

Jesus speaks to His Church - He is in the midst!

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[0 : 00] With John on the island of Patmos, which is kind of like Napoleon on St. Helena. He's in prison. He's been exiled. He's an old man.

He's the last of the apostles. The church is struggling. Rome is turning its attention toward the church, and it's been persecuted all over the place. And it looks like it's going to be wiped out, and everything is difficult, and it looks like they're going to lose what Revelation ends in the new Jerusalem, the heavenly city, in the eternal hereafter, where there will be neither weeping or mourning, where there will be no more death and no more sin, where everything will be okay for us, and God will wipe every tear from our eyes.

You are going to win. It's going to be all right. But you might not know all the details along the way, but the big picture is certain.

That's the encouragement of Revelation. That's how we should always read it and not get too bogged down, necessarily, in all of the detail. But notice the context in which the letter is written. So it's written to, primarily, to seven churches who existed at that time. Now, we mustn't miss that. Revelation chapter 1, notice, says, the revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place.

[1 : 34] So, yes, it contains elements of future prophecy.

And yes, it also provides a window to help us to understand Old Testament prophecy. Because if you read Revelation, you can't miss the fact that so many of the Old Testament prophets are explained.

But not only explained, they shed light on the fact that Jesus was in the Old Testament and we missed him. That the one like the Son of Man, did you read that phrase?

And did you read that Jesus had a voice that was like the sound of rushing waters?

Well, that explains what Ezekiel says about God's voice being like the sound of rushing waters. In other words, we're being told here that the Alpha and the Omega, that Jesus, who is with us in the fire and in persecution, is none other than Almighty God, who stood with His people, in times past, and will stand with His people forever in the future.

[2 : 52] That's why you win. Because He holds the future and can guarantee its successful conclusion. Newcastle are playing today.

Sunday, you've got to mention football. I can't guarantee that they'll win and get into the European Cup Champions League. If I could, they would already be champions of Europe many times over.

I have no power to guarantee anyone's victory. And it's true in the spiritual world. The Scripture does not say, well done, John Winter, you were able to keep yourself from falling.

And you were able to present yourself before the throne of God with exceeding great joy. The Scripture does say, now to Him who is able to keep you from falling.

For He is able to guarantee us victory. For He is none other than Almighty God, the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End.

[3 : 58] Praise His name. And John is speaking to the churches. At least Jesus is. The church that is now in trouble. John must have been spending his time worrying about the church when he was on the Isle of Patmos.

And in his prayers, he must have been praying. And maybe he was getting news. Things were going badly for the church. And he was thinking, what will happen? Will the church survive all of this? And now, once I'm gone and there are no apostles left, who will take over the leadership mantle?

Will they be as faithful? Those who perhaps didn't know Jesus as directly as we did. Oh, the future looked so uncertain. And the churches are not all faithful.

Some of them have been invaded by false teachers. And they've been led astray. And others have lost their first love. It's looking bleak. But John sees a vision of Jesus in the midst of the church. He is walking among the lampstands. And the lampstands stand for the churches. Jesus is in the midst. Just to reassure him that it is Jesus who will keep His church.

[5 : 19] I will build my church. And the gates of hell will not prevail against it. I am always walking among the lampstands. Even when they're faithless, I remain faithful.

And didn't he say to the church, where two or three are gathered together in my name, there I am in the midst of them. And yet, they're going to get a rude awakening.

They're not only going to discover that He is walking among them, but He knows everything there is to know about them. And that then makes you think twice, doesn't it?

Jesus is speaking to His church. Imagine if Jesus was to turn up the day and say, right, Whitby Christian Fellowship, I want you all to sit around in a circle, and I'm going to tell you all about you. I'm going to tell you what you're thinking and what you've been doing. And I'm going to tell you what I think of you. Wow, that would be scary, wouldn't it?

[6 : 18] What does Jesus think about His church? And oh, it's so faithless sometimes, isn't it? And so full of weakness and so full of contradictions.

He's not going to spare the seven churches. He's going to tell them the truth. And in six out of seven cases, He gives them a rebuke. There's one that's weak, but full of faith.

I like the irony of that. You know, the world is impressed by largeness and by liveliness. And these great mega churches, oh, look at that, thousands of people.

Wow, to go to their prayer meetings and look at that orchestra, my goodness. And all the money they've got in the bank, God must be blessing them. And not necessarily. That was Laodicea.

Rich in Christian goods, it had need of nothing. But Jesus says it's miserable, wretched, poor, and blind. God does not see as we see. He does not judge as we judge.

[7 : 20] We might think, well, that poor little church there, it's not up to much. And Jesus might be saying, it's very faithful. And I love it. And so we have to critically evaluate ourselves, not in the light of what the world calls success, but as to whether or not we're being faithful to Jesus.

Faithful in spite of the difficulties and the obstacles that are in our way. And so what can we see in chapter one? Very quickly, a revelation is revealed.

A revelation is revealed. This is from Almighty God. This is somewhere on a slide. If we can follow the slides. If the slides are stuck, don't worry. Almighty God is revealing something.

You can carry on from there. Just miss that one. No, no. It's two before. There we go. There we go. One more, yeah. Get there in the end. Revelation means this is God's definitive, unmistakable, supremely insightful word.

And it's a revelation. You wouldn't know it without it. God is getting to the very heart of the truth here. And he's revealing a truth about the world, its future, and the future of the church.

[8 : 50] And it's certain. It's certain. We can rest our hope upon it. And that's why that quote, you're not going to see by Martin Lloyd-Jones, is quite right.

He's saying, look, if you think revelation is just there to kind of satisfy your curiosity about the future, you've missed the point. Revelation is given to comfort you.

To comfort you when you go through persecution. Not if, but when. When the trials come, and when it's really hard to stand firm as a Christian, revelation is given to comfort you, to tell you that God is on your side.

Next slide. Next one. Secondly, there is a vision here of victorious Christ. We'll spend a little more time on this. John hears a voice, and he recognizes the voice.

But then he turns around and looks, and he sees one like the Son of Man. But he says he's like the Son of Man because he's like a man in shape, but not like a man in appearance.

[9 : 59] This man shines like the sun. This man is described as dressed in a robe, reaching down to his feet, and with a golden sash around his chest.

His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and his eyes were like a blazing fire. His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of rushing waters.

In his right hand he held the seven stars, and out of his mouth came a sharp double-edged sword. His face was like the shining sun in all of its brilliance. This was the man in the fiery furnace in Daniel chapter 3.

But this is also the Ancient of Days in Daniel chapter 7 verse 9, when Daniel says, You see where John and the imagery is coming from?

We're getting a window into the meaning of the Old Testament. Now a robe reaching down to his feet with a golden sash around his chest suggests regality.

[11 : 24] The apparel of a nobleman. His head and his hair were white like wool, as white as snow, a bit like mine. White hair conveys the idea of wisdom.

You might be pleased to know that I was. And the dignity of old age. But also it is a symbol of holiness here.

That's why it's white as snow. But then his eyes were like blazing fire. Because if you look at people like me with white hair, you might think, Oh, well he's getting old and he's past his best.

But not if you look into his fiery eyes. Then you see his spirit. This old guy is not past it quite yet. So the Ancient of Days has fire in his eyes.

He's ready to face his enemies. And he's ready to defeat them. And Satan will bring all of his might and all of his power. And this is the other big message of Revelation.

[12 : 30] You see, this world is not in the hands of Donald Trump or Vladimir Putin. This world is under the sway of the evil one who is seeking to destroy it in his mad obsession with unseating almighty God from the throne of heaven.

But the God of this world will be defeated. For the devil and his angels will be cast into the hell fire where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

In the end, Armageddon will mean his defeat. That is certain. But the whole world lies under the sway of the evil one.

And there is a battle going on. Between those who belong to the Lamb. Who are covered by his precious blood. And those who are under the sway of evil.

There is a war going on. And we must be ready to fight it. But don't be afraid. For behold, he is coming with the clouds. And every eye will see him.

[13 : 39] Even those who fear him. And so, third point here. There is this vision of the victorious Christ. And then there is a call to faith, not fear.

John sees the vision of this glorious Jesus. And he falls at his feet as though dead. Wouldn't you? To see him in all of his regal glory.

To see him in all of his almighty splendor. To stand before his holy presence and fall on your face in fear. Fearing that you might die. Well, that's not an unsurprising reaction.

But Jesus puts his right hand on him. Did you notice that it describes Jesus having the seven stars in his hand? The seven stars are the seven angels of the churches.

And the word angel, angelos, it means either literal angel. So it could be that every church has a literal angel. If so, welcome angel, whoever you are.

[14 : 44] But angelos just means messenger. So it could just be the presiding leader of the church. The bishop, the elder, whatever. But whoever leads the church, he does not uphold it.

The church is upheld in the right hand of Jesus. And yet the same Jesus who upholds the church in his right hand puts his right hand on his servant.

To say, don't be afraid. I'm with you. And that makes that passage so special to me. You see, we don't know what the future is going to bring.

We don't know how hard life is going to be for us. We don't know what we might have to go through and suffer in this world. But we do know that he who holds the earth in place, he who holds the future in his hands, He who holds the future of the church in his hands, holds us in his hands.

My name is written on his hand. It is near to his heart. Don't be afraid. He's got you. He's got you.

[15 : 59] When John, sorry, when Paul speaks to the Romans, and I'll end with this, when he speaks to the Romans, he talks to them about all that they're going to go through, and then he asks them a question.

Who shall separate you from the love of God? You're going to go through persecution. You're going to go through famine. You're going to go through sword. It's going to be really hard.

Who shall separate you from the love of God? He says, nothing. Nothing and no one. For in Christ we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.

For I am persuaded, he says, that neither life nor death, neither angels, neither principalities or powers, neither demons, nor any other thing in all creation, shall be able to separate you from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

And didn't you see that when Jesus said, I was dead and I am the living one, he says, what did he say? I hold the key of death. And here it is, the place of the dead.

[17:08] Why can nothing separate you from the love of God, not even death? Because Jesus has got the key. And when your body is buried, or when your body is burned, and you are cremated, he is able to raise you up again.

He is able to open the door of Hades, the place of departed spirits, and say, come out, come out.

You will not die. You will live. For I am the resurrection and the life.

And the one who lives and believes in me will never die. Because I live, you will live also. The end is certain. Your victory is secure.

Nothing can separate you from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. Doesn't that make you feel safe? Only, only, if you know the Savior who holds the key.

For only then will you be safe. And it may be time for you today to put your trust in the one who holds your life and everyone's life in his hands.

[18:26] And as I pray, I'm going to invite you to do that now. Shall we stand in prayer? Amen. Amen. Father, Father, we used to sing a song.

He's got the whole world in his hands. And we're so, so pleased, Lord, that you have. You are the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end.

You have everything and everyone and every one of us in your hands. Jesus, we thank you that you have placed your hands on so many of us here and said, do not be afraid.

Trust in me. And Lord, I pray that today those who have not yet experienced your love for them, those who have not yet bowed the knee to you, Jesus, as Lord and Savior, those who have not yet realized that their very lives are in the hands of you who have the key of death and Hades, that today they will come to put their trust in you for salvation.

May today be the day, Lord Jesus, when we hear your voice, when we open the door of our hearts and let you in. Thank you, oh Lord, that our victory is secure, that it will be well with us all because of Jesus.

[20:06] Amen. Amen. Amen.