

Easter Sunday: Jesus Revealed

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[0 : 0 0] I, my kids and I love Harry Potter. There's a lot of things to love about the story, but one of the things that I love about Harry Potter is that Harry starts out and spends the first part of his life living in the world of the muggles.

And of course, the muggle world is a non-magical world. It's the world that you can see, taste, touch, hear, feel, but there's nothing beyond it.

And then one day a letter arrives in the mail. And of course, Harry's not allowed to read that letter. And so more letters come and more letters come and more letters come until finally Harry is able to open the envelope and read the letter.

And that letter reveals to Harry this entirely new world, a world that he didn't know existed right in the midst of his own world. Turns out the muggles are wrong.

And the world is actually an enchanted place. And there are great cosmic forces at work. And there is a great unfolding story. And Harry is invited to join in and become part of that story.

[1 : 0 6] And in the very similar kind of way, I think in the postmodern West, we live in the muggle world. It's a disenchanted world. It's a world that is limited only to sensory experience.

And as we look at the book of Revelation, which we're going to be looking at this morning, this is a letter that has crossed space and time. It has come through centuries upon centuries.

But as we receive this letter and we open this letter, it reveals to us a world within our own world, but an enchanted world full of cosmic forces with a great unfolding story that we're invited to take part in.

And the nature of Revelation is that it is apocalyptic literature. And this is not the kind of book that is about being clairvoyant and predicting a distant future.

This is rather a book that reveals to us the truth of the world that we live in here and now. It peels back the veil and shows us the enchanted world in the midst of the muggle world.

[2 : 1 6] And so that's what we're going to be looking at. It's Easter Sunday. And so it's only fitting that we look at Revelation chapter 1 together, perhaps one of the greatest resurrection passages in all of the Bible.

And this opening chapter reveals the risen Christ. And what we get to see in this is Jesus as he truly is. And he's no longer the pale Galilean.

He is a towering, formidable, fearsome king with blazing eyes who will not be managed. And it's very important that we as Christians see Jesus as he truly is.

Because John was writing to churches that were facing or would soon face severe persecution. I don't know if we can relate to that. But certainly our brothers and sisters in Sri Lanka can relate to that.

You may have seen the news this morning that the Easter celebrations in Sri Lanka in some of the churches were interrupted by bomb blasts. And nearly 200 people were killed.

[3 : 26] Most of them Christians gathered for Easter Sunday worship exactly like we are here. And so if you're a Christian and you know that God has called us not only to endure that kind of suffering and persecution, but to actually love our enemies, then we need reassurance.

And the towering, fearsome personage of the risen Christ reminds Christians everywhere that Jesus is still firmly in control even when it doesn't seem that he is anywhere near.

So we don't have a lot of time this morning. About half the kids in this church are going to get baptized in just a minute. And so that's not really an exaggeration. There's going to be a bunch of kids down here.

So we really don't have a lot of time this morning. And so we're just going to look at a couple of things from chapter 1. What we're going to see is this, that as Jesus is revealed, we also learn about the relationship that Jesus has with his word and his church.

So we're going to see the truth about the relationship between Jesus and his word and Jesus and his church. Let's pray. Lord, Heavenly Father, you are risen from death.

[4 : 36] You hold the keys of death and Hades in your hands. And Lord, we know that you are knowable, that you desire for us to know you. And so we pray that you would, Lord, reveal yourself to us even as we open your word together.

We pray this in your holy name. Amen. So first of all, let's look a little bit at the relationship between Jesus and his word. In essence, we learn that Jesus is inseparable from his word.

And by that, I mean this word. I mean the written word. Jesus is inseparable from his word. Revelation opens with John on the Isle of Patmos. Now that sounds like a pretty nice place, doesn't it?

Patmos? You think John's had, you know, years as a disciple, done a lot, planted some churches, and maybe this is his sabbatical. Maybe he's on vacation on the beach island of Patmos.

But that's not, in fact, what's going on. Patmos is a prison island. John is in exile. He's been sent there by the state officials. Literally, it says that he's on Patmos, quote, on account of God's word.

[5 : 44] So he's being punished for preaching and teaching about Jesus. They said, we've got to get rid of this guy. So it's a prison island. And it makes us wonder, why would the Roman authorities care what John was teaching about Jesus?

I mean, if you know anything about Rome, Rome was pluralistic. They were very open, like our society in some ways, to all different kinds of religions. So why would John be treated differently?

Simply because of the religion that he was preaching and teaching. Well, they cared because they realized that the Easter announcement that Jesus has risen from death is a political threat.

And they said, this is no longer a benign religion. This threatens Roman authority. And you know what? Well, they're right.

They're right to be afraid. They are right to feel threatened. If Easter is true, what Easter means is that there is a living king who has overcome death, who is literally called the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end, who is Lord of Eternity.

[6 : 53] And so what that tells us is, no matter who you voted for in the last election, no matter what you think of our current president, no matter who you plan to vote for in the coming election, the day will come when all human authorities bow down before this king.

Every human authority is limited. And so they're right to perceive Easter as a threat to their power. That's exactly what it is. And it's because of Jesus' words and the teaching and preaching of Jesus' word that they are so afraid.

And this shows us that Jesus' words matter more than anyone else's words. This is why John says in verse 3, Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear and who keep what is written in it.

What this is saying is God's word has the power to bless those who hear and keep it. If you want God to bless you, hashtag blessed. If you want God to bless you, hear and keep his word.

That is the means of God's blessing coming into your life. And along with this in verse 16, the word is like a sharp two-edged sword coming out of Jesus' mouth.

[8 : 09] The word can divide between righteousness and sin. The word can divide between truth and falsehood. The word can divide between life and death.

So the word of Christ is extremely powerful. And here's the thing we need to see about the word. The word can be one of two things. The word can be a sword, an instrument of war against those who reject the kingdom of God, or the word can be a surgical knife that can cut out the tumor of sin and restore us to being the fully human beings that God created us to be.

It can either be a sword or a surgical knife. And all of that hinges on how we respond to the claims of Easter. Right?

So right here we're gathered because we believe that Jesus rose from the grave. But it's very tempting when we hear Christian teaching, when we think about Scripture, it's very tempting to treat it like advice.

You know, like just old advice that has stood the test of time. You know, so when I need guidance, I'm going to go talk to my friends.

[9 : 28] I'm going to see what Dan has to say. I'm going to go talk to my wife. And Laura, what do you think that I should do? And maybe I have a counselor, and I'm going to go pay that counselor, and I'm going to hear what my counselor thinks.

And then I have maybe a spiritual director, and I'm going to go to that spiritual director. And then maybe I'm going to read a few blogs, or just kind of Google my problem, and see what kind of comes up, the top hits.

You know, and maybe go on Quora, or something like that. And then I'll read the Bible, and all that kind of goes into the hopper. And I'll take it all under consideration, and then I'll do what I think I need to do.

And this is the thing we need to see. If Jesus rose from death, as we're claiming he did, that sets him apart. And it means that his words matter more than anyone else's words.

And so that means in our lives, we should listen to every syllable that came out of Jesus' mouth. Those words are more important than all the collective wisdom of human beings combined.

[10 : 27] His words matter more. So either every word that Jesus uttered is crucially important, or Jesus didn't rise from death.

And here's what I would say. If that's the case, go home. There's nothing in Christianity for you. When people say it doesn't matter if he rose, all that matters is that he rose in your heart, and we keep the tradition alive, that's bogus.

No. You don't want to be a Christian if Jesus didn't rise from death. That's what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15. He says, if Jesus didn't rise bodily from the grave, our faith is in vain. Go be some other religion that asks less of you.

Religion asks way too much of you. To be a Christian if Jesus didn't actually rise from death. So either his word matters more than anyone else's words, or it doesn't matter at all.

The one option that Jesus does not leave on the table is to take his words as advice. He just simply doesn't give us that option.

[11 : 28] And we see in John's response to Jesus, this is how we are called to respond to Christ in his word. Verse 17, when I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead.

He submits in reverence because he recognizes who Jesus really is. And this is what we do every week when we come. Even though one of us is up here speaking, we're all sitting under the word.

And we're submitting to the word and we're allowing it to reveal us to ourselves. So that's the power of the word and the relationship between Jesus and his word is they are inextricable.

They are one. Now I also want to look at the relationship that we see in here between Jesus and his church. Just as inseparable as Jesus is from his word, he is also inseparable from his church.

And I just want you to listen to this description of Jesus in verses 12 through 16. It says his appearance is like the vision in the Old Testament book of Daniel.

[12 : 32] And it's a lot like that, but it's a lot more than that. He's dressed in a long robe with a golden belt. Why would he be dressed in a long robe with a golden belt?

He's dressed like a priest. When they see Jesus, he's dressed like a priest. He has white hair like wool, which means he's the pure, spotless, and what does wool make us think of?

Lamb of God. His eyes are like a flame of fire. These are eyes of discernment and eyes of judgment that see everything. He has feet like burnished bronze.

Imagine bronze when it's still glowing hot from the furnace. He has glowing bronze feet. This reminds us of the vision of the statue in the book of Daniel.

But you know, in Daniel's vision or Nebuchadnezzar's dream, there's a statue that represents all of the empires of the earth, but it has crumbly, delicate clay feet.

[13 : 32] And that shows us that all the greatest empires in human history are fragile at their foundation and they will one day crumble. Whereas Jesus has feet of burnished bronze.

His kingdom will last forever. You see this description, you begin to realize this is making profound theological statements about who Jesus really is. From Jesus' mouth comes a sharp two-edged sword, which we already talked about.

He holds seven stars in his right hand. There are seven angels over the church, which shows us that Jesus holds authority in his right hand and cares for his church.

And that his face is like the sun. What greater Easter image could we have than a face like a sunrise? You know, when you see his face, you know that a new day has dawned.

Powerful imagery of Jesus. It's breathtaking by itself, but here's the thing I want you to hear. Here's the thing I want us to get. There's more going on here. Notice in verses 12 and 13, notice the order, the way this progresses.

[14 : 43] John first hears the word of Jesus, and then he turns, and what does he see when he turns? Can we get it up on the screen? Maybe not. Anybody up there?

Oh, yes. If we can, great. If not, no worries. He turns when he hears the word of Jesus, but the first thing he sees is not Jesus.

He sees the seven lampstands, which represent the church. And then only after he sees the seven lampstands, does he then see, verses 12 and 13, does he then see the person of Jesus himself?

And so the seven lampstands, which represent the seven churches in Asia, that's the first thing that he lays eyes on. And, you know, I think this is very encouraging. As a pastor, this is encouraging for me because we've been going in our church already looking at the letters that Jesus then writes to his churches, and they're very imperfect.

And spoiler alert, our church is very imperfect as well. You may not know that. I know you think it's perfect. It's not. There are a lot of issues with every church. The church is extremely flawed because it's full of people.

[16 : 00] I mean, no offense, but people like us, people like me, mean that the church is always going to be flawed, deeply flawed. There's always going to be deep issues in any church.

And yet what we see here is Jesus is to be found with his church. He's with his church. He's in the midst of his churches. And we'll see that Jesus has a lot of hard things to say to his church, but nevertheless, he's with his church.

He's not abandoned his church. That's where you find the presence of Christ. And this is not only a pattern in Revelation, but it's a pattern that you see in the life of all of God's people.

If you want to see Jesus, if you want to know Jesus, look to the church. You look to the church. This is the relationship between Jesus and his church.

As the church acts like a lampstand and upholds and shines forth the light of Christ, so Christ dwells with and is present in his church.

[17 : 07] And this is made even more explicit in verse 15. It describes his voice as being like the roar of many waters. You say, what does that have to do with anything?

I've never seen this before. You see this language show up in Ezekiel, but you also see it show up in Revelation 14 and Revelation 19.

Now here's what I want you to see. In the opening chapter of Revelation, Jesus' voice is described as the roaring of many waters. But then later in Revelation, two more times, the same description is used, the roaring of many waters, but it's not being used to describe Jesus' voice.

It's being used to describe the voices of the saints, of the gathered saints from across time and space who are joined together in prayer and praise, singing to the Lamb of God.

Same description. And what we're meant to draw from that is a connection. I'll put it plainly. Do you want to hear the voice of the risen Christ?

[18 : 14] Audibly. Listen to the church gathered in prayer. Listen to the church confessing our faith as one. Listen to the church singing together.

It's not simply for our own enjoyment that we gather every Sunday to take part in the liturgy and the worship and the prayer and the singing that we do here.

The voice of the risen Christ is the voice of the saints. It is when all of us gather together and in the interplay of melody and harmony, all of our voices converge into one united voice.

That is the voice of the risen Christ. If you want to hear the voice of Christ, listen to His bride as she praises Him. So what we're meant to see is that there is an inextricable connection between Christ and His church.

And what Revelation is telling us is this, that Jesus is not just with His church, He is His church. He is in His church. They are one and the same.

[19 : 27] And the great promise of the gospel is that Jesus and His church would become one like the bride and the groom of eternity and that we will be in every way like Him.

And you say, well, what does it mean to be in every way like Him? Read the description that we read earlier. Right? The hair of purity, the blazing eyes of discernment and judgment.

Right? This is the description that we can one day apply to God's people. And of course, the very same John who wrote Revelation in his epistle said the very thing that we're talking about.

He said, Beloved, we are God's children now and what we'll be like has not yet appeared, but we know that when He appears, we shall be like Him because we shall see Him as He is.

That's what we see in Revelation. So here's the invitation for us this Easter. Jesus is risen. And if you want to know the risen Christ as He truly is, not as you might imagine Him being, not a figment of our own creativity, but if you want to know the true risen Christ, listen to His word and look to His church.

[20 : 40] That is where you will find Him because that is where He is because He is inseparable from both. Let's pray. And if you want to know the next day. Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray.

Let's pray. So let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray.

Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. Openfeel. Let's pray. Okay. Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray.