

Christ's Presence in the Church

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[0 : 0 0] Okay, it's my turn. We're doing the third chapter in our book. Now, I told Glenn, I don't know, a month ago, I don't know what to do with this chapter.

But we're going to give it a shot. We're going to be talking about the Christ's presence in the church. Now, I know all of us know, there's scripture all over the place that says that he's the head of the church.

Paul made a big deal of that. We're the body, he's the head. And that church is the church with a capital C, the universal church, and the church with a little c, the local church like us.

He's the head. But do we really understand what that means? Or how it is supposed to affect the church, and the church and its functions.

So, let's begin where we see him amongst the churches. So, the next slide. And if you open up your Bible, I did not put all the scripture on the slide on purpose.

[1 : 1 0] So, open up the Revelation. Oh, you got what's left over my voice. I was too involved in the singing. Anyway, Revelation 1, we're going to look at verse 12 through 19, or 20, actually.

20. I'll give you a minute. Now, as you read this book, you're going to read these verses a lot, I have a feeling.

So, this is the foundation of a lot of what's in that, that he talks about. And this is the foundation, really, of what I want to talk about today. So, it says, starting in verse 12, I turned to see whose voice was speaking to me, and it is the Apostle John.

He's in Patmos in exile, and he's in the spirit on the Lord's day. And when I did so, I saw seven golden lampstands. And in the midst of the lampstands was one like the Son of Man.

He was dressed in a robe, extending down to his feet, and he wore a wide golden belt around his chest. His head and his hair were as white as wool, even white as snow. His eyes were like fiery flame.

[2 : 1 8] His feet were like polished bronze, refined in a furnace. And his voice was like the roar of many waters. He held out seven stars in his right hand, and a sharp, double-edged sword extended from his mouth.

His face shone like the sun, shining at full strength. When I saw him, I fell down at his feet as though I were dead. But he placed his right hand on me and said, Do not be afraid.

For I am the first and the last, the one who lives. I was dead, but look, now I am alive forever and ever. And I hold the keys of death and of Hades.

Therefore, write where you saw, what is and what is to come after these things. The mystery of the seven stars that you saw in my right hand and the seven golden lampstands is this.

The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches. And the seven lampstands are the seven churches. You know, that's why that's here. I've said that before, but Matt said that before.

- [3 : 16] The reason, ours is not golden. I'm just not sure we deserve gold. But anyway, ours is wooden. But that's why it's here to remind us that Christ is here walking amongst us.
- I like the description. We had another description in our song. Remember the song when we described it? The colors of the rainbow. Oh, that's the clothing majesty.
- Our God is beyond description. I've been reading Isaiah. And you go in there and you find these descriptions. By the way, I think that song probably was based on Isaiah. But you hear these descriptions, see these descriptions of God and Him coming as a mighty warrior.
- You know who the mighty warrior is that's coming, right? Who is the one that's coming as a mighty warrior? Jesus. And it talks about, you know, this blazing fire and this magnificence.
- It's His that's coming. And sometimes I think we think of Jesus as that kindly young man, that old man or man, our best friend, our buddy.
- [4 : 21] You know, hey, come on over here and sit down with me. We get real close and cozy with him. We don't often think of Him like John saw Him.
- Or like Isaiah portrays Him. Or like the song sings of Him. He's really easy to forget that He's the Lord of Lord and King of Kings.
- That He reigns over all creation. He commands legions of angels. He created all the stars and the planets. He created us.
- We forget that sometimes in our faith, in our daily walk and whatnot. We just sort of pretend like He's there or not there depending on how we feel.
- We get real lax, I think, in our devotion. But we've got to remember our Lord Jesus Christ is in fact our friend, but He's also one of power and authority.
- [5 : 27] And we must treat Him like that. Not flippantly treating Him as one of the guys. And I was trying to think of an example. You know, if you were the...
- Our presidents are all messed up these days. But anyway, there was the president and you happened to be one of His friends. You would still have to treat Him with some decorum and respect.
- Even though you were close friends, there'd still be some distance between you. There may be those intimate moments where you sit down and have some time together, but there's still...
- He's the president. You're not. That is what it is with Jesus. He's still Lord and King. And He still is God.
- Yeah, He wants to fellowship with us. I love... You know, you go back into Revelation 3.20 where He tells the church, I'm knocking at the door. Let me in. And I'll come in and dine with you.
- [6 : 28] He won't... He's not talking about a state dinner. He's talking about an intimate dinner around the table. You know, I think... This is sort of an aside and Mark back there asked me to make this short sermon.
- Ha, ha, ha. You know why Baptists like to eat? Yeah. Yeah. George knows me like to eat, not yet.
- Why don't you guys make good food? Ha, ha, ha. Ha, ha, ha. Ha, ha, ha. Where is real intimate fellowship found? But over food at a table.
- When you sit down, someone has provided it, made the effort to make you feel special by having you participate in a meal. Jesus wants to sit down with us and have that meal.
- But He also wants us to remember He holds the stars in His hand and He walks amongst the limeheads. We are privileged to have the King visit us.

[7 : 31] But we still got to remember He's King. We also think we need as a church, we need to remember that He's here.

We don't see Him, maybe. But He's here. He's very much aware of our activities, of the state of the church, where it's at, all the different things.

He knows about the service of work we do or don't do. And He knows the vices of the church. I mean, we're people, and Steve said it, we're sinners, so we have things we don't do right.

He's aware of all that about us, and just like He was aware of the seven churches He sent letters to, to commend them and to warn them. Now the church of Ephesus, he recognized their faithfulness and their work, their steadfastness and their faith.

And you say, well, that's pretty good stuff. Now you've got to remember, John was the pastor there for a long time. Paul was there before. This church had a heritage. But He warned them.

[8 : 55] He warned them. That all that wasn't enough. That's nice. That's good. Don't lose it. But that's not all. They lacked what was truly important.

They had wandered from their first love, their love for Him, and I think also for one another. The church of Pergamum was commended for clinging to Christ's name, for standing firm in persecution.

But they were warned of compromise. They had compromise with the world, accepting worldly behavior as morally acceptable.

And it was leading them into sin. And that's understandable. What has happened in the church in this country? As it's come under pressure from outside, many churches have compromised the truth in order to get along well.

that accepted things that we know clearly as sin as morally acceptable. And so it goes with most of the seven churches.

[10 : 10] There's only one church that isn't warned. And it's under such persecution and suffering that it was just hanging in there. And He said, no, I won't leave you.

But one thing Christ tells them all at the end of His critique is this. And it's the next slide. There it is.

We're training someone back there, by the way. It says, Revelation 229 is the word I've got it from. It says, The one who has an ear had better hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

Now, I want you to raise your hand if you have at least one ear. At least one ear that's working.

I don't have many that work. We'd better hear what the Spirit is saying to the church. See, I think what's happening to the churches warned by Christ is this.

[11 : 10] They have forgotten who it is is walking amongst them. Who it is is the head of the church. They don't see Him, and so it's easy to forget He's there.

And they end up running. I mean, they've been doing all these good things. Maybe even Christ led them to do these good things. Initially, it was part of the work that He had for them. He was doing it. Well, they just sort of forgot where He was and what He was doing, and they just kept going.

It's like a train, you know, or a car. You put it on an automatic, and you point it a certain direction, and you let go of the wheel, and it just goes wherever it was pointed. It isn't doing anything.

In fact, it's headed to danger. But, you know, these churches, they were doing some good stuff, but they forgot who was leading them, and they just kept doing the same thing over and over and over and over.

They were running on self-directed energy and plans. The church today has a little bit of a different problem. There are a lot of them that are doing that, but there are others that are going, oh, this isn't working really well.

[12 : 18] And so they go, and they look around, and say, well, who knows a better way? They never look up and say, Lord, what do you got for it? They look around, and they say, there's got to be a better way. And they go, well, that business is, look at it, it's grown leaps and bounds.

What are they doing? Next thing you know, they're getting a hold of that guy's leadership manual, and they're going, well, this is what he's doing. And they start applying business methods to the church, and sometimes these churches grow for a while, but they have no spiritual core.

They have no solidity in the Spirit of God. They're not doing God's work. They're just building themselves, and the next thing you know is something happens. The leadership does something stupid.

Sin enters in. People leave. The whole thing falls apart. Mars Hill is a good example. See, it's easy.

It happens easily. Things need to get done. We've got problems. We've got to solve them. Attendance is down. Giving is down. What are we going to do?

[13 : 28] So programs are set in motion. Good eyes become plans of action, and people forget to ask Christ what to do. Rather, they ask Him to bless their plans and to give them success in what they're doing to meet their needs as they perceive them.

It probably started innocently enough. A good idea was presented or a real need was made known, and then people responded. The next thing you know, that's what the church does. It gets things organized, staffed, and moving.

Is there anything really wrong with that? Well, I don't know. If Christ is not in it, it's worthless.

What does Ecclesiastes say? Vanity, vanity. You know, doing good, and there are things you can do that are good.

I always, people say, well, I don't know if I should do that. I go, is it a good thing? Yeah, it's a good thing. Well, then do it. What's the worst thing? You've done something good. What's the best thing? God led you to do something good, right?

[14 : 37] But sometimes doing good is not appropriate, but usually it is. But for a church to fail to seek the one who has the master plan, who is the master of the church, and finding out what he's doing and what he wants done is a fatal mistake.

You want to kill a church? Leave Christ out. Amen. Amen. And something, that is exactly what Christ has called the churches to repent of.

It's a fundamental failure of certainhood. And it leads to all kinds of errors. All kinds of conflicts and mismanagement and personal issues and infighting and boredom and lack of commitment and lack of fruit.

We're lost because we didn't seek Him, the one who knows best, and do what is most convenient or favorable or is the I know best mentality.

Have you been in a church where I know best is the rule? We're going to do this because I know the work. I know this. We need it. I know. Or, this is the way it's always been done.

[15 : 55] When we first came here, Matt, that was sort of, we ran into that. We've never done that before. So, we got to remember to follow His lead.

To see Him in our midst working and then get on with doing what He's doing. The one who has an ear had better hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

So, that brings us to what is the Spirit saying to us? What is Christ doing around us? Where is He already working that we can join Him? Are we watching and waiting prayerfully to know all this?

Are we acting and worshiping and serving with a clear understanding that He's here and present and watching us? Do we need to repent of self-directed, self-fulfilling works?

Are we just going through the motions of worship? Are we coming before our Lord and our God bowing down, humbly praising Him, offering our hearts and time and resources?

[17 : 17] I wanted to look at a couple encounters people had with God in their response. So, the next slide. When Isaiah was worshiping, is that it?

Alright, I'll just skip that. Just leave that. I maybe didn't make, I made these slides this morning. I wouldn't, anyway. I had to remake them because I made them as a, anyway, Isaiah. Turn to Isaiah 6.

It's the big book in the prophecy, in the prophet's side. Isaiah 6. I'm doing a study in Isaiah and I tell you what, I have never, there it is, never, ever understood that book and this is bringing, opening my eyes and I'm just standing in wonder.

Isaiah 6, verses 1 through 8. Amen. Somebody want to read that for me so we'll get my voice the last.

Isaiah 6, 1 through 8. Hi. In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, lofty and exalted, with the train and His robe filling the temple.

[18 : 25] Seraphim stood above him, each having six wings. With two He covered His face, with two He covered His feet, with two He flew. And one called out to another and said, Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts.

The whole earth is full of His glory. And the foundations of the thresholds trembled at the voice of Him who called out while the temple was filling with smoke.

Then I said, Woe is me, for I am ruined. I am a man of unclean lips. I live among the people of unclean lips.

For my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts. Then one of the seraphim flew to me with a burning coal in his hand, which he had taken from the altar with tongs.

And he touched my mouth with it and he said, Behold, this has touched your lips and your iniquity is taken away and your sin is forgiven. How much more did you say?

[19 : 30] Just one more verse. Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, Whom shall I send and who will go for us? And then I said, Here am I, send me.

Whenever you have you come into God's presence, encountered the living God, and said, Woe is me, I'm a sinner. When did you ever come into God's presence in worship and fall in your face because there He is and He's holy.

We sang that, Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty. And said, Whoa, I'm undone. I'm undone. When John encountered the Lord in worship, we already read this, it's in Revelation verses 1, chapter 1, 17-19, and He said, When I saw Him, I fell down at His feet as though I were dead, but He placed His right hand on me and said, Do not be afraid.

I am the first and the last, the one who lives. I was dead, but look, now I'm alive, forever and ever, and I hold the keys of death and of Hades. Therefore, write what you saw, what is, and what will happen next.

He said, I fell down as if dead. Now, you say, well, those guys had special situations.

- [21 : 04] That's just not the way it happens. I think you get what you look for sometimes. I'm not saying every time you go in prayer or you go to worship you should have that kind of experience, but you should be aware that the God that you're worshiping and you're praying to, talking to, is the same one.
- High and lifted up. He fills, and there's angels, seraph, you know what seraphs are? They're guarding angels, angels that guard. They're keepers of heaven.
- They're the ones that surround His throne to keep anything away that isn't supposed to be there. They're here. He's here.
- They're here. You don't see the smoke and the flashes of lightning. You don't hear the voice of the roaring river or waters.
- They're here. He wants us to encounter Him. He wants us to fall down and say, woe is me.
- [22 : 11] And He said, put His hand on you. I use my left hand, I'm left-handed. He also put His hand on you and say, it's okay. I'm the Lamb of God. I was slain for your sins, but I live.
- And in you, you have life in me. You know, the Spirit is always speaking to us.
- We don't always pay attention. And I think a lot of us are spiritually are deaf to the Spirit. We haven't ever learned to listen. Our minds are so busy with things.
- If not looking at our phones for one thing or another, just listening to all this chatter around us in the world, we don't ever have a time when we are just quiet. So that a small, quiet voice can come to us and say, listen, I have something you should know.
- I want to tell you this. Spiritual ears. To hear the things we need to hear. To hear the things we need to repent of.
- [23 : 27] To hear the things we need to respond to. And I hope and pray that no one here has the problem of being spiritually deaf because they don't have a relationship.
- They have a religion. They have a religion problem. We're not involved ourselves as such in a religion.
- The world says we're religious. But it's not a religion that we follow. You can follow a religion if you have a set of guidelines. This is what you do.
- These are the rules. This is the methods. This is the practices. These are the things we believe. You can take all that stuff and do it and know nothing of the person of whom you're worshiping.
- We have a relationship. And I was trying to think of a good analogy and I only came up with a spouse. I had... Oh, no.
- [24 : 37] Well, that's the best I could. Anyway, I was thinking... It's sort of interesting. I don't know. Teresa and I met... I'm going to get in trouble because I'm off my notes.
- But anyway, when we first met, we met at a wedding. We went on one date and I was in a tuxedo with a bloody nose in Underground Atlanta for the entire date.
- Somehow she decided that was okay. I went to Nashville to visit the guy that had led me to the Lord who was responsible for getting me saved.
- And she had gone to school there and she came up and stayed with a friend and we went around Nashville for a couple days and then I flew home. This was in May.
- I guess. June. I went to the University of Arizona. I started school. We corresponded. This was the day before cell phones so you couldn't...
- [25 : 39] And telephones, long distance, was prohibitively expensive. And so we wrote letters. We have all those letters. Anyone ever wants to read them? No. I found them.

They're in a box. But we carried on a conversation remotely. Now, how well can you get a person... know a person? How intimate can you get with a person...

I don't mean physically but intimate with a person over a long distance by letter? Well, you can learn some things. You have a... You get along. But you don't really know the person.

She came out at Christmas time. I went out at Christmas time to visit her with my brother. We spent a few days. And then she came out at Easter and at the end of that week we had agreed to be married.

whichever story you want to believe how that happened. And in the following Thanksgiving we were married. So we were with each other face to face less than two or three weeks.

[26 : 46] I can remember our first argument. Our little apartment only had one door inside and she slammed it on the other side.

And I remember saying telling me later she says I thought to myself here I am married to a man I don't even know 3,000 miles away from my family. What am I doing?

You understand that? Now think about that. If you only have a remote relationship with Christ via the Bible you read some or you hear some or you come to church some you never really spend any time with Him how well are you going to know Him?

Are you going to wake up before the throne and go oh my goodness that's you all of you. I didn't know that. I thought you were oh my.

How was I supposed to? He said I've been trying I've been knocking on the door for 20 years where have you been? I hope you get the idea. How can you express your love and your concern and all that if you're not in His presence?

[27 : 57] You've got to have a close intimate relationship with Jesus then all these things that we've been talking about will be discernible and knowable and you'll be able to respond to Him and accept. We have a relationship with Christ He's both friend and master He's both Savior and Lord and we need to realize Christ is the ruler of all creation and never allow our familiarity to cause us to forget that.

Alright. Next slide. The one about the four points. In his book Bob Blackaby has four points that he says about Christ's presence in the church.

And we need to consider the first one is Christ's presence reflects a relationship. He's here walking amongst us. Why is He here? Is He just superintending? No.

He's trying to fellowship with us. He's working amongst us so that we can know Him and He can be known. He wants to fellowship with us.

He invites us to ask Him in and share life with Him. The highs and the lows. Second one. Christ's presence brings joy.

[29 : 16] We may not have all the signs of a successful church. This is a little church. We don't have big programs and big budgets and big crowds. But we have all of Christ.

You understand that? We have all of Christ right here. And in Him is joy unlimited. Everything we need He provides. everything.

We have never we've had some tough times haven't we? There were days but always provided. Always. Third Christ's presence transforms our service.

We're no longer doing our thing our best idea but we're serving the King. We're about our Master's business. Working side by side with Him.

in His plan and doing it His way. And fourth Christ's presence brings peace. No trouble no crisis no difficulty will ever overthrow us if we're responding obediently to Christ.

[30 : 27] The outcomes and the resources are His responsibility not ours. And that frees us from the need to produce peace. And when we're freed we have peace.

He's able to do all things we're not expected to do everything or to be able to do everything. So if all this is true what's next for us?

That's a good question. Anyone got an answer by the way? Well I suggest we keep doing what He's blessing. Now think about that for a minute.

What are we doing that God is blessing? I think we're doing some things that He's blessing. Anyone want to mention one?

bringing the churches together. We had a church fellowshiping together.

[31 : 32] Reaching the school. We're doing some things right. We're doing things that He wants us to do.

We're supporting some missionaries who are doing some important things. Do you know that I think Matt's going to make did you have made the slides yet on laying on those people folks yet? I'm going to show them one Sunday morning soon.

I got the power point ready. So just to listen to how people's lives are being changed all over everywhere is amazing.

And to know that we have a small part in that because God led us to do that and provided the resources to make it happen is amazing for a small church like this. I also suggest we need to do this.

We need to wait and we need to watch prayerfully. Teresa sometimes will say we'll be watching and I'm walking around and she's what are you doing?

[32 : 41] No she's not being prayerful about it. She's being skeptical. But you never know what I'm up to. But you know what? You can't find out what a person's doing unless you watch them over time.

What are they doing? He went there. He went there. What is he doing? He's got that. What is he doing with that? Same thing with Christ. We don't know what he's up to in our midst. What is he working unless we wait and watch?

Wait and watch. Prayerfully. Lord what are you doing? Why are you doing that? How's that work? Are you working here?

Show me what you're doing. How can I help? What would you have me do? And then when we see him working we join him. I think first we need to act like we know he's here with us even now.

And worship like never before. You know that song? Worship like never before. So let's pray that is talk with him.

[33 : 52] Act like we really do need an answer and some guidance. Let's serve like we really indeed are serving him. Making him our number one priority.

And his purpose our number one priority in action. And not just participate in some program or such that might suit us. Say well I don't want to do that because that's not my thing.

Or you know they're doing this but you know I don't really like that kind of thing. It's not up to us. Ask a servant. Ask a servant. If the master tells you to do something you get a choice.

A butler would not be employed long the boss said do this and he says I don't do shirts. And Christ the boss came to you and said I want you to do this and you go oh Lord you know that's not my gift.

He's saying I think you missed the point. Let's find some joy and peace that comes with this and be thankful for his love and his grace and his presence.

[35 : 00] Let's pray. Lord we thank you for your love and your grace and your presence here. You're here Lord as magnificent into the fullness of your power and your mercy and your grace.

Lord you're here. You're with us wherever two or three are gathered together. We need to remember that in our team meetings and even in our fellowship when we get together in our groups.

You're there with us in all of your glory and mind and power. Lord help us to keep our eyes open and our ears open to see and to hear what you're saying to us and then to be obedient.

To follow you no matter. To lead us wherever you would go. Have us do whatever you would do. We thank you in Jesus name. Amen.