

# A vision of Jesus and His church

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Preacher: Mark Jackson

[ 0 : 0 0 ] Our first reading today is from the book of Revelation. It's the last book in the Bible, and you'll find our reading on page 1235. The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show to his servants the things that must soon take place.

He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John, who bore witness to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw. 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, for the time is near.

John, to the seven churches that are in Asia, grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven spirits who are before his throne, and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead and the ruler of kings on earth.

To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood and made us a kingdom, priest to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

Behold, he is coming with the clouds and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him, and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him.

[ 1 : 3 0 ] Even so, Amen. I am the Alpha and the Omega, says the Lord God, who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.

I, John, your brother and partner in the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance that are in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos on account 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 a trumpet saying, Write what you see in a book and send it to the seven churches, to Ephesus and to Smyrna, to Pergamum and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea.

Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking to me, and on turning I saw seven golden lampstands, and in the midst of the lampstands one like a son of man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash around his chest.

The hairs of his head were white like wool, as white as snow. His eyes were like a flame of fire. His feet were like burnished bronze, refined in a furnace, and his voice was like the roar of many waters.

[ 2 : 4 5 ] In his right hand he held seven stars. From his mouth came a sharp two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining in full strength.

When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead, but he laid his right hand on me, saying, Fear not, I am the first and the last and the living one.

I died, and behold, I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of death and Hades. Write, therefore, the things that you have seen, those that are, and those that are to take place after this.

As for the mystery of the seven stars that 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.

Our second reading today is Revelation 2, 1-11, and this passage can be found on page 1,236 of the Church Bibles. To the angel of the church in Ephesus writes, The words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand, who walks among the seven golden lampstands.

[ 4 : 03 ] I know your works, your toil, and your patient endurance, and how you cannot bear with those who are evil, but attested those who call themselves apostles and are not, and found them to be false.

I know you are enduring patiently and bearing up for my name's sake, and you have not grown weary. But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first.

Remember, therefore, from where you have fallen. Repent and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent.

Yet this you have. You hate the works of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who conquers, I will grant to eat the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.

And to the angel of the church in Smyrna I write, the words of the first and last, who died and came to life. I know your tribulation and your poverty, but you are rich, and the slander of those who say that they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.

[ 5 : 14 ] Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested. For ten days you will have tribulation. Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life.

He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. The one who conquers will not be hurt by the second death. Thank you very much, Judy and Ian, for reading for us.

Let me pray for us before we look at Revelation. Heavenly Father, we do thank you very much that you do speak to us through your word of the Bible.

And so we pray, Father God, that wherever we're coming from this morning, you would do that. Please speak to us. Please give us a clear vision of the Lord Jesus Christ.

We ask it for his name's sake. Amen. Please do keep your Bibles open there on page 1235, as we look at the book of Revelation together.

[ 6 : 20 ] And if you turn to the back of the service sheet, you'll see that there's an outline of today's talk. It's probably worth me mentioning, actually, that point three is now merged into point two.

So please don't start panicking if you wonder if I'm ever going to get to the end. I will. Let me also add my word of welcome to Simon's. It's great to welcome friends and family of Flory Winter here this morning.

And can I say, if you are visiting us today, if you're a guest with us this morning, looking in to the Christian message, can I say it's a great day to be with us. Because these opening chapters of Revelation, they get right to the heart of who Jesus Christ is.

Right to the heart of what he's about. That seems to me there's enormous confusion today when it comes to the person of Jesus Christ.

Most people view Jesus as nothing more than a figure of history. Jesus, the baby in a manger.

- [ 7 : 29 ] Meek and mild. A great story for kids at Christmas. Others, Jesus, the good guy. Pretty wise. Said some pretty amazing things.
- But far from perfect. Had someone just say the other day, they saw Jesus as a revolutionary. He upset the status quo.
- A bit like Che Guevara. Or the Dalai Lama. But that's all. He's just a figure of history. Who's had his time. Who's been and gone. And so he's irrelevant.
- To the world we live in today. The financial meltdowns. The job losses. The fears for the future. Irrelevant. But this couldn't be further from the truth.
- And chapters 1 to 3 of Revelation. They're going to show us why. Because they give us a clear vision of who this Jesus Christ is. Who is the real Jesus? Not merely a figure of history.
- [ 8 : 34 ] But the God of eternity. Now this is something God wants all of us to see. Wherever we're coming from this morning. And it's something that Flory Winter will need to see as she grows up.
- Now before we look at this vision of Jesus. Let me just make three brief introductory comments about the book of Revelation as a whole.
- First thing to say is that the book of Revelation. The last book of the Bible. It is a book about Jesus Christ. So if you look down to verse 1. On page 1, 2, 3, 5.
- We read the first words. The revelation of Jesus Christ. Okay? Pretty obvious. Opening sentence makes it absolutely clear this is who it's about.
- And yet it's amazing how much wacky stuff has been written and said about the book. Which seems to ignore this opening verse. Books about Christians being raptured up to heaven.
- [ 9 : 37 ] Leaving the rest of the world to battle it out against the devil. Might have read one or two of those. A Bible code. Revelation. You've got to work out all the numbers and symbols.
- And then you can map out history. And who's going to win the presidential elections. Or perhaps you've had a Jehovah's Witness knocking on your door. Using the book to try and persuade you to become one of the chosen 144,000.
- Now, can you see from verse 1. None of these views can be right. Verse 1 does not say the revelation of the rapture. Does not say the revelation of the US elections.
- Does not say the revelation of the 144,000. You can all see it. It's pretty obvious. It's about Jesus Christ. And these opening chapters are about him.
- Second introductory comment is to see that revelation is written for all people. Not just clever theologians.
- [ 10 : 34 ] Not just the super spiritual. I think a lot of people are put off by the book. It's got some weird language. Some tricky stuff. But look at verse 3. Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of the prophecy.
- It's for anyone. You just read it and there's a blessing. Verse 4 makes it clear that the book was originally a letter from John, the Apostle John, to seven churches.
- Normal churches full of everyday people just like you and me. Kids as well. In other words, this book is not the preserve of ivory tower theologians.
- It's a book for everyone. Don't be put off. Read it. Enjoy it. Be blessed by it. The book is written for you. And the third introductory comment is to see that the purpose of revelation, why it's written about Jesus, is first and foremost to keep our faith in him.
- To keep going with him, not to give up. Let me read you two verses from the heart of the book. You don't need to turn to them now. You can see the references if you want to look up later on the sheet.

[ 11 : 42 ] This is from chapter 13, verse 10. Here is a call for the endurance and faith of the saints. Chapter 14, verse 12.

Here is a call for the endurance of the saints, those who keep their faith in Jesus. This is the purpose of the book.

This is the purpose of the book. About Jesus. For all people. To keep our faith in him. Now, for some of us, that will mean putting our faith in Jesus for the first time as we read the book together.

And for others, it might mean renewing our faith if we've been letting things slip. For most of us, it will mean the normal daily experience of keeping going with Jesus.

Fighting sin. Facing opposition. Standing firm. This is what God wants to encourage us with over the next five weeks. Okay, so those are three introductory comments about the book.

[ 12 : 43 ] With that in mind, let's now turn and look at this vision of Jesus given in verses 12 to 20. So this is our first point. A vision of Jesus to stick in our minds.

The book is unique in the Bible in that it's constantly playing on our imaginations. All five senses need to be involved.

Taste as well. And the book, as we're about to see, uses some very strong evocative imagery. As it tries to hit us with the full force of the message.

It's a bit like those NHS drink driving adverts on TV if you've seen them. So let me read this vision out to you. And as I do, try as best you can to picture it in your own minds.

Imagine you're in John's shoes, seeing the vision yourself, hearing the voice of Jesus, feeling the full force of it. Okay, here we go. Verse 12. Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking to me.

[ 13 : 47 ] And on turning, I saw seven golden lampstands. And in the midst of the lampstands, one like a son of man.

Clothed with a long robe. And with a golden sash round his chest. The hairs of his head were white like wool.

As white as snow. His eyes were like a flame of fire. His feet were like burnished bronze.

Refined in a furnace. And his voice was like the roar of many waters. In his right hand he held seven stars.

From his mouth came a sharp two-edged sword. And his face was like the sun, shining in full strength.

[ 14 : 48 ] When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. But he laid his right hand on me, saying, Fear not. I am the first and the last.

And the living one. I died and behold, I am alive forevermore. And I have the keys of death and Hades.

It's an awesome vision, isn't it? Awesome in the true sense of the word. I'm not sure if you've ever been in a dinghy when a seri in a mighty ferry has sailed by.

Or been on the platform edge and a fast train has suddenly shot by, caught you on a way. Oh, wow. I think this is what's going on here. This is what God wants us to feel as we read and imagine this vision for ourselves.

And just so that we're all feeling it, let me draw out some of the imagery for us. So verse 13. Jesus is described here as a son of man. Saw this earlier.

[ 16 : 07 ] We sang about it. From the prophecy Daniel. One with almighty power. All power. Over all people. For all time.

In verse 14. The hairs of his head. White like wool. Pure. Holy. Perfect in every way. Always good. Always right.

Just like God himself. Because Jesus is God. His eyes. Like flames.

Burning right through us. Seeing all our thoughts. And motives. Knowing us inside out. Knowing us better than we know ourselves. In verse 15.

His feet. Like burnished bronze. Immovable. Indestructible. Invincible. Empires rise and fall.

[ 17 : 09 ] Great leaders are born and die. Jesus is saying. His kingdom. Last forever. His voice. Like the roar of many waters. We've all seen.

The power of floods. Tsunamis. Tidal waves. Nothing compared. To the immeasurable power. That this Jesus Christ has. In verse 16.

His right hand. Holding the seven stars. The entire universe. Under his control. Jesus really has got the whole world.

In his hands. His mouth. With a two-edged sword coming out. The warrior in battle. Ridding the world of evil.

And sin. Through the power of his word. Defeating all those who oppose him. He is the judge of the universe. His face.

[ 18 : 06 ] Like the sun. In full strength. Shining. On his church. Gracious. Merciful. Loving. A saviour.

And then are the words that he speaks. In case we haven't got the message yet. I'm the first and the last. The beginning. The end. The alpha. The omega. Which if you compare back to verse 8. Is another clear claim to Jesus being God.

He says. I'm the living one. The source of all life. The source of your life. Creator. Sustainer. Give the keys of death and Hades. All power and authority.

Even over death itself. In control of your eternal lives. And we can be sure of all this. If we're thinking. Well. You know. How can we trust this vision?

We can be sure of all this. Because of what Jesus says in verse 18. I died. And behold. I am alive forevermore. Here's the proof.

[ 19 : 14 ] For all that Jesus is saying. He rose from the dead. He died. And then rose. Again. The empty tomb. The eyewitness sightings of him. The changed life of the disciples.

The billions of Christians around the world. Who have objectively weighed up the evidence for the resurrection. And subjectively testify. The power of the risen Christ in their lives. This is how we know that this vision is not made up.

This is Jesus Christ as he really is. Not literally with the sword coming out his mouth. But with all the power and authority and glory and splendor.

That the sword and the rest of the vision portray. This here is the real Jesus. Not merely some figure of history. But the Lord of history.

Not a mere baby. Not a mere revolutionary. This is the God of eternity. And if we're talking about the relevancy of Jesus for us.

[ 20 : 15 ] Well is there still any doubt? I mean this is your creator we're speaking of. The one who made you. This is your judge. The one you will face on judgment day.

This is your saviour. The one who loves you. And has died for you. So you can be forgiven. And know him. And enjoy a relationship with him. Into eternity. This is your God.

It's a vision of Jesus. As he really is. Now it wasn't until yesterday afternoon. That the full force of this vision really hit home to me.

I was at a wedding. With all the fun and joy and happiness of the occasion. Got a call from my mum. And she told me that my auntie, my auntie Julie. Had lost her fight with cancer.

She had died. And it struck me at that moment. That she was now standing face to face. With this Jesus.

[ 21 : 22 ] Not some Jesus of history. But the Jesus of today. The Jesus of this vision. So let me ask you.

Is this the Jesus that you know? Not someone to take lightly. Not someone to trivialise. Not someone to mess around with. But someone to turn to.

As your God. And even if we are Christians. Here this morning. Most of us are. I mean. It's easy to forget. Isn't it? How awesome. The Jesus is we know and love.

Treating him perhaps flippantly. Or without the awe and respect he deserves. But this is a vision that reminds us. Who he is. Who he really is.

The Lord of history. The God of eternity. It is a vision of Jesus. To stick in our minds. And secondly.

[ 22 : 18 ] It's a vision of Jesus. Which every church. Needs. Because in chapters 2 and 3. Jesus starts speaking to his church. And for each individual church.

Without exception. Jesus begins. By reminding them. Of a part of the vision. We've just seen together. And it's also wonderfully personal. And specific.

As Jesus addresses. Each church. Because although he's this mighty God. And Lord of history. God of eternity. Well he's also intimately concerned. For his people. Telling them what they need.

To know. That's a bit here. Like a doctor. Knowing exactly what medicine. To give to each patient. So God here knows exactly. What part of the vision. To give to each church.

Let me give you a few examples. The first four. So. For the church in Ephesus. We're in chapter 2. Verse 1 to 7 now. The church in Ephesus. They'd intellectualized their faith.

[ 23 : 16 ] They'd forgotten their first love. What do they need. Chapter 2 verse 1. To the angel of the church in Ephesus. Write. The words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand.

Who walks among the seven golden lampstands. And that's verse 20 tells us is the seven churches. In other words. What the church in Ephesus needs. Is this clear vision of Jesus.

Here walking amongst them. Holding them in his hand. Reminding them. That the heart of Christianity. Is a love for the Lord Jesus Christ. Which is what Nick was sharing with us earlier.

What about the church in Smyrna. Facing opposition. Facing suffering. Facing prison. Facing even death. What do they need. Chapter 2 verse 8. And to the angel of the church in Smyrna.

Write. The words of the first. And the last. Who died and came to life. Again. The church needs a clear vision of Jesus. Who died and came to life.

[ 24 : 16 ] The one who is triumphant. And victorious over death. Even over death. They've got nothing to fear from their oppressors. What about the church in Pergamon.

Where some of the congregation have been deceived by false teaching. What do they need. Chapter 2 verse 12. And to the angel of the church in Pergamon. Write. The words of him who has the sharp two-edged sword.

Again. You're getting the picture. The church needs a clear vision of Jesus Christ. This time the sharp two-edged sword. With the warning of Jesus coming in judgment.

If they don't turn back. To the truth of God's word. In the Bible. Finally. As an example. What about the church in Theotera.

Where sexual immorality. Was threatening to destroy the church. What do they need. You've guessed it. Chapter 2 verse 18. And to the angel of the church in Theotera.

[ 25 : 17 ] Write. The words of the son of God. Who has eyes. Like a flame of fire. And whose feet. Are like burnished bronze. The church needs a clear vision of Jesus.

This time the flaming eyes. Searching their minds and hearts. Calling them back. To repentance. And confession of their sin. Now can we see. Each church.

No matter the situation. They need this clear vision of Jesus. It's the same with Sardis. A dead church. Philadelphia. A faithful church. Laodicea.

A lukewarm. A half-hearted church. To all seven churches. They need this clear vision of Jesus. And God is saying. We need this vision too. We at Greece church.

We need this clear vision of Jesus Christ. So whatever the situation we're facing. We know where to look. We know where to turn. So just to bring that home for us.

[ 26 : 18 ] If for example. We are struggling with opposition. For following Jesus. If we are fearful. Of standing up for Jesus. Because of what might come our way.

Because of what others will think. Well the vision of Jesus. To the church in Smyrna. Or Philadelphia. Is what we need. We need to see Jesus. As the first and the last. God himself.

Risen from the dead. Alive. And realize that those who. Who threaten us. They're nothing in comparison. The more we see how mighty and awesome.

Jesus Christ really is. With all his power and authority. On our side. The more we'll realize. How small and weak. Those are. We fear. And they need to hear the message of Jesus.

Just like we did. Choose another example. If we're struggling with sexual sin. The vision of the. Of Jesus to the church.

[ 27 : 19 ] In Theotira. It is what we need to. To hear. What we need to see. We have to think of Jesus. With his flaming eyes. And realize. We can't hide our sin from him. He sees everything.

He sees every. Lustful thought. Every second look. Every unfaithful action. And he's just calling us to repent.

Knowing his forgiveness. Knowing he's died for us. To experience afresh. His mercy and forgiveness. That's what we need. A final example.

If we're not feeling. Much love. Towards the Lord Jesus. At the moment. Feeling a bit complacent. A bit half hearted. Well the vision of.

Of Jesus. To the church in Ephesus. Or Laodicea. Is what we need. To see Jesus walking. Amongst the church. And realize that.

[ 28 : 17 ] Even though we may have lost. Some of our love for him. Jesus has not lost. One bit of love for us. He is still walking with us. Always there for us.

Still at work within us. Always doing right by us. Still loving us. In the same way he did. The first moment we realized. He died for us. Now a love like this.

Is irresistible isn't it? And it's this clear vision of Jesus. Walking amongst the lampstands. His churches. That will keep us going with Jesus. Whatever the situation we're facing.

And actually it's just the same. If you are a guest here today. You need this clear vision of Jesus as well. Yes the church may look very weak to you. Yes the church may look poisoned by sin and scandal.

Yes the church may look divided. Over some of its teaching. But God is calling you to look at this vision of Jesus Christ. The Lord of history. The God of eternity.

[ 29 : 17 ] Who is calling his church back to him. Calling his church to repent of their sin. To follow his teaching. And to keep going. Following him faithfully. This is what Jesus is doing.

Calling the church to follow him. As he calls Flory Winter to follow him. As he calls you to follow him. Let me pray for us. Father God we do thank and praise you so much for this almighty vision of the Lord Jesus Christ.

We pray Father God that you'd help us. To see Jesus as he really is. To believe it. And to have this vision in our minds. So whatever situation we're facing.

We see you as in total control. As the one ruling over this universe. As the one who is triumphant. Glorious. And who is coming back for his church.

I pray you'd help us to keep our faith in you. For Jesus sake. Amen. Amen.