus rose in a cloud, ascending into heaven. And here, He sees him standing in the middle of seven lampstands. You can only imagine the thrill, the excitement, as John once again was able to see his Lord.

Now, He’s called the son of... a son of man. You remember that the “Son of Man” is one of the most common titles for Jesus in the gospels. In fact, it occurs 85 times and, 83 of those times, Jesus uses it for Himself. Where does this title, “Son of Man”, come from? Well, it comes from Daniel. You remember? We studied it together. Look back at Daniel 7. Daniel 7. You remember there’s a vision of the world empires in the first part of this chapter? And then, beginning in verse 9, the Ancient of Days takes His throne. God the Father takes His throne, and He judges **the** Antichrist and destroys him. And then verse 13: “I kept looking in the night visions, / And behold, with the clouds of heaven / One like a Son of Man was coming, / And He came up to the Ancient of Days / And was presented before Him. / And to Him was given dominion, Glory and a kingdom, / That all the peoples, nations and men of every language / Might serve Him. / His dominion is an everlasting dominion / Which will not pass away; / And His kingdom is one / Which will not be destroyed.” That’s where the title, “Son of Man” comes from. It was clearly a person who, while was human like and of course in our Lord’s case was entirely human, but also had divine attributes and qualities and characteristics. That’s why, you remember, when at Jesus’ trial, when the High Priest said, ‘Are you the Messiah, the Son of the living God?’, and Jesus said, ‘I am’, and then He quoted this passage, what did the High Priest

do? He tore his robe and said, 'He's blaspheming, He is describing Himself as God.' So, clearly in this text in Revelation 1 then when it says, 'I saw a son of man', you have a unique person who is human like and yet also divine just as in Daniel 7. Here in Revelation 1, we see Jesus' uniqueness. He's one like a son of man but, as we will see as this chapter unfolds, He shares the attributes and the honor and the actions of God Himself. He's the God-man.

Secondly, as we look at this vision, we see His chief domain. Look again at verse 12: "Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking with me. And having turned I saw seven golden lampstands..." Now, these lampstands were like those commonly found in homes, in typical homes in the first century. In a nice home, you needed light at night. And so, you would take a small clay lamp, typically they were pinched at the end with the wick coming out. Oil was in the lamp. You would light that, but you wouldn't want it on the floor. You needed it somewhere in the room higher up so that it could cast light across the room. And so, you would set it on a lampstand so that light could be broadcast across the room. This is, by the way, a powerful picture, isn't it, of the role of local churches, the role they serve in their communities. They're like lampstands in a dark world. These lampstands were gold. They weren't like the ones found in ordinary homes. Instead, they're gold, the most precious metal on earth in order to illustrate their real value in God's sight. There are seven of them because that's the number of the churches to whom this letter is addressed **and** likely the number seven is also, at the same time, symbolic. Seven is typically the number of completeness in Scriptures. We'll see the number seven a number of times **in this** prophecy. Verse 13 says: "and in the middle of the lampstands I saw one like a son of man. Now, Christ identifies the meaning of the seven lampstands down in verse 20. He says, "the seven lampstands are the seven churches". So then, get a picture of what's going on here. This vision pictures the exalted Christ standing among His churches. Such a comfort! You remember, He promised this. He promised His continued abiding presence with his church. In Matthew 28:20: "I am with you always, even to the end of the age." And here He is in this vision that we're allowed to see standing among His churches. The domain of Christ.

Look at chapter 2:1: "To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: The One who holds the seven stars in His right hand [notice this], the One who walks among the seven golden lampstands..."

You see the domain, the realm in which Christ reigns, the focus of His attention in the world today (and I love this) is not the great centers of political power. Of course, He rules what happens in all of the great capitals of the world but that's not His preoccupation. That's not His primary domain. His primary domain: churches like ours, like those in the 1st century, those little churches that dotted Asia Minor. They weren't grand. They weren't special. They were ordinary churches. And yet, there's Christ walking among His churches. He has an intimate personal relationship with each one. There isn't a single true church on this planet that Christ isn't walking among. That's His chief domain.

Thirdly, here, as we look at this vision, I want you to notice His primary role. Verse 13 says, "and in the middle of the lampstands I saw one like a son of man, clothed in a robe reaching to the feet, and girded across His chest with a golden sash." Here, His clothing gives us a clue as to His primary role as He's presenting Himself here in this vision. In fact, I would put it this way. In the early verses of Revelation 1, we discover what we know from theology and that is the Christ occupies three great offices. He is a Prophet. Verse one says that He is the one revealing God's truth, the truth in this book. He is a King. Notice verse 5: he rules over the kings of the earth. And verse 5 also says He's a priest because He's the one who's made full atonement for the sins of His people. I believe that that is the meaning of the clothing that's expressed in verse 13. Notice He's "clothed in a robe reaching to the feet". The robe that's described here was worn in the Old Testament by three groups of people. It was worn by royalty - you can see that in 1 Samuel 18. It was worn by prophets - you can see that in 1 Samuel 28. But the Greek word **that** is used here in the Septuagint, six of the seven times it is used in the Old Testament, this word it's describing the robe that was worn by the High Priest. Verse 13 goes on to say: "and girded across His chest with a golden sash." The High Priest also wore a sash, **but** it was embroidered, we're told. And so, some say, "Well this can't be that because this is a golden sash **and** that wasn't a golden sash". But historians tell us that the High Priest's sash had gold thread woven into it. So, this is the sash worn by the High Priest, and typically there's some debate about this, but typically and probably it was a sash which dropped diagonally from the shoulder across the waist.

What's the point of this clothing? What's the point of this description? It's to remind us that He is our great High Priest, and He continues to serve as our great High Priest. I mean think of it this way. Jesus, as High Priest, completed forever His atonement for our sins. He isn't still functioning as our High Priest in the sense of atoning for our sins. He's already done that. Hebrews 10:11-12: "Every priest stands daily ministering and offering time after time the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins; but He, having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, sat down at the right hand of God..." When it comes to the atoning work of our High Priest, it's done. And He's seated at the right hand of God. There's no more sacrifice for sins. Folks, your sin is completely paid for, as we sang. His work is complete. He has once and for all atoned for every single sin every single believer has or ever will commit. If you're in Christ, you will never stand before God in judgment for your sin, not a single one, because Jesus was judged for them. But He still functioning as a High Priest. In what way? He still continues to function as our High Priest in His intercession for us. Listen to Romans 8:33-34: "Who will bring a charge against God's elect? God is the one who justifies; who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised..." **So**, there we're talking about our justification. It's final. Jesus, as our High Priest, has dealt with our sins forever. But then it says, "who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us." Our High Priest continues His work, not atoning for our sins - that's done once and for all - but interceding on our behalf.

Now, if you're thinking, you might say, "Well why does Christ need to intercede? If His work at the cross was complete, does this imply that there was something deficient with His once for all sacrifice that He now needs to intercede with me before the Father?" The answer is: absolutely not! Think of it this way: by His continual intercession, He constantly applies His once for all completed work at the cross. And He constantly appeals to the Father on its basis. That's Christ our High Priest. The believers in John's time needed, and frankly we still desperately need, to constantly be reminded that our Lord still serves as our great High Priest, interceding for us before the Father. And today, that's His primary role.

Do you know...This is a different message for a different time. This isn't even my notes. I probably shouldn't do this because I don't have time but **let me just** remind you that even in our worship, in what we're doing here, we're trying to worship our God. Do you understand that

apart from the work of your High Priest your worship is not acceptable to God and neither is mine? But Jesus takes our incomplete, inadequate, sin laden worship and He presents it to the Father. And He says, ‘Father, **look at My work**. Look at My sacrifice. Accept them as You accept Me.’ This is our great High Priest. That’s his primary role.

Well, the vision goes on to tell us about His present ministry, specifically, His ministry to His church in verses 14 to 16. Now, the vision of Christ in this passage is not describing His relationship to the world. Let me say that again. Think with me. The vision of Christ in this passage is not describing His relationship to the world. This is not a description of how the world will see and experience Jesus during the tribulation in chapters 6 through 18. This vision, that we began to study, doesn’t end as I said to you until the end of chapter 3. So, this vision is part of His revelation to the seven churches. In fact, remember that He’s going to introduce each of these letters, to the seven churches all of them except Laodicea, by referring back to this vision. So, this vision of Christ is not about His future judgment of the world. Rather, it is about His present ministry to His church. This is how He relates to us. You know, it’s interesting **there** is no physical description of Jesus **in the Bible**. Have you ever wondered about that? I mean, I’ve wondered that. Wouldn’t you love to have a physical description of Jesus? He looks nothing like the guy who plays the role in The Chosen. I just want to tell you that. But **we don’t** have a description of Jesus. And this isn’t one either. Because no artist can take this description of Jesus and paint a portrait of Him. It’s not intended to do that. Instead, using a series of similes, John describes not what Jesus looks like in the truest sense, but rather the reality of Jesus’ relationship to His church. I mean, notice as we go through it, how many times he uses expressions like “like” and “as”. He’s just trying to search his vocabulary for some way to describe the reality of who Jesus is to His church.

Now, in this present ministry of Jesus, there are seven qualities that I just want to touch on briefly highlighted of Jesus’ relationship to His church. I love this. This is a lot for us to think about. I’m really just going to give you an outline and you can meditate on it as I will in the days ahead. First of all, we learn in this portrait of Christ, this sort of simile portrait: His incomparable wisdom leads His church. His incomparable wisdom leads His church. Verse 14: “His head and His hair...” You can also translate that, ‘His head even his hair’, that is, especially

his hair. We're not talking about His face now. We're going to talk about that later. We're talking about His hair. It was "white like white wool, like snow." Now this should remind you, if you were here when we studied Daniel, of Daniel 7:9. There, we read: "I kept looking / Until thrones were set up, / And the Ancient of Days took His seat". God the Father takes His seat. "His vesture was like white snow / And the hair of His head like pure wool. There, these same expressions were used to describe God the Father. Here in Revelation 1, that very same language is used for Jesus which, of course, underscores His deity. But, here, it makes the very same point that it did in Daniel 7. Jesus is described with white hair to make the point that He has the wisdom that typically is accumulated with age and experience. And in His great wisdom, His immeasurable incomparable wisdom, He leads His church. You don't have to worry about the Church of Jesus Christ. He said I will build my church and He leads it in incomparable wisdom. He has a plan. You might not understand His plan. You might look at the news feed that you have and think, "What is going on in the world?" But Jesus has perfect wisdom. And He is working out his plan.

Secondly, we learn here in this portrait that His penetrating omniscience evaluates His church. His penetrating omniscience evaluates His church. Verse 14 goes on to say: "...and His eyes were like a flame of fire." **The** picture here of His eyes, is like they're torches. His eyes are like torches. **What** is that picturing? His eyes light up everything and reveals it as it truly is to His eyes - just like a torch in the dark. In modern terms, like a laser. Jesus' eyes look into everything and see the reality of how it really is. This description also has a clear parallel in Daniel. It's Daniel's description of what we learned was probably a pre-incarnate appearance of the Son of God. In Daniel 10:6: "...his eyes were like flaming torches..." The same description occurs again in the letters to the churches. Look at chapter 2:18: "And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write: The Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire..." It occurs again in chapter 19, chapter 19:12: "His eyes [speaking of Christ at the Second Coming] are a flame of fire..." What's the point of this? Back in Revelation 1, as He is revealing Himself to His churches, what's the point of torch like eyes **that** penetrate and see everything? The point is that the character of every single church is absolutely clear and transparent to the gaze of Jesus Christ. He doesn't miss a thing. His penetrating omniscience looks into the heart of every single church and He sees everything with crystal clear clarity. By the way, I was reminded this last week, as I

was rereading Revelation again, of just how clear this becomes in the letters to the churches. Seven times Jesus says, “I know”, “I know”, “I know”, “I know”, “I know”. He knows. He misses nothing. He knew what was going on in every one of those small churches in Asia Minor in the first century. He knows what’s going on in every single true church today. He knows everything that’s going on in this church. That’s both sobering on the one hand and comforting on the other. Let me say, by the way, this is also true individually and personally. Jesus knows, with his torch like laser like eyes, He knows everything about you in its perfect clear reality. Hebrews 4:12-13 say, “[He is] able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open [all things are open] and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do.” His penetrating omniscience evaluates His church with perfect accuracy and clarity.

Thirdly, His personal holiness purifies His church. Verse 15: “His feet were like burnished bronze, when it has been made to glow in a furnace...” Again, that revelation of the preincarnate Son of God in Daniel 10:6, “his arms and feet like the gleam of polished bronze...” - here in Revelation, Jesus comes back to this in chapter 2:18 where He says, “The Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and His feet are like burnished bronze, says this...” Now Jesus’ feet, here, are described - this idea **of** burnished bronze **means** a gleaming metal. There’s some debate about exactly what kind of metal it is but, the bottom line is, that isn’t as important. **I think** it’s probably in this bronze family. But the point is it’s gleaming. But he goes beyond that. He says like that which “has been made to glow in a furnace...” In other words, Jesus’ feet are described like a gleaming metal that’s still in its molten form when it’s been made to glow in a furnace. Metal **that is** still in a molten state...think about this...Metal that’s still in a molten state is like a crucible for everything it touches. In the same way, as Christ walks through His churches, as we saw it earlier, as He walks through His churches, He purifies them like metal in a furnace is purified. That’s the point. His personal holiness purifies His church. We’re going to see this unfold in the letters to the seven churches.

Number four: His authoritative word directs His church. His authoritative word directs His church. Verse 15 says, “...and His voice was like the sound of many waters.” Ezekiel describes God in this way. Ezekiel 1:24: “I also heard the sound of their wings [of the cherubim] like the

sound of abundant waters as they went, [and then it says this] like the voice of the Almighty...” Earlier, Christ’s voice was described as a trumpet but now it’s like the sound of many waters. What is that - the sound of many waters? Clearly, you can imagine what John is thinking about. He’s on a rock-strewn island in the Aegean Sea. What he is thinking about is the relentless crashing of the waves on the rocky shore of Patmos as it produced a constant deafening sound. That’s like the voice of Jesus Christ. The point is His voice stands out above all the noise so that His sheep can hear and obey. This is how the Father wanted it to be. You remember at the Transfiguration in Matthew 17:5: “While he was still speaking, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and behold, a voice out of the cloud...” This is God the Father. He says, “This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased; listen to Him!” Listen to Him. Hebrews 1:1 says, “God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has spoken to us in His Son...” Jesus is God’s final word, and when He speaks, it’s like the crashing of the waves. He speaks with commanding authority and His church obeys. John 10:27: “My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me.” Where do we hear the thundering voice of Jesus Christ? Jesus’ sheep still hear His voice solely in the Holy Spirit inspired Scripture. And if you have a heart that’s tuned to Him, it thunders. You can’t miss it. His authoritative Word directs His church.

A fifth quality of Jesus toward His church is: His sovereign lordship controls His church. His sovereign lordship controls His church. Verse 16: “In His right hand He held seven stars...” In Scripture, the right hand is the place of honor and authority. And in Jesus’ right hand are seven stars. Again, in verse 20 he explains: “As for the mystery of the seven stars which you saw in My right hand...[those] seven stars are the angels of the seven churches...” Now, we need to stop for a moment and consider that because the Greek word translated, “Angels”, here, is *aggelos*. **It** can refer to actual angels, supernatural beings created by God. It can also refer to human messengers. In this case, it could refer to the leaders in the churches. And I would argue that it has to be referring to the leaders of each church here and not angels for three reasons. First of all, because angels are never represented as leaders in the church in any other place, and yet clearly, **they** are...whoever these people are, they occupy that role. Secondly, holy angels don’t sin and therefore they never have to repent as these angels are commanded to do. Just take one example. Look at chapter 2:4-5. Remember this is expressed, verse one, “To the angel of the

church in Ephesus write...” And then he says in verse four: “But I have this against you, that you have left your first love. Therefore remember from where you have fallen, and repent...”

Thirdly, these can't be real actual angels because think about what this would mean. It makes no sense for Christ to send a message to John, to pass the message to angels, so that the angels can pass it to the churches. Doesn't make any sense. So, the reference here is to Christ holding the messengers of the churches, in other words, the key leaders, likely the leading elders, one from each of the seven churches in His right hand. What is the point? Well, it may imply protection. You know, we're in His hand and no one can snatch us out (John 10). But I think, in this context and the way we're going to see it used in the letters to the seven churches, it's more about control. He's got the leaders of the churches in His hand. He controls His church. He is the head of the church and He exercises that leadership through the leaders He has placed in each local body. To use other terminology, Jesus our Lord is the chief shepherd, and He mediates that shepherding role through under shepherds and He controls them all. His sovereign lordship controls His church.

Number 6: His devastating judgment defends His church. His devastating judgment defends His church. Verse 16: “and out of His mouth came a sharp two-edged sword...” This is an unusual sword. The reference here is to a large Thracian sword, typically wielded with great sweeping blows. This one is sharp, and it has cutting surfaces on both sides. It comes out of His mouth, clearly symbolizing that Jesus fights not with an actual weapon but with His words. The reference is primarily of His speaking destructive judgment against the enemies of the church. In this case, the enemies that are inside the church. Look at Revelation 2:16: “Therefore repent; or else I am coming to you quickly, and I will make war against them with the sword of My mouth” - talking about enemies of His church within the church. But someday, He will use His words as a weapon to destroy the enemies of His people outside the church. In chapter 19 - notice Revelation 19:15. It says, “From His mouth comes a sharp sword, so that with it He may strike down the nations...” He will destroy His enemies outside the church and the enemies of His people. The point is this: Christ will defend His church from its enemies, both those inside and outside. And He will do so by pronouncing devastating judgment on them. As Mounce puts it: “The sword symbolizes the irresistible power of divine judgment.”

Seventh and finally, we learn here in this portrait that His matchless glory both captivates and characterizes His church. His matchless glory both captivates and characterizes His church. Verse 16: “His face was like the sun shining in its strength.” Sixty-five years before this, John the Apostle had been one of three who got a glimpse of the glory of Jesus Christ at the Transfiguration. Matthew 17:2: “And He was transfigured before them; and His face shone like the sun...” On Patmos, he saw it again in the risen exalted Christ. Do you understand that so have we? So have we. If you’re in Christ, you’ve seen the glory in the face of Jesus Christ. Where did you see it? You saw it in the gospel. Listen to 2 Corinthians 4:6: “For God, who said, ‘Light shall shine out of darkness,’ is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.” He’s talking about what you saw Christ in the gospel. You saw His glory and it captivated you just like that literal, physical vision the Transfiguration did those who were there. But we not only see His matchless glory and are captivated by it, but we also began to reflect that glory. 2 Corinthians 3:18: “But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from [one level of] glory to glory [another], just as from the Lord, the Spirit.” So, we are captivated by the glory, the blazing brilliance of Jesus Christ. And the longer we know Him and the longer we see Him and gaze at Him in Scripture, the more we meditate on Him, the more we began to reflect that same glory. Like Moses, when he was alone with the Lord on the mountain, his face began to shine with the glory. This is our Lord, and this is how He interacts with His church. And this is why, dear friends, we don’t have to worry. We don’t have to worry about what’s going on in the political world. And we don’t have to worry about what’s going on in the church. Jesus Christ is in control.

Let’s pray together.

Our Lord, thank You for this overwhelming vision You’ve given us. Thank You for the privilege of a seeing what John saw. Thank You that You commanded him to write everything that he saw so that it’s as if we were there on the island of Patmos 2000 years ago - watching, observing, seeing what he saw. Lord thank You for the reminder of who You are, who You are to your church. Lord comfort our hearts. We are so easily frightened - frightened by the events in the world at large, and even frightened by trends within the professing church. Lord help us.

Help us to be faithful even as these churches were reminded. But help us to trust, to trust the Lord of the church who, in perfect wisdom, is guiding and directing it to His own great ends. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen!