

Revelation 1 - The Things John Saw

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Here we go. I don't know how you feel about going into the book of Revelation, but I think some people have traditionally kind of been afraid of this book for various reasons. Not the least of which it can be, you know, it can be challenging, but as we get into this study, let me establish one thing right off the bat, okay? There is no "S" at the end of this book title. We have to remind folks once in a while it is not "Revelations", although, you know, that kind of makes sense. But no, it is the book of Revelation.

In fact, you'll notice as you look in your Bible that the first five words of this book are "The Revelation of Jesus Christ". And that tells us what the book is about. It's about Jesus. He's the star of the book. It is all about Him. He is the focus. Interesting also, I think the word revelation itself is, I won't try to pronounce the Greek word, but it's where we get our word apocalypse. Although if you look up the word apocalypse in your English dictionary, it will speak of the destruction of the world. In fact, some dictionaries even will make reference to the book of Revelation as it relates to the definition of that word, but in the Greek the word that is translated revelation means "a revealing" literally "an unveiling". So the book of Revelation is the unveiling concerning the person and the work of Jesus Christ.

I wanted you to know that as we get into this book, we're going to follow some interpretive rules. Frankly, these are rules that we use pretty much in the study of any book of the Bible and they're applicable. We're going to talk about them here tonight because that's the way we're going to interpret the book of Revelation. As you can see on the screen, we've got the four rules of interpretation.

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The Four Rules of Interpretation

- The Plain Sense Rule

The first one is called the Rule of Plain Sense. Here's the definition: When the plain sense of scripture makes common sense, seek no other sense.

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The Plain Sense Rule

When the plain sense of scripture makes common sense, seek no other sense.

Now, that seems like a very simple sort of a rule, does it not? And yet you'd be surprised. Well, maybe you wouldn't. How often people will read the Bible when it makes perfect sense looking at it for just what it says, and they will move beyond that. They will go beyond and try to make it say something that goes beyond what simply makes sense. We're going to follow this rule of plain sense.

The second rule that we're going to be following is the Law of Double Reference.

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The Four Rules of Interpretation

- The Plain Sense Rule
- The Law of Double Reference

The Law of Double Reference is the tendency of scripture prophecy to sometimes refer to two events or people simultaneously - one relevant to the general time of the prophecy and the other relating to the distant, far-off future.

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The Law of Double Reference is the tendency of Scripture prophecy to sometimes refer to two events or people simultaneously - one relevant to the general time of the prophecy and the other relating to the distant, far-off future.

We see this a lot. I have brought this out to you many many times in our study of the Old Testament. It's basically simply saying that a single prophecy can refer to two events, usually one that is nearby and then one that is far off distant. We find the Law of Double Reference throughout the Bible, and we will certainly find it here. We're going to be looking for it and we're going to be watching for it. When you don't take the Law of Double Reference into consideration you get into trouble with your interpretation.

The third law that we're going to be looking at is the Law of Recurrence.

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The Four Rules of Interpretation

- The Plain Sense Rule
- The Law of Double Reference
- The Law of Recurrence

I'll just explain this to you. The Law of Recurrence describes the recording of an event in scripture, followed by a second recording of the same event, giving more detail. You guys know this, I'm sure from the book of Genesis. Genesis gives you the six days of creation, and then after it finishes with that, it goes back and focuses on just the sixth day and particularly the creation of the man and the woman. If you don't understand the Law of Recurrence, you're going to think that God created a bunch of people and then he created Adam and Eve.

But no, this is a recurring event. This is going back now and as it were, kind of taking a microscope and looking more deeply at what we had previously seen. That is the Law of Recurrence. It is another interpretive law that is very important to apply in the scripture when we see it.

And finally, this is one that you're all going to be familiar with, and that's the Law of Context.

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The Four Rules of Interpretation

- The Plain Sense Rule
- The Law of Double Reference
- The Law of Recurrence
- The Law of Context

It simply means that a verse can only mean what it means in the context, and it must not be taken out of context, otherwise it will lose its meaning. I have said to you many times, however, that there is an exception to the Law of Context. And that is whenever something is said about God or about His nature. Whatever is said about God is true in any context because God never changes. The context may change, but God never changes. So if the Bible says God is love, He is love in all contexts, right? If the Bible tells us that God is just and fair and righteous, then He's going to be just and fair and righteous regardless of the context. So that is the exception, if you will, to the Law of Context.

Those are the rules. These are good rules to use when applying or when going through and studying the scripture in any sort of a situation. We're going to be especially careful to observe them here in our study of the book of Revelation to guard against wrongful interpretations because as you can well imagine there

have been a lot of wrongful interpretations that have come out of the book of Revelation. If you want proof of that, just simply Google “the 144,000”, which we'll get to much later on in this book. You will find lots of groups over the years have said “we are the 144,000” and they make claims, you know, and so forth. The Jehovah's Witnesses laid hold of that. And there were other groups that did too. These are fanciful wrongful interpretations that come from not applying proper interpretive rules. So there you go.

We're going to divide the book of Revelation essentially into three sections. We're going to see these described in this first chapter.

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The Divisions of Revelation

- The things John had seen (Rev 1)
- The things which are (Letters to the Churches) (Rev 2, 3)
- The things which will take place after this (Rev 4-22)

The first section is The Things John Had Seen and that's going to be encompassed in the first chapter.

The second section is The Things Which Are, and those are the letters to the churches, the seven churches of Asia Minor. We'll talk about those when we get to Revelation chapters two and three. And then finally we will look at The Things Which Will Take Place After This and that encompasses chapters four through 22.

They all speak of future events after the end of the church age, which we are in right now. If you look with me in your Bible, at the first two verses of this book, it begins by saying:

¹"The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show to His servants the things that must soon take place. He made it known by sending His angel to His servant John, ²who bore witness to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw." (Rev 1:1-2 ESV)

So if you consider yourself today a servant of Jesus Christ, then this book is for you. Because that's the first thing that we hear. John tells us that all of the insights that have been given in this book were given to show His servants the things that will take place.

Notice that it says, “show His servants the things that must soon take place”. That's the word that is given in the ESV Bible translation. Frankly, I'm not

terribly crazy about the ESV translator's use of that word “soon”. Your Bible may say “shortly”, “the things that must shortly take place. But even that word can be misunderstood because this is actually a Greek phrase, whether it's translated soon or shortly. It's actually a phrase in the Greek, and it essentially means “something that will quickly or suddenly come to pass”. But the idea here is not that it's going to happen soon, but that when it begins to happen, it's going to happen quickly. In other words, once it gets started it will rapidly play out. That's what John is essentially telling us here that these are the things given to the servants of God to talk to you about the things which once they begin, will very quickly take place.

Next John gives a blessing to those who read and receive these words. You'll notice in verse three, he says, “blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy”. You can tell from that, that John intended that this book would be read aloud in church services. He pronounced a blessing upon those who would read them aloud. He said, “blessed also are those who hear”, and not just hear, but who keep, which means to respond and to embrace what is written in it, he says for the time is near.

Then we get to verse four, and this is where John begins to give his message saying first of all his name, John, to the seven churches that are in Asia. This is Asia Minor which is modern Turkey. These churches include Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea. These are seven churches that existed at that time. John is going to receive letters from the Lord that the Lord will dictate to him as we'll be reading in chapters two and three directed to these seven churches. We'll talk about what those mean. He goes on to say “grace to you, and peace from Him, who is and who was, and who is to come” speaking of the Lord, “and from the seven Spirits who are before his throne”.

Now, that's the way the ESV translates this, “the seven Spirits who are before his throne”. The NIV gives the same translation, but also includes a footnote. Those of you who have an NIV Bible in your lap tonight you'll notice that there's a footnote next to that phrase and it takes you down to the possible translation of the sevenfold Spirit.

We'll talk about that in a moment, but John doesn't explain what he means when he refers to the seven Spirits who are before the Throne of God. There are a couple of popular interpretations of John's meaning. The first is that this is just very simply a reference to the Holy Spirit, and John just happens to be using the number seven related to the Spirit because that's God's number of perfection and

completion and wholeness. I don't know, I kind of find that to be a fairly lame interpretation, to be completely honest with you.

The second popular interpretation is based on that alternate rendering from the NIV, the sevenfold Spirit and many believe that this refers to seven characteristics of the Holy Spirit.

But as I said, the fact is John doesn't explain it. This is nowhere else used in the scripture. If it's speaking of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit is nowhere else referred to in this way. If it is speaking of something else it is nowhere mentioned in the word of God. You know where the scriptures are silent on something I am usually very unwilling to venture a guess, because that's all it is, it's a guess. I really don't want to convey to you my guesses because my guesses aren't worth anything. But you know what, what we've hit here already in verse four of Revelation chapter one, is something I want to prepare you for in our study through the book of Revelation. Many times, we're going to read some statement or verse in the book of Revelation and you're going to hear me go, "eh?". And that's kind of it because there's a lot of things here that we just don't have the full word on or the full revelation necessarily about. I'm kind of adverse to guessing about such things.

As he goes on now in verse five, John passes along a greeting from the Lord himself. He says his greeting is also from the Lord Jesus Christ. He calls Him here, the Faithful Witness. I like that title because it speaks of His absolute reliability. Jesus is the faithful witness. When Jesus speaks to you, when He testifies about something, you know that you're getting the absolute truth.

He also, and boy, I'll tell you, that's something we long for, isn't it? He is also, according to John here in verse five, the first born of the dead. What does that term mean? Well, this is a title that speaks of Jesus being the first to die and then to be raised never to die again. In other words, the victory that Jesus won over death was a permanent victory.

You know, Jesus wasn't the first one raised from the dead. There were many people in the Old Testament raised from the dead. You want to hear a bummer? They had to die again. It kinda stinks, doesn't it? I mean, you think about that. You think, well, they were raised from the dead, Glory to God! Yeah, they had to die again.

Isn't that a joy? You know, it's like, yeah. Can you imagine these people in heaven? I died twice. You know, they brought me back to life and then I had to croak all over again. It was really fun, you know, sort of a thing. But what's

interesting about Jesus and this title, the First Born of the Dead, is that He was raised to life never again to die.

He is the first, and we are going to follow in His footsteps. And that's glorious to think about that. But He is the first, He came first. He trod that road first for us, death and then life everlasting. We have that to look forward to. Finally, you'll notice John refers to Jesus as the ruler of the kings on earth, and that's of course another way of simply saying King of Kings, as we see in other passages of the Bible.

Still in verse five, it says “To Him, who loves us and freed us from our sins by His blood”, we’ll keep reading here, verse six, “and made us a kingdom priest to his God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.”

Let's take a look at these sections. First of all, John reminds us that He loves us. That's one of those statements that we hear in the Bible. You can hear it in the Bible and it can go in one ear and even pop out the other and not have a great impact. We hear about God's love. “God so loved the world”, you know, and it all sounds very universal and very general, but it's not very specific. When we do get a specific sort of a sense of God's love, it's a very powerful thing. I don't know if you've had a personal revelation of God's love. There's a general revelation. God loves people, you know, God so loved the world, so on and so on.

But have you received a revelation of God's love to you personally? I mean, can you say to somebody God really loves me? I mean, He's delighted with me. Can you say that? It's an important thing. If it's something that you have not yet received, that personal revelation of His love, I would ask you, I would encourage you to ask Him to give you that revelation. Don't be afraid to ask Him. Don't be afraid that if you ask, He's not going to, that He's going to go, “well, not you, other people maybe, not you”. No, that's not going to happen. He loves you and receiving that personal revelation, I tell you, it'll just knock you right, just flat off your feet.

I remember the first time I had a revelation of God's love. I was in my twenties, hadn't been walking with the Lord all that long. If you would've asked me, Paul, does God love you? I'd go, oh yeah, sure, of course He does. But I'd never had that personal revelation. And when it came I was actually at church. I think it was after church, but we were kind of hanging around talking and stuff and I got this revelation of God's love. I literally went down on my knees and just began to ugly cry. Just right there, around the people that were standing near me. I just started bawling. I just couldn't help it because it was so impactful, so powerful.

God loves me, you know? I know what I am and He loves me. Wow. Blew me away. Absolutely blew me away. So, John reminds us of that. He loves us. And by the way, before I move on, let me just say that the enemy is very keen on trying to convince you that God doesn't love you. Okay? Just know that. He doesn't want you to get that personal revelation.

Secondly, John says that Jesus has freed us from our sins by His blood. This freedom that He has given to us through His blood from our sins is twofold. First of all, Jesus has freed us from the penalty of our sin. And then secondly, Jesus has freed us from the dominion of sin, or if you will, the sin nature. Now we understand what it means that we've been freed from the penalty of sin, right? That's just really a description of being saved. You're no longer under the penalty of sin because Jesus took your penalty on the cross, right?

So He freed you from that penalty. But you're also no longer under the dominion or the domination of sin. That means sin no longer has to be your master. Now, it doesn't mean you're going to live this perfect sinless life, but it does mean that you now have the freedom to live a sinless life. Do you understand that paradox?

And this is something that a lot of Christians struggle to understand. Jesus has set you free from the power of sin to dominate your life. Now you're going to mess up, right? Because you still have a sinful nature that is going to have a gravitational pull towards sin, but He still set you free. In other words, He's given you everything you need for godliness, everything you need, the Bible tells us for godliness. But you know you're never going to do it perfectly this side of glory, and God knows that. And He loves you anyway. Imagine that. But He has set you free.

Lastly, John tells us He has made us a kingdom. Your New King James Bible says He has made us kings and priests. The ESV says, He has made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father. Whichever Bible you have on this phrase, the bottom line is that He has given us a kingdom and a priestly purpose within that kingdom as we serve our God. If you know anything about the role of the priest in the Bible, and I'm not talking about Roman Catholic priests. Roman Catholic priests are a creation of Roman Catholicism. They are not really a creation of the Bible. The biblical definition of priests is quite different. You have been given a priestly role that is similar to that biblical definition. That's what John is saying here.

He goes on in verse seven, *“Behold, He is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him, and all tribes of the earth will*

wail on account of Him. Even so. Amen.” When he says that He's coming with the clouds is he talking about the rapture or the catching away of the church here, or is he talking about the second coming of Jesus? I want you to know the difference.

Jesus is coming first for the church, then He's coming to Earth, and those are referred to as different things. The first coming, if you will is given to us in First Thessalonians chapter four, and that is the catching away of the bride. Jesus doesn't actually come to earth when He comes to receive His bride. He comes and we meet Him, Paul tells us, in the clouds, according to First Thessalonians Four. That is what we call the rapture of the church or the catching away of the church. Paul says in First Thessalonians, we will be caught up to meet the Lord in the air. That's where we get our word rapture, “caught up”, to meet the Lord in the air.

Then you have the second coming of Jesus Christ, which is which when He returns and we come with Him at the conclusion of the Great Tribulation. Verse seven is talking about His second coming. It's not talking about the catching away of the church. How do we know that? Well, it says, first of all, that every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him, and all the tribes of the earth will wail on account of Him. I want to show you some interesting scriptures. First of all, he said that every eye is going to see Him. Did you know that Jesus said the same thing? Let me show you Matthew chapter twenty four and verses twenty six through twenty seven. It says:

Matthew 24:26-27 (ESV)

“So if they say to you, ‘Look, he is in the wilderness’, do not go out. If they say, ‘Look, he is in the inner rooms’, do not believe it. For as the lightning comes from the east and shines as far as the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man.”

Jesus is speaking here of His second coming and He's saying, everybody is going to see it and nobody's going to be able to have inside information and will say to you, oh, hey, the Messiah's back, Jesus is returned.

Listen, you'll know. Or the people on earth will know. If you're in Christ, you're going to be with Him in that second coming, right? So if you're not in Christ and you happen to live through the Great Tribulation, and survive it, then you may in fact see these things happen.

But I want you to notice that John also says concerning His coming, that even those who pierced Him, and all the tribes of the earth will wail on account of

Him. This is a specific reference to Israel when they behold the coming of their Messiah. The Jews believe that Messiah, some of them do, is coming and He will come at the end of the Great Tribulation. They are going to realize that He had already come before. Not only that, but they're also going to realize they crucified Him. They are going to weep and wail when He comes. They're going to be happy about the fact that He comes to deliver them from their enemies, but they're going to weep and wail when they realize they missed Him the first time. This is prophesied in the book of Zechariah, let me show you that on the screen as well:

Zechariah 12:10 (ESV)

"And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and pleas for mercy, so that, when they look on Me, on Him whom they have pierced, they shall mourn for Him, as one mourns for an only child, and weep bitterly over Him, as one weeps over a firstborn."

Again, this is a prophecy about how the Jews are going to respond when Jesus comes to the earth. That is what John is talking about here in verse seven.

In verse eight John is now finished with his introduction. Now the Lord introduces Himself and He says in verse eight, "I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty." So, there you go. There's God identifying Himself, introducing Himself. Alpha and Omega are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet. That would be like saying, I am the A and the Z. In other words, I am the first and the last. I am the beginning and the end.

Most people assume that this is God talking here. We assume that because of the language being used. The language is pretty clear. He says, I am the Lord God. And he also uses the words, the Almighty. And so we say, this is talking about God the Father, but if you go all the way to the end of the book of Revelation, you find this phrase used again. Let me put it up on the screen so you don't have to turn there.

Revelation 22:12-13 (ESV)

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

Revelation 22:12-13 goes like this, "Behold, I am coming soon." Now we know this is Jesus talking, "bringing my recompense with me to repay each one for

what he has done. I am, the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end.”

So, Jesus uses the same verbiage as this One who in the beginning of the book of Revelation says that I am the Lord God. I am the Almighty. What are we to conclude from this? Jesus is God. Jesus is one with the Father, the Lord God, the Almighty, the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last, and it is He who is coming soon.

Now as we get into verses nine through twenty. John is beginning to write here about that first section of Revelation that we talked about, that first category, and that is what he saw. What he saw and what we're going to read about here is he sees the glorified Jesus. Now, remember, John traveled with Jesus. For how long? We're not exactly sure. Probably the better part of His three-year earthly ministry. John lived with Him and ate with Him and worked with Him. He was there with Jesus for a long time. He knew what Jesus looked like. He had seen Him in His earthly body and he was very comfortable with that. But what John is about to be shown is the glorified Jesus Christ, and this is not what he's used to seeing. You might remember that Peter, James and John received a glimpse of this on the Mount of Transfiguration when they walked up to the mountain with Jesus. He was transfigured before them and His face shown and so forth. But that was a glimpse. That was a momentary glimpse. Now he is beholding the glorified Jesus.

We're going to read all through these verses together because I think they're just more powerful when you take them together. Then we'll go back and make some comments. Verse nine:

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. ¹⁰I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet ¹¹saying, "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."

¹²"Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking to me, and on turning I saw seven golden lampstands, ¹³and 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. ¹⁴The hairs of His head were white, like white wool, like snow. His eyes were like a flame of fire, ¹⁵His feet were like burnished bronze, refined in a furnace, and His voice was like the roar of many waters. ¹⁶In 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."

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, ¹⁸and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades.

¹⁹Write therefore the things that you have seen, those that are and those that are to take place after this. ²⁰As 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."

Wow. Feels like you need to kind of pray again doesn't it? A little bit here in verse nine though. As we get into this, John begins this section by revealing you'll notice that he was on the island of Patmos on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. Patmos was a penal island just off the coast of what is now Turkey. It was used by the Romans to incarcerate enemies of the empire, enemies of Rome, and that is why John referred to himself as your brother and partner in the tribulation. That just means the troubles that go along with being a witness of Jesus Christ. You might notice he also says, "I am your partner in the patient endurance that is in Jesus." I've always liked that phrase. There are some words that I think that we could benefit from just pausing for a while and thinking or maybe even meditating about how they apply to our lives as believers.

He says, "your brother and partner in the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance that are in Jesus", "the patient endurance". That pretty much describes how we're supposed to live. We are patiently enduring. Well, not always, we're supposed to patiently endure. We become very impatient sometimes though, don't we? We see things happening. We read the news, we hear things on the news or whatever, and we're like, "Ugh". We just get angry, you know. We see what's going on in the world, what's happening to children. We see what's happening to families and homes. We hear these things and sometimes we burn, we're disgusted by the way things are playing out in the world, but we are to patiently endure. We know that there's going to come an end. We know that there's a day that God has set, He calls it the Day of the Lord, when these things are going to be dealt with, finally, and with finality. We know that God is going to set things to right and we know that God is going to judge.

He's going to have His way. And we know that there's only so much we can do. We are called to be salt and light in the world, and we should be doing that. But I'm telling you right now, we're not going to be salt and light in the world if

we're going to just become impatient and angry. Nobody is going to make a difference in this world by being impatient and angry at the world.

Have you ever heard an angry street preacher waving his Bible in the air as you walk by and he's cursing everyone and everything? I remember when we lived in Seattle, that was back when it was safe to go to downtown Seattle. We used to take our kids, our little kids to downtown Seattle to the pier. We'd walk up and down and get our fish and chips and feed the seagulls and just hang out. Every once in a while you'd see a street preacher who was just angry. I mean, there were some that were preaching the goodness of God. I always remember though, whenever I see an angry street preacher, the Bible says, it is His kindness that leads us to repentance (Romans 2:4). We're not going to do much good by being angry and being impatient. So there is a patient endurance that God calls us to as we walk out the issues of this life.

John goes on in verse ten he says, I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day. Normally we would think that this phrase refers to Sunday because they actually referred to Sunday as the Lord's day because it was the day of the resurrection. That was the day that Jesus emerged from the tomb. But that's not what John is saying here. He's not saying I was in the Spirit on Sunday. This is not a noun in the Greek, it's an adjective. So he's saying, I was in the Spirit on this special day of the Lord. He calls it the Lord's day simply because of the things he saw and heard. He's saying it was a cool day of the Lord when I was in the Spirit and he begins to describe the one who is speaking to him.

If you look down now, this is verses twelve through sixteen. As we look again at these verses, he says, "I turned to see the voice that was speaking to me and on turning, I first of all saw seven golden lamp stands". Verse twenty told us that those golden lamp stands are representative of the seven churches. We're going to get into this next week in much, much more detail, but for now, you might kind of ask yourself, why did Jesus write letters to these seven churches? There were a lot more than seven churches weren't there? Well, yeah, of course there were. There were many churches. There was the church in Jerusalem. He didn't write a letter to them. There was the church in Antioch. He didn't write a letter to them. There was a church in Rome. He didn't write a letter to them. Why these seven?

Next week when we get into chapters two and three, I'm pretty sure we're going to take these individual letters one at a time, one week at a time. I believe that not only were these churches that existed at the time, obviously, but I believe that when you see what is said to each of these churches, they represent different time periods of the body of Christ throughout the ages. I'm going to

show you as we go through those letters to those seven churches, how what Jesus said to that church is uncanny in its representation or its reflection upon a specific time period in the history of the church age leading up to the present day.

That's why I believe Jesus chose these seven churches because these are messages to the body of Christ throughout the ages. He wasn't leaving out churches. These are letters written to the body of Christ throughout all time in what we call the church age. Remember this, the church age started at the inauguration of the church when the spirit fell upon the believers in the book of Acts chapter two. That was the beginning of the church age. The church age we are in right now, and it will continue until Jesus comes for his bride. When we are caught up to be with the Lord, that is the end of the church age. A new age begins, the world will be thrust at that time into that period of, what is called the Great Tribulation.

It is important and even necessary that the church be gone for that time period to take place. The church age must come to an end prior to the start of the great tribulation. This is an important thing to keep in mind when we see this image that John is describing of Jesus among these seven golden lamp stands, this means Jesus among His church. Jesus is among his church, you guys, He's here. Jesus is here, and not just here, but wherever two or more are gathered, He said, there I am. I'm with you. When you come together with other believers, Jesus is there. He is always with His church. He's in the midst of the church. I want you to really get a sense of that when we come together.

I have to tell you something. In all honesty, I get a little distressed when we begin a service and we're beginning to worship the Lord, and there are people hanging out in the entryway, not coming in. Because Jesus is in here and we're worshipping Him. Somebody really special is in here. If some dignitary who was known around the world, was here at Calvary Chapel Ontario and he was sitting right here, I dare say people wouldn't be hanging out in the entryway. They'd be in here. Especially, you know, once that person got up to speak. They'd be in here saying I want to hear what this guy says. This guy's known all around the world. Let me tell you, Jesus is infinitely more special than any dignitary we could ever invite to be here. When we come together as the body of Christ, we should be here because He's in our midst. He is among us and we are to worship Him. It's a glory that He is among us, and it's kind of to our own shame that we sometimes don't recognize that.

Verse thirteen, "in the midst of the lampstands was One, like a Son of Man clothed with a long robe. With a golden sash around His chest." That speaks of

Jesus' priestly role. We talked about the role of the priest from the Old Testament, literally by just looking at His clothing, knowing that there's a sash on His clothing that tells us that He's a high priest, He's our high priest. How do we know that?

Well, let me show you a passage from Leviticus. When Moses was told to dress Aaron with his high priestly garments, it says:

Leviticus 8:6-7 (ESV)

And Moses brought Aaron and his sons and washed them with water. And he put the coat on him and tied the sash around his waist and clothed him with the robe and put the ephod on him and tied the skillfully woven band of the ephod around him, binding it to him with the band.

Now, if you want to know how they actually made that skillfully woven band or waistband, you'll read in the Old Testament that they wove golden yarn or thread through this thing and it was very beautiful. But Jesus wears this same high priestly sash, but His is pure gold, which speaks of the superiority of His priestly ministry over that of the old covenant priestly ministry.

Now look again at the description John gives, in verses fourteen and fifteen, he says that the hairs of His head were white, like white wool like snow. His eyes were like a flame afire. His feet were like burnished bronze refined in a furnace like literally glowing. And His voice, he says, was like the roar of many waters. If you've heard rapids that's what he's talking about. It's that sound of roaring water over the rocks, you know, of rapids. It's this huge sound. If you compare that description with the individual that Daniel saw in Daniel chapter ten, you'll find that there's a lot of interesting connections. Let me show you on the screen:

Daniel 10: 5-6 (ESV)

I lifted up my eyes and looked, and behold, a man clothed in linen, with a belt of fine gold from Uphaz around his waist. 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.

The sound of a multitude is like this indistinguishable voice that comes from an immense crowd of people all talking at the same time. He says, that's what it sounded like. Those two descriptions are pretty interesting, are they not.

John says in verse sixteen that in His right hand, He held seven stars. Now again, we've already read verse twenty, and we know that the seven stars are

representative of seven angels and the word angel can also be translated messenger. So it could very well be the seven messengers of the seven churches. He says also in verse sixteen that from His mouth came a sharp two-edged sword. Of course, that's the exact description of the word of God that we're given in Hebrews chapter four, verse twelve. John says His face was like the sun shining in full strength. And by the way, that's exactly the way Matthew describes the face of Jesus at the Transfiguration. He says Jesus' face shown like the sun when He was transfigured in front of Peter, James, and John.

Now, John's reaction in verse seventeen is pretty understandable. Remember, John had lived with Jesus for a long time, and yet he says, when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as though dead. He literally just, I don't know if he face planted or fell back. I don't know. He just went down. He says it was like I was dead. Similar reaction by the way to that of Daniel, but both men were given strength. The verse says Jesus laid His right hand on him. Then notice how Jesus identifies Himself to John saying still in verse seventeen, "Fear not. I am the first and the last." And again, that is the beginning and the ending and everything in between.

This is God's way of saying I am the all in all. I encompass the beginning, the ending, and everything in between. And He also called himself here in verse eighteen the Living One. Now you might say, well, what's so special about that? I could say the same thing. I am the living one. Well, I'm one of many living ones because I'm sitting here today and I'm alive. Well, this obviously means so much more than He was simply alive. When He says, I am the living one, Jesus says, I am the source of life. I am the giver of life. In John fourteen Jesus claims to be the life. He says I am the way, the truth and the life (John 14:6).

That's a pretty bold claim. He goes on, I died and behold I am alive forever more. Now remember too, when Jesus says I died, this is not an admission that death ever had control over Him because death never had control over Him. He willingly gave Himself and when it came time to die, He gave up his Spirit. You remember that the Bible says He dismissed His Spirit almost like you and I would dismiss someone from a room. You know if I said to you, you can leave now, and you got up and you walked out of the room. That's the way Jesus, dismissed His Spirit. He said, You can leave now, and His Spirit left. He literally gave permission to His Spirit to depart because He was in control of His death. Very important that you see that.

Do you remember Jesus said as much in John chapter ten? Check this out. Jesus says:

John 10:17-18 (ESV)

"...I lay down my life that I may take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again."

So Jesus says, no one murdered me. I gave my life as a sacrifice. I gave my life. Very important that you see that when Jesus says I died He's not admitting a weakness.

Jesus says, "behold, I'm alive forevermore". And finally, He says "I have the keys of Death and Hades". I want you to know that Jesus alone has authority over death as well as the place of the dead, because that's what Hades means, the place of the dead. This should be a huge comfort for those of us who love and serve our Savior, the One who loves us. No, make that personal, the One who loves me has authority over death. That means that if I live long enough that Jesus waits to come for His church and my body does expire, that's completely in His hands. It is entirely 100% in His hands. He determines, as David said, all the days that were ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be (Psalm 139:16).

God is in control and for God, when you depart this life, it's like walking through a door. You walk through from this life to that life, and He has total authority. You don't need to be afraid. I mean, none of us is looking forward to the dying process. Don't get me wrong. I'm not trying to be coy. We all know we're going to die if the Lord tarries. None of us is looking forward to the process of seeing that or experiencing that as it happens. I mean, nobody who's sane would look forward to dying, but we at least know that He has the authority.

Then lastly, John is told in verse nineteen to write, therefore, the things that you have seen, those that are, and those that are to take place. Remember, those are our three divisions for the entire book of Revelation. He gives it here in verse nineteen and that's what we're going to follow. Next week we're going to get into the letters to the churches and those are the things that are, and then after that we'll get into the things that will take place. Then of course, verse twenty, the last verse is just the reminder of what the symbols of the stars and the lamps mean.

So there you go. There's chapter one of the book of Revelation. We'll get into the rest next time, Lord willing.

Let's pray. Father, we thank you for this first chapter from the book of Revelation. Thank you, Lord, for revealing these things to your servants. Thank you, Lord, because you know, you didn't have to tell us. You could have kept us in the dark. You didn't have to show us. You didn't have to reveal who you are and what you're going to do. You know, for that matter you didn't have to love us, but you chose to love us, and you chose to send your Son to pay the penalty of our wrongdoing. And then you told us all we needed to do was put our faith in that work and we would be born again, saved from all of our sin and forgiven. Lord, it's just too much. That kind of love just blows our mind, but we thank you for it. And we thank you that you are the Lord of our lives, the Giver of Life. I praise you for the things that we're going to learn as we go through this study in the book of Revelation. We ask you, Lord, to be with us every step of the way and to guide us in understanding and insight and application. We ask all these things in the name of Jesus Christ our savior.

Amen.