

John has given us an introduction to this book and a greeting to the churches that is more of a doxology than a greeting. We have seen that the first words of the book are “unveiling Jesus.” I want to share a little more on what we may miss from just reading the phrase “revelation of Jesus.” Remember the last time that the world at large saw Jesus, He was a bloody broken man upon a Roman cross with criminals on each side. He appeared in His resurrected body to His followers, even 500 at one time (1 Corinthians 15:6ⁱ), but even in His resurrected body His glory was veiled. Only Peter, James, and John had seen the glorified Christ on the Mount of Transfiguration (Mark 9:2ⁱⁱ).

It is helpful for us to get an idea of what the world was like toward the end of the first century when this revelation was delivered to John. John was the last living apostle. The Jews were persecuting the church. The temple had been destroyed. Nero had accused the Christians of starting the fire that burned the part of Rome which coincidentally was the section he wanted to rebuild in A.D. 64. Christianity was now seen by Rome as different from Judaism and was therefore an outlawed religion. There are Roman documents from that time that tell of how Christianity had spread to towns and villages and was said to be undermining the government and was blamed for natural disasters. The Christians were accused of everything from cannibalism to incest, to revolutionary plots. For Christians, it was an exciting time to be living because so many were coming to faith, but it was a dangerous time to be living because the next earthquake could be an excuse to throw you to the lions. Tertullian complained that when anything goes wrong the response is to throw the Christians to the lion! He jokingly adds that it will be hard for that lion to eat so many people. In other words, Rome underestimated the growth of the church.ⁱⁱⁱ

John the Beloved was captured and, according to church tradition, Rome attempted to boil him in oil. When that did not kill him, he was exiled to a penal island, Patmos. It was there on that island that he received this revelation. The Muslim world is in a similar situation today. Many are coming to Christ but are also under constant threat of execution.

That was what the world was like when God saw fit to unveil His Son. We could read “the revelation of Jesus” as God gifting Jesus with this unveiling of His current glorified condition. Now we will see Him as He is. He is not the bloody broken man hanging in suffering at the hands of men and under the wrath of God (Isaiah 53:10^{iv}). Now He is the glorified King of kings and Lord of lords. What an encouragement to John and the church! What a warning to the world and to those in the church who are indulging in wickedness (Revelation 22:12^v)!

It is in this setting that John writes, *⁹ 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.* Revelation 1:9 John is not using his status as apostle for the authority of this letter. He is telling us that he is our brother, a partner in tribulation and the kingdom. He is one of us. He suffers like we do. He is a brother because we are all a family in the Lord. We all suffer rejection from the world because we do not belong to this world (John 17:14^{vi}).

John is one who patiently endures just like the rest of those in Christ. Please take note of this. If you have not had to patiently endure the hardships of being a believer, the

time will come! If you are in Jesus, you will be persecuted for your faith. Our response in Jesus is to patiently endure. Endure for a little while so you will obtain a better inheritance (Hebrews 11:35^{vii}). We endure the consequences of following Christ knowing that there is something better to come. This life is brief (James 4:14^{viii}). Eternity is a very long time. In the letter to the Church of Philadelphia, Jesus rewards them for keeping His word of patient endurance (Revelation 3:10^{ix}). Perhaps it is that Word that came through the Apostle Paul. *If we endure, we will also reign with Him* (2 Timothy 2:12a^x)!

The reason John was on that island was because of the Word of God and the testimony of Jesus. If you are true to the Word, and share the Word, and stand on the convictions we receive from the Word, you too will have to endure patiently (2 Timothy 3:12^{xi}). He was there because of the testimony of Jesus. Testimony is the word from which we get the world martyr. Another translation would be the “witness” of Jesus. Jesus witnessed to us the love of God (1 John 4:9^{xii}). It is such a powerful love and so undeserved that it calls for us to respond with our all. Jesus’ testimony is that He alone is Lord, and Rome did not like that. Our flesh does not like that! Our culture does not like that. But we unapologetically say that this is His testimony. He is the King of kings! There is no other way to the Father (John 14:6^{xiii}). There is no other life worth living but one in submission to Him. If you do not like it, ask yourself why. Is it because your ego wants you to be in control?

¹⁰ *I was in the Spirit on the Lord’s day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet.* Revelation 1:10 There are four passages where John describes himself being in the Spirit (1:10; 4:2^{xiv}; 17:3^{xv}; 21:10^{xvi}) which seem to divide off the four sections of the book. Picture John dressed in rags sitting in a limestone cave to get out of the sun, knowing it is the first day of the week when Jesus rose from death and the day of the week when the Spirit descended. See him there worshiping the Lord Jesus, as he remembers the things Jesus had done and said to him personally as he is caught up in worship. Suddenly there is a blast like a trumpet behind him. I can see him hitting his head on the top of the cave as he jumps around to see what that blast is. Before he can turn, he hears the instruction ¹¹ *saying, “Write what you see in a book and send it to the seven churches, to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamum and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea”.* An assignment – but look at the One giving the assignment. John certainly must have flashed back to the Mount of Transfiguration.

Why does it say that John was in the Spirit? Are we not always supposed to be in the Spirit (Galatians 5:16^{xvii})? The opposite is being in the flesh, dominated by it. Even an apostle had to get in the Spirit to worship. Are you in the Spirit this morning? What are you thinking about (Romans 8:5^{xviii})? That is one easy way to check. When we are in the Spirit the Lord has our attention.

¹² *Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking to me, and on turning I saw seven golden lampstands,* Revelation 1:12 This sounds like the lampstand in the Holy Place of the temple (Exodus 25:37). It was taken away as treasure when the Romans destroyed the temple. Its purpose was to give light to the priests who ministered to the Lord at the table of showbread and the altar of incense. We saw the number seven in the introduction; the seven spirits of God which most likely represent the fulness of the Holy Spirit. We will see in a few verses that the lampstands in this verse are the churches to whom the letters were written.

In apocalyptic literature like Revelation, there are lots of symbols and pictures. The lamp with seven flames is found in Zechariah 4. *Zechariah's lampstand, which symbolized the presence of God in the temple, is fulfilled by the seven lampstands of Revelation, which symbolizes God's presence in the seven churches to whom John writes (1:20^{xix}; cf. 2:5^{xx}). Zechariah's "two sons of oil," Joshua the high priest and Zerubbabel the royal descendant of David, are fulfilled in Jesus, who stands among the lampstands as God's presence in his church. Jesus himself fills the offices of High Priest and High King of Israel. The vision of the lampstand and the two olive trees in Zechariah guaranteed that God would empower the rebuilding of the temple. Similarly, John's vision of Jesus among the lampstands guarantees that God will accomplish his purpose in the building of the Church.*^{xxi} The rebuilding of the temple foreshadowed Jesus building the church.

Are you ready? Here is the unveiling of Jesus: ¹³ *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.* ¹⁴ *The hairs of his head were white, like white wool, like snow. His eyes were like a flame of fire,* ¹⁵ *his feet were like burnished bronze, refined in a furnace, and his voice was like the roar of many waters.* ¹⁶ *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.* Revelation 1:13-16 Let us take it slowly and do our best to see what John saw. This being was in the midst of the lampstands. Where is Jesus now? He is in the midst of the church!

Lone ranger Christian, hear this! If you want to be where Jesus is speaking and at work, you need to be in the church, the gathering of believers (Hebrews 10:25^{xxii}). I am not talking about a building or an organization. It is the gathering of true believers who know Him as Lord of their life. We were designed to function together. God establishes order. Yes, men create chaos and often are not in the Spirit. But Jesus is found in the midst of the lampstands (Genesis 2:9^{xxiii})! If you have been hurt by a group of believers, get over it. So, have I. It grows us up. It matures us. It teaches us it is not all about us. We are not here to have someone sympathize with us and agree on everything. We are here to worship Jesus. It is not about you or me! It is *all* about Him (Hebrews 12:2^{xxiv})!

He is like the son of man. This language is similar to Daniel 7. ¹³ *"I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him.* ¹⁴ *And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed.* Daniel 7:13,14 Daniel saw Him more than six centuries before John did. He is one like a son of man. He has a human form (Philippians 2:7,8^{xxv}).

He is dressed in a long robe with a golden sash around His chest. His hair is as white as snow, which identifies Jesus with the Ancient of Days described in Daniel 7:9^{xxvi}. But it is His eyes that captivate me. They are like a flame of fire, piercing, revealing, loving, and judging (Daniel 10:6^{xxvii}). Do we dare to look into them (Psalm 11:4^{xxviii}) *All are naked and exposed to the eyes of Him to whom we must give an account.* Hebrews 4:13b^{xxix}

His feet glow like refined bronze, a symbol of justice, and his voice is like a waterfall. His right hand holds seven stars and sharp double-edged sword is coming from His mouth (Hebrews 4:12^{xxx}). His face is shining like the sun on a clear day in all its

brilliance. That is Jesus today and every day. He is not on the cross. He is not in the grave. He is risen and more than alive. He is life (John 11:25^{xxxi})! He speaks to us. His words are a sharp two-edged sword, discerning the thoughts and intents of our hearts.

17 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, ¹⁸ and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades. Revelation 1:17,18 Daniel witnessed an angelic being in Daniel chapter ten with similar features and had the same reaction (Daniel 10:9,10^{xxxii}). The interaction with the supernatural takes from man his ability to even stand. Their touch strengthens the recipient to be able to receive the message they have been sent to give. The necessary command to "fear not" is almost always the first words of an angel, whether to Mary (Luke 1:30^{xxxiii}), or Daniel (Daniel 10:12^{xxxiv}), or Abraham (Genesis 15:1^{xxxv}). Even John who had witnessed the transfiguration needed to hear it. They are Jesus' first words in this book. After reading the words of the book, we need to hear them too. We can have no fear because of what He has done for us.

Jesus follows John's description with a self-description. John's Gospel has a number of "I am" statements from Jesus. I am the bread of life (John 6:35^{xxxvi}). I am the good shepherd (John 10:11^{xxxvii}). I am the door to the sheepfold (John 10:7^{xxxviii}). I am the resurrection and the life (John 11:25^{xxxix}). Here Jesus uses a description we saw in the last lesson, from verse 8^{xl}, describing God. They are both the first and the last. I have always thought how ludicrous it would sound in the mouth of anyone other than Jesus. But when He says it, it provokes reverent awe and wonder. The Alpha and Omega declares Himself to be the first and the last (Isaiah 44:6^{xli}). There is nothing that escapes Him. He sees all things of all time. (Hebrews 4:13^{xlii}).

He is the living one! He died and He is alive forever! Some in the Old Testament were raised from death, but they died again. When Jesus died, He conquered death. He took the keys of Death and Hades. Satan no longer holds the power over death, for Jesus is victorious, and Satan had to forfeit those keys to Jesus. When God said that if you eat of the forbidden tree, you shall surely die (Genesis 2:17^{xliii}), death became the lot of the human race. Satan could take claim to those keys. But when Jesus said, "*It is finished*" (John 19:30^{xliv}), He had earned the right to give His righteousness to those He chose (1 Corinthians 1:30^{xlv}). He took back those keys. Hallelujah!

19 Write therefore the things that you have seen, those that are and those that are to take place after this. Revelation 1:19 Once again, we have this past, present, and future dimension because John is writing about Jesus who was and is and is to come (1:4^{xlvi}). He is writing about the living One. The book covers what John had seen, the present, and the future.

20 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. Revelation 1:20 The symbolism is explained for us. The lampstands are seven churches that existed in Asia at that time. Because of the previous verse, some believe this speaks of church ages, past, present and future. I think our problems are the same throughout history because the heart of man is the same. We can see all of the church problems and victories in the church of every era. The church is the gathering of people. Some of those people may be backslidden or misled, but if they are in Christ, they are a part of the church. We even have unbelievers or those who have

not surrendered to the lordship of Christ among us and so we have the same problems these churches had (Matthew 13:38^{xlvii}). We are all works in progress.

People point to church problems as a reason not to believe in the church. On the contrary, it confirms the doctrine of the fallen state of man (Romans 3:9-11^{xlviii}). Every letter of the New Testament was to address a problem in the church. We must wait for heaven for perfection. In the meantime, we patiently endure as we grow in Christ and learn to love one another, warts and all (Luke 21:19^{xlix}).

The seven stars are the seven angels of the churches. There are a number of ideas about the meaning of these angels, but I lean toward the use historical information that would help us interpret the expression. The early church patterned its worship service after the synagogue. **The one who delivered the message on a given Sabbath, expounding on the passage that was read, was called the messenger. The word in Greek is *angelos*.** It is the same word for angels because angels are messengers. I believe the Lord was saying that on the Sunday the letter was read, the one to expound on the letter from Jesus was in the palm of His hand. Jesus would use the messenger to convey the letter purely and without personal agenda. God will see that His message gets through to His sheep. I count on that. We are all flawed, but God is glorified by the beauty He creates from flawed instruments (2 Corinthians 4:7¹). It displays His greatness. Of course, it could be a heavenly being as the word is used as such in the rest of the book. That is also a wonderful thought, that each true church has an angel assigned to it. To the angel of the church of Sedona write...

The reason God anoints the messenger is because God loves His sheep. If my message to you comes with the anointing of the Holy Spirit and you hear from the Lord, it is because He loves you, not because I am special. Oh, I can certainly get in the way, and I can be more available to Him, but the anointing on the message is because of His love for you. As the letter was read to each church, they were ready to listen intently because this is not just John's opinion. It is from the eternal One, our glorious, resurrected Lord. That is how we should receive it as well.

Imagine how this introduction to the letters that followed would have warned and encouraged the church living in that day. It should do the same for us today. It should really cause our ears to be open to what follows. We have seen in this passage the unveiled Jesus! What He will say is also an unveiling for it reveals His heart for the church, His bride. Are you ready to look into those eyes of fire? We will start the letters next week, but you can read ahead if you dare.

Questions:

- 1 What was the world like when John wrote down this letter?
- 2 How was Jesus unveiled?
- 3 What does that mean for them and us?
- 4 How is John like us?
- 5 What is Jesus' testimony?
- 6 What is the Lord's Day?
- 7 What is "in the Spirit"?
- 8 Relate the lampstand to the one in Zechariah.
- 9 Go over the description of Jesus.
- 10 Go over Jesus' description of Himself.

11 How did Jesus take the keys?

12 What does the vision of the glorified Christ reveal to you?

ⁱ **1 Corinthians 15:6 (ESV)**

⁶ Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep.

ⁱⁱ **Mark 9:2 (ESV)**

² And after six days Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. And he was transfigured before them,

ⁱⁱⁱ MacArthur New Testament Commentary on Rev. 1:9

^{iv} **Isaiah 53:10 (ESV)**

¹⁰ Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him; he has put him to grief; when his soul makes an offering for guilt, he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days; the will of the LORD shall prosper in his hand.

^v **Revelation 22:12-13 (ESV)**

¹² "Behold, I am coming soon, bringing my recompense with me, to repay each one for what he has done. ¹³ I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end."

^{vi} **John 17:14 (ESV)**

¹⁴ I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world.

^{vii} **Hebrews 11:35 (ESV)**

³⁵ Women received back their dead by resurrection. Some were tortured, refusing to accept release, so that they might rise again to a better life.

^{viii} **James 4:14 (ESV)**

¹⁴ yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes.

^{ix} **Revelation 3:10 (ESV)**

¹⁰ Because you have kept my word about patient endurance, I will keep you from the hour of trial that is coming on the whole world, to try those who dwell on the earth.

^x **2 Timothy 2:12a (ESV)**

¹² if we endure, we will also reign with him;

^{xi} **Revelation 3:12 (ESV)**

¹² The one who conquers, I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God. Never shall he go out of it, and I will write on him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down from my God out of heaven, and my own new name.

^{xii} **1 John 4:9 (ESV)**

⁹ In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him.

^{xiii} **John 14:6 (ESV)**

⁶ Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

^{xiv} **Revelation 4:2 (ESV)**

² At once I was in the Spirit, and behold, a throne stood in heaven, with one seated on the throne.

^{xv} **Revelation 17:3 (ESV)**

³ And he carried me away in the Spirit into a wilderness, and I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast that was full of blasphemous names, and it had seven heads and ten horns.

^{xvi} **Revelation 21:10 (ESV)**

¹⁰ And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great, high mountain, and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God,

^{xvii} **Galatians 5:16 (ESV)**

¹⁶ But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.

^{xviii} **Romans 8:5 (ESV)**

⁵ For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit.

^{xix} **Revelation 1:20 (ESV)**

²⁰ 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.

xx Revelation 2:5 (ESV)

⁵ 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.

xxi James M. Hamilton Jr., *Preaching the Word: Revelation—The Spirit Speaks to the Churches*, ed. R. Kent Hughes (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 46.

xxii Hebrews 10:25 (ESV)

²⁵ not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.

xxiii Genesis 2:9 (ESV)

⁹ And out of the ground the LORD God made to spring up every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food. The tree of life was in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

xxiv Hebrews 12:2 (ESV)

² looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

xxv Philippians 2:7-8 (ESV)

⁷ but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. ⁸ And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

xxvi Daniel 7:9 (ESV)

⁹ “As I looked, thrones were placed, and the Ancient of Days took his seat; his clothing was white as snow, and the hair of his head like pure wool; his throne was fiery flames; its wheels were burning fire.

xxvii Daniel 10:6 (ESV)

⁶ His body was like beryl, his face like the appearance of lightning, his eyes like flaming torches, his arms and legs like the gleam of burnished bronze, and the sound of his words like the sound of a multitude.

xxviii Psalm 11:4 (ESV)

⁴ The LORD is in his holy temple; the LORD’s throne is in heaven; his eyes see, his eyelids test the children of man.

xxix Hebrews 4:13 (ESV)

¹³ And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

xxx Hebrews 4:12 (ESV)

¹² For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

xxxi John 11:25 (ESV)

²⁵ Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live,

xxxii Daniel 10:9-10 (ESV)

⁹ Then I heard the sound of his words, and as I heard the sound of his words, I fell on my face in deep sleep with my face to the ground. ¹⁰ And behold, a hand touched me and set me trembling on my hands and knees.

xxxiii Luke 1:30 (ESV)

³⁰ And the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God.

xxxiv Daniel 10:12 (ESV)

¹² Then he said to me, “Fear not, Daniel, for from the first day that you set your heart to understand and humbled yourself before your God, your words have been heard, and I have come because of your words.

xxxv Genesis 15:1 (ESV)

¹ After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision: “Fear not, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great.”

xxxvi John 6:35 (ESV)

³⁵ Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.

xxxvii John 10:11 (ESV)

¹¹ I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.

xxxviii John 10:7 (ESV)

⁷ So Jesus again said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep.

xxxix John 11:25 (ESV)

²⁵ Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live,

xl Revelation 1:8 (ESV)

⁸ “I am the Alpha and the Omega,” says the Lord God, “who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.”

^{xli} **Isaiah 44:6 (ESV)**

⁶ Thus says the LORD, the King of Israel and his Redeemer, the LORD of hosts: “I am the first and I am the last; besides me there is no god.

^{xlii} **Hebrews 4:13 (ESV)**

¹³ And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

^{xliii} **Genesis 2:17 (ESV)**

¹⁷ but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.”

^{xliv} **John 19:30 (ESV)**

³⁰ When Jesus had received the sour wine, he said, “It is finished,” and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

^{xlv} **1 Corinthians 1:30 (ESV)**

³⁰ And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption,

^{xlvi} **Revelation 1:4 (ESV)**

⁴ 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,

^{xlvii} **Matthew 13:38 (ESV)**

³⁸ The field is the world, and the good seed is the sons of the kingdom. The weeds are the sons of the evil one,

^{xlviii} **Romans 3:9-11 (ESV)**

⁹ What then? Are we Jews any better off? No, not at all. For we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin, ¹⁰ as it is written: “None is righteous, no, not one; ¹¹ no one understands; no one seeks for God.

^{xlix} **Luke 21:19 (ESV)**

¹⁹ By your endurance you will gain your lives.

^l **2 Corinthians 4:7 (ESV)**

⁷ But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us.