Jesus and His Church

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 08 September 2002

Preacher: Canon Dr. J.I. Packer

[0:00] As you see, friends, I'm pinch-hitting for David Short, who, as it turns out, is not quite well enough, after all, to preach yet.

But I'm taking his passage, Revelation chapter 1, which I'd ask you to have open in front of you, page 227 in the New Testament section of the Bibles.
And I'm very happy with his title, Jesus in His Church. This is the first of a series of sermons on the first three chapters of Revelation, the letters to the seven churches.
And actually, David's title, Jesus in His Church, would fit all three chapters. Because that's exactly what you're confronted with all through.
The Lord Jesus Himself is the focus. He is presented to us, taking stock of His own church.
[1:05] And He communes with His people through communication. He sends each of them a letter, a business letter, in which He assesses how they're doing, calls on them to adjust things that are not quite right, and gives them wonderful promises of final glory to those who are faithful to the end and overcome, significant word, in the battles for faith and obedience in this world.

But if I'd been asked to give my own title to the message that God has given me, I would call it, and I speak as a man who loves alliterations, perhaps you know that by now, the violence, the vision, and the voice.
For those are the three realities with which this chapter confronts us, and which we're going to look at in order. What we're going to try and do is put ourselves in John's shoes.
John is a church leader. He may be John the Apostle. I shall assume that he is, although the scholars are not quite certain. And he's been exiled, deported, we would say, so that he can't lead and guide churches which are under persecution.
The Romans periodically persecuted the Christians because the Christians wouldn't join in the state religion. The Romans weren't interested in the reason why.
[2:55] The Romans had no concern for the Christian conscience. The Romans said, you do this or else, and the Christians in conscience couldn't do it.

So the persecutions took place. And as you know, I'm sure, religious persecution is again and again the worst sort.
And horrors were committed. I expect John had seen some of them. And as he sits in Patmos, 50 kilometers off the coast of Asia Minor, where the sphere of his ministry had been, isolated and unable to stand by the people and help them when they were undergoing such pressure and pain.
He's in pain himself. And this vision, which we're going to look at, was given to him in his distress, to sustain him in his distress.
And, well, we shall see just how that was to happen as we go along. It was a vision, as we know, of the exalted Christ.
[4:15] And it was a vision given in the way in which visions, it seems, were from time to time given to Bible writers. There's something to see, and it moves and it changes, even as you look, so that it's not possible to draw exactly everything that's described because of those changes.

But nonetheless, the seer has seen everything that was there, and verbally he reports it. And that's what we've got John doing here, as in a moment we shall see.
But the first thing I want to say about John as the pen man of this book is that he believes with all his heart that he is writing the word of the Lord, revelation from Christ himself to Christ's people.
To the churches who are going to get the letter, just as to John himself, it's Christ in communion with his people through communication.
Just look at those first three verses and you'll see it. The revelation of Jesus Christ. First words, and they make the point straight away.

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host

[5:40] The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what 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.

That was the substance of what he was given. As it was the substance of the ministry that he'd had before he was deported. If you look at verse 10, verse 9, I'm sorry, you see that again.
John says, second half of the verse, I was on the aisle called Patmos on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. Well, that's what John is given here.
More of the word of God, more of the testimony of Jesus. And he says, verse 3, Blessed is he who reads aloud the words of the prophecy.
He's saying, and he's in a position to say, this letter of mine is like the books of the Old Testament prophets who, as we know, were given messages from God for the people and their business was to relay those messages just as they came without adjusting them, without editing them, without watering them down.
[7:12] No, nothing like that. The prophet's business was to declare the word of the Lord just as he'd received it. And that was the faithfulness that was required of him.

Well now, the person who reads aloud the words of the prophecy is the chief pastor of each of the churches to whom, of course, the handwritten or hand-engraved copy of the letter would be sent. And in a church meeting like this, he would read it out as the message, the letter, the sermon from John.
And says, John, there's a blessing for him if he does that faithfully and reverently, just as, last part of verse 3, blessed are those who hear and who keep what's written therein.
Hear and receive. Hear and obey. Well, that's the setup. And now we get to the first of my V's.
[8:25] violence, which I have to talk about. I'd rather not, frankly, but it's part of the scene here. If you look at verse 9, you see John using a couple of words that speak of the violence.

I, John, your brother, who share with you in Jesus the tribulation, see it there, and the kingdom, that's the new relation to God, which we have in Christ, and it's also the hope of glory, which is before us in Christ.
Yes, I share with you in the kingdom as well as in the tribulation, and I share with you, he says, in the patient endurance. Take those words, tribulation and patient endurance for a moment.
tribulation is a Greek word that carries with it the root idea of crushing something, pressing down on it in order to break it, hammering it in order to knock it into small pieces, squeezing it, squashing it, putting it, as we say, under pressure in order to break it.
There's an English word abbreviated from tribulation, it's the word trouble. We use it often enough, and the message is trouble is coming, there'll be trouble, it will get worse before it gets better, things will be harder before they're easier.
[10:17] That's something that Jesus said to his disciples, you know, right at the end of his life. I guess we do know the words, in the world you will have tribulation. You've heard those words before, that's Jesus to his disciples in John 16.

And Paul, teaching the new converts in Asia Minor in Acts 14, says the same, it is through many tribulations, he says, that we must enter into the kingdom of God.
So I have to say, God calls us to get real about trouble. None of us is going to be exempt from it.
And John says, well, it's marked out for us as the path we must tread.
And we must prepare for it and not be surprised when it comes. But patient endurance is a word which stands for staying steady under pressure.
This too is the way it must be for the Lord's disciples. I hear the word patient endurance. I remember that what John is talking about as he uses this word and prepares the letter for the seven churches is the persecution which they're all of them facing and under which they must by God's grace remain standing.
[11:57] And my mind goes immediately to the wonderful response that Calvin's successor at Geneva a man named Bisa gave to the king of France who in an interview told him that he was not prepared to have reformed churches in France any longer.

They were going to be persecuted. They were going to be stamped out. and Bisa's wonderful answer was to say simply this may it please your majesty to remember that the church of God is an anvil that has worn out many hammers.

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host

A wonderful answer isn't it? This is how it has to be and this is what John is reminding his readers has to be as he pens this wonderful book.
Well now violence you see is a reality for them and what we have to face is that we still live in a violent world just as they did and violence may very well be in the most literal sense part of the pattern that awaits us.
What is violence? Well in the simple literal physical sense it's self-assertion against people whom one disrespects.
[13:43] it's the mindset which says well after all might is right and they haven't got any rights against me because I've got the power and they haven't.

So let's go ahead and crush them and this week on Wednesday on the 11th we shall be remembering a classic instance of that the terrorist hijacking of the four airplanes with the passengers of course which the 19 young men turned into huge incendiary bombs two of them brought down the World Trade Center one of them did damage at the Pentagon and who knows what damage the fourth would have done if some of the passengers led be it said by a Christian man hadn't tried to retake the plane from the hijackers and led them simply to nose dive it into a field well that was
September the 11th and it was traumatic for the whole western world for us I guess as well as for our American cousins the idea of the hijackers was the idea of violence as I defined it we want to kill as many Americans as we can we want to humiliate America as much as we can we can do this so let's do it and there's there's there's a further form of violence which we shall also have to think about this week and that is violence to the Christian conscience which we shall be facing up to at the church meeting the vestry on Tuesday evening Tuesday the 10th I wish I didn't have to say this but violence has been done to
Christian consciences as we all know by the leadership of the Synod of New Westminster where without anything like a moral majority behind them they took the decision to sanctify a lifestyle which the Bible not merely presents as displeasing to God but which it warns us is a way of life that is soul destroying and brings death pastoral Christians can only shudder at that but that's what Paul says 1st Corinthians 6 verses 9 through 11 you may like to look it up after the sermon Paul says don't be deceived as many were then and I think many are today let no one fool you about this those who follow this particular lifestyle will not inherit the kingdom of
God and we meet on Tuesday to decide how we respond to this disregard for the biblically informed Christian conscience I won't say any more about it now when I said this much in the first sermon this morning I gave great offense to one or two and I dare say I've given great offense now to one or two more truth has to be spoken whatever offense it gives friends I am not apologizing for believing that Saint Paul spoke truth but let's get on let's look at the vision and the voice thank you for your view thank you for your view but may
[18:22] I recommend Saint Paul now I will leave you to form your own judgment on that comment meantime let's look at the vision and the voice the vision was given to John to sustain him and I think that the vision may have that same blessed effect for us I trust so it's a vision of the Savior in his glory confronted by or rather surrounded by the churches Jesus in his church and says John describing what he saw I saw one in the midst of the lampstands verse 13 like a son of man now the scholars tell us that this phrase the son of man comes from echoes

Jesus echoing the apostles echoing what Daniel presents in Daniel chapter 7 a divine figure in the form of a man coming to take the kingdom the kingdom of God and to reign in it so the son of man phrase speaks both of the divinity and of the humanity of Jesus our Lord and every time we meet it in the New Testament we should understand that that's so this figure was wearing royal dress which marked out his dignity says John he was clothed with a long robe and with a golden girdle round his breast that wasn't quite the ceremonial dress of the monarch the ancient monarch but near just as it was the ceremonial dress of the ancient
Israelite priest and the judge in the ancient law court and it's a reminder of course that Jesus fulfills all three of those roles he is our Lord he is our priest our high priest who brings us to the father having made atonement for our sins from that standpoint he is the Lord who is the lamb the lamb as it had been slain which is how he has shown us in the book of Revelation and along with this presentation of his dignity we're told that his hair was white white as wool white as snow that's verse 14 and there are two thoughts there one is that he looked like an aged person this remember comes from a culture where the older you got the wiser you were expected to be and the more

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host

respect you got from those younger than yourself well that undoubtedly is part of the thought here but there is another thought too which this image of the white hair is expressing and that's the thought of purity the moral purity of the
Saviour's character that too is something of which John is being reminded by what he sees here and then come details which highlight the majesty the greatness of the Lord Jesus in his glory just as the sound of the trumpet which called John's attention to the vision had underlined the majesty of Jesus so now three details are given which highlight that further his eyes blaze eyes like a flame of fire they search the sight of the Lord Jesus permeates everywhere he sees everything he knows what's going on he is Christ the Lord and then
John says his feet were like burnished bronze refined as in a furnace you remember that in the Old Testament in the Psalms and elsewhere the victory of the Lord who gains the victory is often expressed by the phrase he treads down his enemies and this picture of cast metal is intended to show the decisiveness of the treading down when it happens and then his voice that was like the sound of many waters says John like a massive waterfall if ever you stood by Niagara Falls you will know what John means and finally there are details here which speak of the sovereignty of the Savior what have we got here humanity divinity dignity purity majesty and sovereignty he holds seven stars later identified as the ministers of his gospel in his right hand that speaks of his lordship and control over them and we're going to hear that he is the lord in charge of the seven churches the thought of sovereignty then is here as well and when
[24:50] John says from his mouth issued a sharp two-edged sword sixteen the image clearly is that the word of lord cuts cuts into the conscience exposes us to ourselves makes us face the reality of what we're doing and then it says his face was like the sun shining in full strength in other words it dazzled and John who was looking found he couldn't look because the light was too bright so you can't wonder that in the next verse he says when I saw him I fell at his feet as though dead it's a wonderful vision of the greatness and the glory of the lord and we do well to remember friends that though visions of this kind are not given to you and me not ordinarily anyway the lord jesus is as truly present with us st john shaughnessy and each one of us in this congregation as he was present with john when he allowed john to see him in this visionary way never forget that friends but now the voice he speaks i can't go through it all but two things which i ask you to remember take note of as i bring this message to an end first of all the i am statement that he speaks of himself echoing the words of the lord god in verse 8 i am the alpha and the omega who is and who was and who is to come the almighty what john hears jesus saying to him is this and it's the last words of verse 17 and 18 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 i am the lord in charge i am the one who finally determines destiny for everyone all power is given to me in heaven and in earth remember that john as you think about the churches you've left and your own position not being able to help them i can help them i am the lord and then note what he says to john about john back in verse 17 he laid his right hand upon me saying fear not don't be afraid perhaps you are afraid afraid for the churches afraid for yourself afraid of what the future may bring don't be afraid i am christ the lord in charge wonderful words the bishop of rome has made a great deal of them during his papacy we should be making a great deal of them as we speak to each other in these difficult days fear not and john i have a job for you to do now write what you see

and send it to the churches we all have different jobs to do but the lord asks for our obedience obedience in the present just as he asks for our trust as we look into the future do your job john and to you also as to me the savior says do your job right now whatever it is and as my job this morning i think was to share this message with you so there is obedience required of all of us and this brings me to the three questions with which i want to leave you as i close question one comes straight out of the passage where are you this morning john was in patmos you are in the congregation of st john's john was in the spirit he was brooding on divine things he was seeking the lord's face he was praying are we where are we in that sense and then second question who's with you i answered that question a moment ago it isn't just the people sitting next to you the lord is here and we are face to face with him just as john was on patmos you know what it is to acknowledge the lord's presence and hear the lord's voice can you say with the hymn writer i heard the voice of jesus say you know how it goes on come thou weary one lay down thy head upon my breast i came to jesus as i was weary and worn and sad under pressure i found i found in him a resting place and he has made me glad yes that's what that's what comes of listening to the voice of jesus what's he saying

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host

to you what do you hear him saying to your conscience right now i am not lord of your conscience that's between you and him and with that friends i leave you that's those are the questions i have to face with you we're under pressure all sorts of ways jesus is with us praise his name not fearing but continuing along the path of faith and obedience is the road that leads to the kingdom we've begun life in the kingdom already that's the road that leads to it in its final fullness god keep us on the road by helping us to face these questions realize these things and respond in a way which shows reverence and brings honor to jesus our living lord and savior himself amen

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host