

# A Last Look at Jesus for 2012

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] So friends, as has been reminded already a number of times this morning, it's the second last day of the year. Tomorrow, TV stations and newspapers will reflect upon the year that has been in the news and what there is to look forward to in the year ahead.

Traditionally, it's a time to reminisce and it's a time to plan and also a time to get over Christmas lunches. For me, 2012 has been a hard year.

How has 2012 been for you? And so there are things about Christ that I need very much at the end of 2012.

As I reminisce on the year that's been and as I think about the year ahead, I need the perseverance of Christ in the midst of affliction.

I need the energy and strength of Christ in the face of depleting resources. I need the wisdom of Christ in the face of complexities of life and ministry. I need the stability of Christ in the midst of rapid church and personal changes that are happening around me.

[ 1 : 0 8 ] I need the assurance of his sovereign authority in the culture, which is sliding further and further away from his truth. And so, two days before the end of the year, I want us to take a year-end look at Jesus.

The last look of Jesus, if you like, together for 2012. And we're going to do that in Revelation chapter 1. I want to, if you like, linger for a while with our gaze simply on Jesus.

As we think about the year that has been and the year that is to come, we need to fix our gaze on Christ. Why do that?

Because of all the uncertainty that surrounds me for the year ahead, I am certain of one thing. God's specific plan for me and his specific plan for you is that you be transformed more and more into the image of the Lord Jesus.

That was the message of Christmas after all, that Jesus came to save and to change. And true gospel change of a person's character comes from steadily gazing at the glory of Christ.

[ 2 : 1 8 ] That is what 2 Corinthians 3.18 says. So that is that God's desire for you in 2013, as it was for 2012, is that you be transformed more and more and more into the image of the Lord Jesus.

And the way he does that is by getting us to gaze upon the glory of the Lord Jesus again and again and again. That is how you get transformed.

So let's look at Jesus together for one last time in 2012. According to Revelation chapter 1, you need your Bibles open here, Revelation chapter 1. Go right to the end, Revelation, and then go back to the beginning of Revelation.

The second half of Revelation chapter 1 verse 9, John was exiled on the island of Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.

And so what John's writing first and foremost here to Christians who lived and died almost 2,000 years ago.

[ 3 : 29 ] Christians who lived in the Roman Empire and they were about to face the biggest nightmare that you can imagine. John hints at it right at the beginning when he talks about what must soon take place.

And again, at the end of verse 3 when he says, because the time is near. You see, these Christians were about to face the full force of the Roman Empire.

And according to the Roman writer Suetonius, the Roman Emperor Domitian, who was the kingpin in the Roman Empire when John wrote this, he demanded that all the people in the Roman Empire referred to him as the Lord God.

That was his request. And so John is writing to a bunch of Christians who are about to be fed to the lions. Christians who are about to be exiled, thrown out of their jobs, destitute refugees because they refuse to call a Roman Empire Lord God.

So this message is first and foremost to them. Those who are feeling the pressure to stop bearing witness to Jesus, to stop calling him Lord God and call a bloke who sits on a throne in Rome Lord God.

[ 4 : 59 ] To stop talking about Jesus as if he is important. And notice who this message is from that comes to John. Verse, it is from him who was and who is to come.

Verse 5, it's from Jesus Christ, the firstborn from the dead and the ruler of the kings of the earth, from him who loves us and freed us from our sins by his blood.

Verse 6, the one to whom power and glory belong forever. Verse 8, the one who is and who was and who is to come, the almighty, the ruler, in other words, from eternity to eternity.

You see, Domitian might be the emperor of the Roman Empire, but he is a library monitor compared to Jesus. You see, this word ultimately is a word of comfort and security for hard-pressed people of God.

And one of those whom is hard-pressed and feeling insecure is the apostle John himself who writes these words. You'll notice that if you read verses 1 and 2 and link them to verse 9, you'll see that he is hard-pressed.

[ 6 : 13 ] Because what John's been doing is he's been bearing witness to Jesus. And already it has got him into a heap of trouble. And he says there's more trouble coming soon.

Friends, it is just around the corner. Notice John knows exactly what he's going to be like. Because he's already facing it himself. John's writing from exile. You don't see it at first.

Because there's just a casual mention in verse 9 that he's writing from the island of Patmos. You see, Patmos is a prison island, six kilometers long. These days, it's got over 3,000 inhabitants.

And it's full of five-star resorts and luxury villas. But not in John's day. In John's day, he wasn't there for a holiday. He was there as an old man sentenced to work in the quarries.

Because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. And so what John says in writing this letter is that he is their partner to these seven churches out there, to the churches of Asia.

[ 7 : 21 ] I am your partner in suffering. Jesus was so real and so precious to John that he would rather be exiled in a barren island, cutting stones with a hammer, than to not talk about Jesus.

But now on the island, God gives John another remarkable glance. One remarkable chance here to gaze again on the glorious Lord Jesus.

He gives him a vision. But he does this not just for John, but for these churches in Asia and ultimately for us.

For these churches who are suffering, for those who are tired and weary and running out of steam and they are confused and disheartened and disenfranchised.

They are insecure. So in verse 10, John says that he was in the spirit on the Lord's day. So much so that suddenly I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet.

[ 8 : 32 ] And the voice says this in verse 11, Write on a scroll what you see and send it to the seven churches. You see, this means that the vision John is about to get is not just meant for John, it's meant for these churches, but it's also meant for us.

And the point of writing it down is to transmit to us the same kind of experience of seeing the glorious of Jesus that John himself had on that island.

Jesus does not intend to come to each of the seven churches in the same way that he came to John on the island of Patmos. He appears to John and says, John, write in a book what you see and send it to the seven churches.

John gets the vision, we get the book. He wants us to come to him through his word. He wants us to seek him in his words.

He wants us to know him by his word. He wants us to gaze upon him steadily through his word. The primary way of gazing on Christ today on his glory is through his word.

[ 9 : 46 ] And so we must be Bible-saturated people in order to be transformed into the image of the Lord Jesus Christ. So let's look at what John saw.

Verse 12. John turns to see whose voice was like that of a trumpet in verse 10. And what he saw was seven golden lampstands and Christ in the midst of them.

Notice verse 20 for an interpretation of the lampstands. It says, The mystery of the seven stars that you saw in my right hand and of 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 see, the vision of Jesus that John gets is him amongst the churches. Christ Jesus standing amongst his churches.

He is not merely over his church. He is not distant from his church. He is in the middle of his church. And what John saw, according to verse 13, was one like a son of man.

[ 10 : 55 ] Son of man was Jesus' favorite title for himself during his ministry here. You might think it refers merely to his humanity and so it is a title of humility and it's certainly probably that.

But in this instance, it is more than that. Mainly because of its use in Daniel chapter 7, which Betty just read out for us. In Daniel, the term son of man or one like a son of man refers to a great ruler over all other rulers.

It says this in verse 13 of Daniel 7. In my vision at night, I looked and there before me was one like a son of man coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the ancient of days and was led into his presence.

He was given authority, glory and sovereign power. All peoples, nations and men of every language worshipped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.

That's the son of man who John saw. And so when John says that he saw a son of man standing in the middle of the lampstand, he means that he saw someone with everlasting dominion and authority and glory and kingly power.

[ 12 : 17 ] Someone with authority over all the nations and over all peoples who would rule the world forever and ever because his kingdom will never be destroyed.

Unlike Domitian. The one who stands among the churches is the one who received from the ancient of days dominion and glory and kingdom rule and power and authority in heaven.

and on earth over all time and eternity. Then we get a specific description of what he saw.

The next thing John saw in verse 13 was that this son of man was dressed in a robe reaching down to his feet and with a golden sash around his chest. The robe here is similar to the robe in the Old Testament where it almost always refers to the robe of the high priest.

And the gold sash around his chest shows two things. The fact that it is high. It is not a belt around his waist. It is a belt around his chest. And sometimes we do see that, don't we?

[ 13 : 30 ] With pants that are up just a little too high. But in this case, it reflects that his priesthood is so very, very great.

So very, very great. Jesus, not only the son of man from Daniel 7 who receives everlasting dominion over all nations, he is also the final high priest who brings all the work of the priests in the temple to an end.

There is no more need for animal sacrifices. Verse 5 says that this Christ who has dominion from everlasting to everlasting is the one who has freed us from our sins by his blood.

He is a merciful, gracious high priest. The priest is so great that he gave his own blood once and for to put away all sins by the sacrifice of himself.

And this is the one who stands amongst his churches. The one who stands amongst us today as one with authority and everlasting dominion and one with final decisive forgiveness for our sins.

[ 14 : 37 ] The merciful, gracious Lord Jesus. Then John sees in verse 14 that his head and his hair were white like wool, as white as snow.

This is remarkable because in the same chapter in Daniel where John gets this picture of the one like the son of man, in verse 9, God the Father is described like this.

As I looked, thrones were set in place and the Ancient of Days took his seat, his clothing were as white as snow and the hair of his head was white like wool.

In other words, John is describing the son of man in terms used by God himself. You put this picture together with the next thing that John saw in the end of verse 14.

Oh, sorry. Yeah, the end of verse 14. It says there that his eyes were like blazing fire. The eyes of this son of man are not the clouded eye of fading glory.

[ 15 : 42 ] These eyes are sharp with clarity. They are purified eyes. They miss nothing that happens in his universe and they are exploding with energy.

We all know what it is to have the drooping eye of sleep. And some of you are yawning right now. That is about to go. You know what it's like. The eyes are closing. We also know the eye of resentment and the grumpiness and the half-shut scowl and the bad mood.

We know the eye, however, that is alive with wonder and with excitement and with hope and expectancy and energy like a child on Christmas Day with a huge present right in front of them.

And Jesus' eyes were like a flaming fire. What we see then is hair as white as snow and eyes like fire. When you gaze upon the Jesus at the end of 2012, remember that he is not tired.

He is not burnt out. He is not fatigued. Instead, his eyes are aflame with a flashing fire of inexhaustible energy and hope for his church. He sees everything that has been and everything that will be.

[ 16 : 57 ] Nothing will take him by surprise. And when Jesus thinks about his plans for you in 2013, when he thinks of his plans for St. Paul's and for his country and for his universe, he's not hesitant.

He's not wearied. He's not bored. His eyes are aflame with fire with utter exhilaration and passion and relish for the work that he intends to do as another year's pieces are put in place for the consummation of history where everything will bow down at his feet and say, you are king.

But there's more. There's the bronze feet of verse 15. A similar picture of glowing metal is found in Ezekiel and Daniel in both the brightness of shining metal or like a fire is connected with the glory of God.

They are the feet of a glorious and almighty conqueror over everything. Again in verse 15, is the voice like the sound of many waters. Again it describes the majesty of God as you might see in Ezekiel.

It is a picture of raw power. The thunder of his voice is authority. And then there is the right hand with the seven stars and the sharp sword coming out of his mouth and his face shining like the sun in full strength.

[ 18 : 24 ] What do you do when you're confronted with such power and authority and splendor and glory? Verse 17, When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead.

As at the end of times when Jesus comes back and people will say, let the mountains fall on me rather than be confronted with this Jesus. Share awe.

He is not to be trifled with. He is not to be treated with disdain. Who can stand in the presence of such a Christ?

And to John's immense relief, this judge, king, majestic, eternal ruler, reassuringly in verse 17, placed his right hand on John and spoke words of comfort.

Do not be afraid. I am the first and the last. I am the living one. I was dead and behold, I am alive forever and ever.

[ 19 : 38 ] These are astounding words of comfort for a prisoner of the Lord Jesus. Jesus' deity are implied in the threefold I am statements and in the title living one and by his sovereignty over history as the first and the last.

So this morning I want you to gaze on this. The great I am, the living one, the first and the last, is amongst his church St. Paul's as the son of man, the one with power over Chatswood and with everlasting dominion and glory.

He is the great high priest that has put away the sins of his people once and for all. He is the great and wise ancient of days, yet with eyes that are aflame with the fire of youth and energy and hope and exhilaration for his unstoppable plans for you and for his church St. Paul's and for his world.

Gaze upon Jesus in the last days of 2012 and let his royal power and his priestly forgiveness and his fiery hope fill you with confidence afresh that serving him in 2012 was not a vanity.

And it is not a vanity to throw your lot in with him in 2013. How encouraging it must have been for John in his weakness and need on the island of Patmos feeling what was just around the corner for his brothers and sisters in the seven churches.

[ 21 : 35 ] What an encouragement that the revelation of Jesus was as the powerful son of man in the midst of his church in their weakness and need.

So let me close this year and this last word, this last look at Jesus with three points of application. One for me, one for a small group of you, and one for all of us.

As I said earlier, as I began, this has been a tough year. As I recently read, there are a few things that will reveal to you the full range of your sin, immaturity, weakness, and failure like gospel ministry.

There are a few things that will expose your weakness to others as consistently as ministry does. There are a few endeavors that will put you under more public expectancy and scrutiny like ministry does.

There are a few things that are as personally humbling as ministry is. There are a few endeavors that have the power to produce in you such deep feelings of inadequacy as ministry does.

[ 22 : 54 ] And I read those words and I wept. I have become more acutely aware of it this year. Our church has gone through a number of painful transitions and I feel every one of them.

This time, we had 30 people more gathering with us each Sunday this time last year. There have been a number of difficult and ongoing and very painful pastoral situations where I don't have the answer for it.

I don't know what to do. We are \$120,000 behind on our offertory. The school was rejected at Roseville East by a handful of people.

The gospel appears to be making slow progress in our culture. The staff are tired. I see fragility everywhere I look. And at points, my resources have been very low and I feel weak.

I am weak. So what a wonderful picture this is for me in my weakness and need. The King of Kings, the Lord of Lords, stands in the midst of his church and he has done remarkable things in 2012 in spite of my weakness.

[ 24 : 17 ] It is his church. He is Lord over it. He is not distant from it. The only answer for me is to fix my gaze on him, to turn, to look and to see the Lord Jesus again and again.

It is essential for longevity and effectiveness of ministry that I spend more and more time communing with the Lord of St. Paul's Chatswood. Secondly, some of you are feeling insecure and fragile because of the cultural changes that we have made over the past number of years here at St. Paul's.

And for those of you who are feeling fragile, I am acutely aware that some of you are about to feel even more fragile because a dearly loved brother is near death.

For many decades, John Donne has been a source of wisdom and guidance. He has been a rock in hard times. He has thought for you. He has prayed for you. He has encouraged you.

He has rebuked you. He has taught you. For some, he has grown to become the primary leader in the church, a source of security and stability. And although he hasn't been here all year, he has been only a few streets away and at the end of the phone and potentially within hours, certainly within days, he won't be here at all.

[ 25 : 44 ] And you'll look around for the first time in decades and John won't be sitting in a pew. And that will unsettle you. That will be tough.

You will feel insecure. And for some, St Paul's will feel even more so different than what it has been without John. And in those moments, I call to you as your pastor to turn around and see Jesus.

To fix your gaze on Jesus in your insecurity, the Jesus that John has been pointing you to for decades. The triumphant, eternal Lord Jesus stands in the midst of his church, St Paul's, and he puts his hand on your shoulder in your weakness and your fragility and he says, I'm still king.

I am the living one. Last of all, for all of us, what are your new year resolutions?

And do they have anything to do with serving the almighty King of kings, Lord of lords, who is and was and always will be?

[ 27 : 02 ] And do they have anything to do with being transformed more and more into his likeness in 2013? What is it that you want Jesus to change in you in 2013?

What area do you need to let go of that he might be not just king of St Paul's but king of your heart? Let's pray. Our gracious Saviour and eternal Lord, help us, your church.

We are slow to learn, so prone to forget, so weak to climb. We are in the foothills when we ought to be in the heights. So make it our chiefest joy to know you, to treasure you and to represent you.

May we meditate on you, gaze on you, sit like Mary at your feet, lean like John on your chest, appeal like Peter to your love, count like Paul all things rubbish that we might know you more and more.

So give us increase and progress in grace in 2013 that there may be more decision in our character, more vigour in our purposes, more fervour in our devotion, more constancy in our zeal, rule in our hearts and over your church St Paul's, Lord Jesus, King of kings and Lord of lords, the beginning and the end, the living one who was and is and yet is to come.

[ 28 : 46 ] Come Lord Jesus. Amen.