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Revelation 1:9-20

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English Standard Version

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## ***“The Lord of the Church”***

This is the 5<sup>th</sup> sermon in the series on The Book of Revelation entitled,  
***“The King’s Triumphant Return.”***

### **Revelation 1:9-20**

*“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. <sup>10</sup> I was in the Spirit on the Lord’s day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet <sup>11</sup> 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.”*

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

*<sup>17</sup> 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, <sup>18</sup> and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades. <sup>19</sup> Write therefore the things that you have seen, those that are and those that are to take place after this. <sup>20</sup> 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.”*

*Heavenly Father, please help us. Open our eyes and ears to truly hear and understand and apply this Word to our lives. Help us to understand why You have spoken to us this way. We want to be among those who are blessed for having spent time in this book. Help us to see Your Son in its words. Help us to meet Jesus in all His glory. Do this for each of us, this morning, in Jesus' name, Amen.*

## **INTRODUCTION: A Christian Gentleman.** <sup>1</sup>

Most people who've grown up in America are familiar with this song ...

*"It's a beautiful day in the neighborhood,  
A beautiful day in the neighborhood.  
Won't you be mine? Won't you be mine?  
Won't you be my neighbor?"*

Of course, it's the theme song of *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood*. I grew up watching *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood*. My children grew up watching *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood*. And I hope my grandchildren will grow up watching *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood* ... even if it's just the re-runs.

Fred Rogers was a Christian gentleman who epitomized gentleness, patience, and love. He was amazing! Even more astounding is that Fred Rogers lived out his Mister Rogers character when the film crews weren't taping. Most of us don't know another man quite like Fred Rogers.

That is, with the exception of Jesus. Be honest. Most of us have always thought of Jesus as sort of a deified Mister Rogers with a beard. Our minds picture Jesus as a baby born in a Bethlehem manger, a carpenter who worked with His father in Nazareth, a teaching rabbi who walked the streets of Jerusalem, a lover of children, a beaten and wounded prophet who died on a cross.

Of course, this does describes Jesus. Yet this describes Him **incompletely**. This is **not** the Jesus of Revelation. The Jesus of Revelation is the God of all the ages who sits in **judgment**. Many of us don't like this Jesus. We only like a Jesus that manifests grace, compassion, and mercy. We're much like children going through a buffet line. We pick and choose what to eat and what to skip. Most children select desserts and other good-tasting foods and bypass the vegetables, salads, and fruits. In the same way, we too can be guilty of picking and choosing what attributes of Jesus we find appetizing and neglect the rest.

There are two extremes: one that sees Jesus only as **King and Judge**; the other that only sees Jesus as Savior and Servant.

What happens if you only see Jesus as King and Judge? It's easy to corrupt Him into a distant or unpredictable or even abusive authority figure to be afraid of and keep your distance from. Some of you come from a family or church background in which this corrupted picture predominated. If so, you need to realize that this same Jesus who is so powerful and holy also loves you deeply, and is far more interested in what He can do **for you** and give you than in what you can do for or give **to Him**. He wants to have a love relationship with you that's full of security and goodness.

What happens if you only see Jesus as Savior and Servant? It's easy to corrupt Him into your domesticated pet who **entertains** you instead of a Lion who awes you; your feeble Servant

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<sup>1</sup> The Introduction is adapted from the sermon "*Awesome and Awestruck*" by Keith Krell, Timeless Word Ministries, Olympia, WA, [www.timelessword.com](http://www.timelessword.com), 3/1/06, [www.Bible.org](http://www.Bible.org)

who **facilitates** your agenda instead of a mighty Ruler who calls you to give your life to His agenda; your personal therapist who helps you **manage** your sin instead of an authoritative Leader who calls you to healing through repentance.

I think this second one is the more common error in our culture which wants a spirituality that leaves **us** firmly in control of our lives. Yet, after studying Revelation 1:9-20, I'm convinced that you will conclude that this isn't a Biblical option. Let's study these verses and get prepared to be awestruck and amazed by the Lord Jesus Christ. We start with verse 9 and ...

**v. 9-11: WHAT JOHN HEARD** <sup>2</sup>

*“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. <sup>10</sup> I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet <sup>11</sup> 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.”*

There are a couple of things here worth noting. When John tells us that he's *“in the Spirit,”* he's referring to the Holy Spirit who gave John the visions recorded here by transporting him to those vantage points from which they're described. This statement appears again in chapters 4, 17, and 21 and is used to make it plain to us that *“the testimony of Jesus”* comes through the person and work of the Holy Spirit. This means that **The Book of Revelation** isn't merely John's visionary musings, the daydreams of an imaginative mind, but is, in fact, the very word of God. This is a vision revealed to John by and through the power of the Holy Spirit. Furthermore, John hears a loud voice, presumably Christ's. It sounds like a trumpet. Throughout history, trumpets are used to sound the arrival of the King. Same thing here. And throughout **The Book of Revelation** we will repeatedly hear of loud voices, sounds, and noises; indicating to us that what follows is of great significance and universal in its relevance.

Now this is the first time that the seven churches to whom this letter is addressed are specifically mentioned by name. And starting next week, we'll look at them in some detail. **[Please put up the map.]**

If you look at this map of Asia Minor, you can see that these churches form a semi-circle, lying along the road which a messenger would have used to deliver John's letter to each of them. But the fact that there were seven of them — the number seven indicating fullness and completion — means that these seven churches and their individual circumstances represent Christ's church throughout the time between His first advent and second coming. Those things for which these churches are commended and rebuked are things which still characterize Christ's church throughout this present age and around the world. The issues these churches face are the same issues that we will face until Christ comes back.

John starts by writing, *“I, John, your brother and partner in the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance that are in Jesus.”* Don't you love this pastor? He writes

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<sup>2</sup> The Exposition of the text is adapted from the sermon, *“What the Bible is all about”* by Dr. Ray Ortlund, Jr., Christ Presbyterian Church, Nashville, TN, 11/14/05; the sermon *“The Revelation of Jesus Christ (Part 2)”* by Mark Driscoll, Mars Hill Church, Seattle, WA, 9/7/08; the sermon *“The Alpha and The Omega”* by Dr. Kim Riddlebarger, Christ Reformed Church, Anaheim, CA, 2002, [www.christreformed.org](http://www.christreformed.org); *Discipleship on the Edge: An Expository Journey through The Book of Revelation* by Dr. Darrell Johnson, pages 35-49; *Triumph of the Lamb* by Dr. Dennis Johnson, pages 55-63; *The Returning King* by Dr. Vern Poythress, pages 75-81; *The Theology of the Book of Revelation* by Dr. Richard Bauckham, page 14-16.

as a brother and a partner. He could have reminded them that he was the last living apostle. He could have reminded them that he was Jesus' best friend. He could have reminded them that he was the de facto bishop over all the churches. He could have said, "I'm John. I'm an Apostle. I'm a Bishop. You can kiss my ring. I'm very important."

**But no, there's great humility here.** John is not only serving God's people, but he's suffering right along with them.

Church history tells us ... the Bible doesn't say this ... but we read it in church history, so it's not infallible, but we read that the Romans feared John and tried to kill him at various times. One story says that they boiled him alive ... in oil. And he was horribly scarred for the last remaining years of his life. Don't know if that's true or not, but we do know that he suffered persecution and the effects of persecution most of his life.

We do know that the Romans during this time killed thousands of Christians. We do know that John was **leading** people to Jesus ... and **baptizing** them ... and because of that the next week he was **burying** them. The Romans would stack the bodies of the saints by the side of the road as a warning to others. And John and the other believers would come by and take down the bodies of their **friends** and give them a Christian burial.

I can't fathom that. I can't wrap my mind around finishing church, and driving home, and seeing the bodies of my parishioners stacked by the side of the road ... naked, beaten, and bloody. And having to stop my station wagon, and open the way back, and pick you up and throw you in the back of my car, and drive you to the cemetery, and dig your grave, and then give you a Christian burial.

**I don't remember signing up for that!**

We have it so easy. We have a set-up crew, and a nursery list, and children's church teachers. **John's church had burial detail !!!**

And finally, tired of John, the Romans shipped him off to Patmos, a rocky island in the Mediterranean that the Romans used as a prison — like Alcatraz in San Francisco Bay, but a lot bigger. John was sent there around 95 A.D. because he was bold for the gospel in a world impatient with truth. But he wasn't the only one. He writes as "*your brother and partner in the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance that are in Jesus.*"

Do you remember what the Apostle Paul said? **2 Timothy 3:12**, "*Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.*"

In other words, Jesus will get every one of us into trouble. Suffering is part of what it means to be a Christian. Look what John says: "*... the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance that are in Jesus.*"

What does **that** mean? The word translated "*tribulation*" means pressure. It's the pressure we feel every day to keep quiet about Jesus. But here's the good news. That hardship isn't merely coming at us from our social environment, our world, our culture; more profoundly, **it's in Jesus**. It's part of **His package**. It's a gift. Again, Paul wrote, **Philippians 1:29**, "*For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in Him but also suffer for His sake.*"

Jesus gives all his friends **the privilege** of proving that His steadfast love is better than life. He has also promised us an everlasting kingdom. That's in Jesus too. And He gives us the patient endurance to get there.

**Everything we need is in Jesus.** We need to **suffer** for Him, and He gives us the privilege. We need a **hope** as big as His kingdom, and He gives it. We need **patient**

**endurance**, and He provides it all.

And so John is all alone, left in a cave, stranded and exiled on a prison island ... he can't be with his church – they're suffering terribly and he can't be there ... he can't be with his people, some of whom are being martyred ... it has to be lonely. And it's the Lord's Day, it's Sunday, and so he worships ... he has church ... even though he's all by himself. And you can have church wherever the Spirit of God is ... any place, anytime, anywhere. And the Spirit of God is with John on Patmos. And so he has church. And what happens? **Jesus shows up.**

So let's take a look at ...

**v. 12-13: WHAT JOHN SAW FIRST**

*“Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking to me, and on turning I saw seven golden lampstands,<sup>13</sup> 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.”*

We know from verse 20 that these golden lampstands symbolize the seven churches John was writing to. What does that tell us? Two things. **One**, to God, a church is golden, it's precious. That's interesting. What in all this world does God value as gold? Not the great universities or libraries or art museums or even the wonders of nature. God values **His churches** — particular churches, like these seven churches in John's world and like Potomac Hills Presbyterian Church in our world. With deep emotion, every one of us must take our hands off this church and say, “This belongs to God. I will love ‘my church’ not as my possession but as God's. This lampstand **belongs to Him.**”

**Two**, a church is the light of its world. This golden lampstand isn't a museum piece to be protected under glass. A lampstand is for burning, for giving off light, for holding flames of fire. The lampstand is not the light, but it shows forth the light. Christ is the light and therefore Potomac Hills Presbyterian Church, as a lampstand, must burn brightly with Christ. A radiant church with a clear message, a church making Christ so **visible** no one can miss that message; a bright church brings the presence of God into its community.

**Philippians 2:15-16a** tells us that we're to “*be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you **shine as lights in the world,**<sup>16</sup> holding fast to the word of life.*”

The next thing we see is that Jesus doesn't rule over His churches by remote control ... from a distance. He's right here in Loudoun County, moving among His churches — stirring us up, keeping us lit, refueling us. John sees Him as “*one like a son of man.*” That language comes from the Old Testament. In the book of Daniel the prophet saw “*one like a son of man*” coming to God, the Ancient of Days, who gave this son of man eternal dominion and glory and a kingdom. That's found in Daniel 7, our responsive reading this morning.

In other words, God promised to unite the world under the lordship of a Messiah, at that time mysteriously unnamed. Now John is saying, “It's Jesus. He's the king God promised us so long ago. His royal clothing — His long robe and golden sash — mark Him as the most important person in the universe. You have a heavenly visitor in your church, and He's the king.” So let's see ...

**v. 13-16: WHAT JOHN SAW NEXT<sup>3</sup>**

*“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.<sup>14</sup> The hairs of His head were white, like white wool, like snow.*

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**3** A. W. Tozer quote comes from his book, *The Knowledge of the Holy*, page 11.

*His eyes were like a flame of fire,<sup>15</sup> His feet were like burnished bronze, refined in a furnace, and His voice was like the roar of many waters.<sup>16</sup> 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.”*

The Bible is all about Jesus. From cover to cover, in various ways, the Bible keeps on displaying Jesus. We see him from basically three angles: Jesus in His humility at His first coming, Jesus in His power and glory at His second coming, and Jesus now. What is Jesus like now?

We know what he was like at His first coming. According to **Philippians 2:7-8**, He “*made Himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.<sup>8</sup> And being found in human form, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.*”

And we know what he’ll be like at His second coming, **Revelation 19:15-16**, “*From His mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and He will rule them with a rod of iron. He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty.<sup>16</sup> On His robe and on His thigh He has a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords.*”

We know what He was like in the past. We know what He’ll be like in the future. But what is Jesus like now? How should we think of Him?

Let me ask you a question. How big is your Jesus?

Does the Jesus you know fit inside your own thoughts and expectations and schedule and budget and so forth? Or is your Jesus big enough to disagree with you and make demands of you and thrill you? Do you fall on your face before Him and say, “Lord, Your will be done in me”? Is that the prayer of your life?

What everyone on the earth must know is that the real Jesus is bigger and better than we think. Therefore, the most urgent business for you and me today is to see Jesus **clearly** and enjoy him **wholeheartedly**. Here in Northern Virginia there’s not a lot of biblical knowledge, and therefore not much biblical power, even within the church ... perhaps especially within the church. What’s gone wrong? A lot. But mostly, small thoughts of Jesus. A. W. Tozer said that the essence of idolatry is thoughts of God that are **unworthy of Him** – not thoughts of false gods but thoughts of the true God that are unworthy of Him.

What’s the remedy? A clear view of who he is.

That is what Revelation 1 gives us.

This book was written for suffering people. A storm of persecution was breaking over them. How could they endure it? Only by fixing their eyes on Jesus. What we most need in all our sufferings is **clarity about Him**. What matters most in our lives is not what happens to us **but who He is**. When people say, “I tried Jesus, but he didn’t come through,” they don’t understand. We’re not trusting Christ to give us ideal outcomes; we’re trusting Him **to give us Himself**, whatever else happens to us, because **He is our treasure**. Revelation 1 reveals that He’s not only up there in heaven but also down here with us, giving Himself to us. He is here, defending us, prizing us, rebuking us, reassuring us. He is moving among us here at Potomac Hills. His active presence explains everything.

How then should we think of Jesus now? John shows us. He tells us what He saw. What do we see? In verses 14-16, John describes him symbolically. John’s not saying, for example, that Jesus literally has a sword coming out of His mouth. He’s using metaphors, technically **similes**, to show us what Jesus is like.

Now let me stop for a moment to make an important point. **THIS IS KEY!!!** To understand **The Book of Revelation** from here forward you need to have **an imagination**. Now everything in the Bible is literal and so the Bible is to be taken literally. But you also have to understand that there are different kinds of literal. There's plain literal ... "**Judas hung himself.**" What do you think that means? Well, that means what you think it means. But here we read, verse 13, "*I saw ... one like a son of man.*" When the Bible uses the word "**like**" it's still communicating literally, but it's using **a figure of speech**.

And what that means is that we read narrative as narrative, poetry as poetry. To read the Bible literally, you don't read poetry as narrative. You read symbolism as **symbols for something else**, not as exact descriptions. Therefore, when John describes Jesus in these verses with **dramatic symbols**, he's telling us **what Jesus is like** ... much more than he's telling us what **Jesus looks like**.

In searching for the right words to describe what Jesus is like, once again, John draws upon the language of the Old Testament ... particularly **Daniel 10:5-6**, "*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. <sup>6</sup>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.*" And so here your imagination needs to kick in.

The Apostle John, "**in the Spirit on the Lord's day**," saw Jesus. And now he's going to explain that to you. The first thing John notices is that He was ...

- "***clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash around His chest.***"

Everyone I can find in the Bible that wore a long robe with a golden sash was either a king or a priest. And Jesus is both. His robe and sash indicate He's God's all sufficient and final priest.

- "***The hairs of his head were white like wool, as white as snow.***"

Wait a minute. How can that be right? In Daniel's vision back in Daniel 7 it was the Ancient of Days, it was God the Father, not the son of man, who had pure white hair. But John knows what he's doing. He knows that Jesus the human Messiah is also God the Ancient of Days. Jesus is everything worthily human and everything marvelously divine.

- "***His eyes were like a flame of fire.***"

John is declaring that Jesus is not only pure, but purifying. Fire illuminates and penetrates and cleanses, burning away the impurities. Jesus can look right through my facades ... and see all the junk that's ruining my life and burn it away.

In other words, his scrutiny sees through everything. In this world, we're often lied to; but no one's fooling Him and no one's getting away with anything. He misses nothing. He sees everything with penetrating insight.

- "***His feet were like burnished bronze, refined in a furnace.***"

No feet of clay here. What undergirds Him is solid. He has been tested and refined by fire (again, an allusion to Daniel 3 and the fiery furnace). Everything evil has attacked Him ... and He's still standing ... and His feet will leave the deepest and most lasting impression on this world of His.

- "***His voice was like the roar of many waters.***"

In other words, His voice generates the volume of a Niagara Falls. In **Revelation 19:6** John compares this sound with "*the voice of a great multitude, like the roar of many waters and like the sound of mighty peals of thunder.*"

Imagine the crowd at the Super Bowl roaring after a touchdown ... and that probably falls far short. John needs that kind of language to describe the powerful voice of Jesus. In fact, this language comes from the prophet Ezekiel in the Old Testament, who used it to describe the voice of God, **Ezekiel 43:2**, “*And behold, the glory of the God of Israel was coming from the east. And the sound of His coming was like the sound of many waters, and the earth shone with His glory.*”

Nobody drowns him out.

- **“In his right hand he held seven stars.”**

Verse 20 says that the seven stars are “*the angels of the seven churches.*” No one is sure what these angels are. The commentaries can’t agree. But the seven stars obviously tie in with the seven churches. So the basic point is clear. Christ holds His churches in his right hand. We are shinningly beautiful to Him, held close and safe. No power can pull us from His grip.

- **“From his mouth came a sharp two-edged sword.”**

In other words, Jesus judges with His word. **Hebrews 4:12** tells us “*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.*”

In chapter 2 Jesus warns the church in Pergamum that they have to discipline some of their members, **Revelation 2:16**, “*Therefore repent. If not, I will come to you soon and war against them with the sword of My mouth.*”

In chapter 19 He strikes down the nations with the sword of his mouth. **Revelation 19:15**, “*From His mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and He will rule them with a rod of iron. He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty.*”

Every human philosophy, every fraudulent culture — the gospel will have the final word over it all. Jesus takes His word and His truth seriously.

- **“His face was like the sun shining in full strength.”**

We’re just a lampstand; He’s the sun. He’s intensely glorious, like the blazing noonday sun. John has seen this before, at the Transfiguration of Christ, **Matthew 17:2**, “*And He [Jesus] was transfigured before them, and His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became white as light.*”

Sometimes the man-made glory of our own culture dims our view of Him. But it will fade away, along with every other false hope in history. Jesus Christ will outshine the world forever. And because of that, we can understand ...

#### **v. 17-20: WHAT JESUS COMMANDS**<sup>4</sup>

“*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,<sup>18</sup> and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades.<sup>19</sup> Write therefore the things that you have seen, those that are and those that are to take place after this.<sup>20</sup> 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.*”

And what’s John’s response to this overwhelming image, “**When I saw Him, I fell at His feet as though dead.**” If you ever hear someone say, “Jesus, the Bible — sure, I believe that

<sup>4</sup> C. S. Lewis quote comes from his book *God in the Dock*, page 147. Part of this section is adapted from the article “Notes on the Apocalypse #4” by Stephen Burch, 3/13/09, [www.feedingonChrist.com](http://www.feedingonChrist.com).

stuff,” **they haven’t seen Jesus.** John may have been the Lord’s closest personal friend when He lived on earth. But when John sees Jesus as He is now, he falls on his face. John not only used the language of Daniel 10, he knew enough to repeat the actions of Daniel 10 ... **Daniel 10:8-10**, “*So I was left alone and saw this great vision, and no strength was left in me. My radiant appearance was fearfully changed, and I retained no strength.<sup>9</sup> 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.<sup>10</sup> And behold, a hand touched me and set me trembling on my hands and knees.*”

The appropriate response to Jesus Christ is not fitting Him into our schedules and budgets and emotions, because “fitting him in” never puts us on our faces. The only appropriate response to Jesus Christ is the **reverence** of a sinner in the presence of God. Christian worship isn’t supposed to be a convenient drive-through for a religious happy meal; it’s supposed to be the deep reverencing of **Someone Else**, Someone without whose mercy we die.

In other words Jesus is saying, “If you have me, you can be fearless. I was here at the beginning, and I’ll still be here when the lights go out. I am the Living One. All other living beings are borrowing life from me, whether they know it or not. I was dead. I suffered the worst death in history. But I’m alive, and I’ll never die again. Death is under my control now. And I’m able to release you from your death. If you have me, you don’t need to fear a thing.”

What other great person has said, “I died, and behold I am alive forevermore”? What other great person has said, “I am with you always, to the end of time”? What other great person has said, “Where two or three are gathered in my name, there I am in the midst of them”? What other great person could say to people, “Your sins are forgiven”? Who else can forgive all our sins?

**Think about it. How big is your Jesus?** How do you know if your Jesus is big enough to go beyond you? Here are some indicators.

**One**, if you think your sin isn’t all that bad, if you think the Bible is **quaint** when it says that God abhors your sin, **your Jesus is too small.**

**Two**, if being fully forgiven forever by the all-holy God doesn’t surprise you and thrill you, if the cross is not the wonder of your heart, **your Jesus is too small.**

**Three**, if you can’t absorb change, if for you “church” is for making **your** life more **predictable** rather than more holy; **your Jesus is too small.**

**Four**, if it doesn’t disturb you that your friends without Christ are going to hell and that Jesus isn’t the delight of their hearts, if you tell yourself we can’t really expect these people to come to Christ, **your Jesus is too small.**

Do you need to repent not only of your sins but also of **your Jesus**? He’s bigger than you think. He’s better than you think. And He loves you with all His mighty greatness. He doesn’t despise you; **Don’t Despise Him!**

Everyone needs the gospel at every point in life. There’s never a point in life when we graduate from the gospel. Towards the end of his life John is no exception. He’s perhaps the holiest man on the planet. Think of John’s stellar life. He walked with Jesus. He was present when Jesus was transfigured. He witnessed the cross. He saw the risen Jesus. At Pentecost, John was clothed with power. He had done miracles, planted churches, written 4 books of the Bible and been instrumental in who knows how many people coming to know Christ. But all this doesn’t mean John has moved past his need for the gospel!

In Revelation chapter 1, John records an awesome vision of Jesus. But, before John could record this vision of Jesus, Jesus had to communicate the gospel to John. When John sees

Jesus with eyes like a flame of fire, a sharp two-edged sword proceeding from His mouth, and a countenance like the sun, he's not filled with a perfect love that cast out fear, but fear itself. He's so afraid that he fell at Jesus' feet as if dead. And before Jesus gives John his mission to write the vision, John needs to hear the good news of the gospel from Jesus. Jesus says, "***Fear not, I am the first and the last,<sup>18</sup> and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades.***"

Jesus proclaims the good news to John. In Jesus' words, we see the nuts and bolts of the gospel: don't fear because of who Jesus is (***the First and Last***), what He's done (***died and rose again***), Jesus' position of never dying (***I am alive forevermore***) and authority (***I have the keys of Death and Hades***). **Christian**, when God reveals Himself to you in a way you've never see Him before and fear, shame, and guilt arise as always — **you need the gospel** — Do not be afraid because Jesus is God who died for your sins and arose so you can have true life. Your Savior will never die so you are safe forever, and all authority is His so you don't have to fear anything. Gospel trust always precedes gospel mission. Jesus preaches the gospel to John and **then** gives him his mission of writing the vision.

This is not the only reason in the Apocalypse that we can see that John needs the gospel. In Revelation 5 he's weeping because he's not looking to Jesus, in Revelation 17 John marvels with great amazement at the Harlot, and in Revelation 19 John is rebuked for worshiping an angel. So, if the great Apostle John, who is afraid of Jesus, not looking to Jesus, Harlot marveling, and angel worshiping needs the gospel at this point in his life, **how much more do you?!?!?**

How much more do I?

### **CONCLUSION: *The Beacons Are Lit!*<sup>5</sup>**

J. R. R. Tolkien, one of England's literary greats from a generation ago, wrote about a fantasy world called Middle-Earth — and that world has now captured the imagination of millions of people in this generation. Tolkien's trilogy of books known as The Lord of the Rings has now been widely popularized through three blockbuster movies based on them.

The final book and movie, The Return of the King, portrays a world where the armies of darkness, made up of vicious subhuman beings, are moving to destroy the last bastions of human life in Middle-Earth. But as the rightful king of Middle-Earth begins to emerge, the humans are rallied to what becomes the decisive battle against this advancing evil.

In one drama-packed moment, one of the main characters climbs to the top of a daunting mountain, where a massive pile of wood awaits ignition. And there, he takes a torch and lights the signal fire. A waiting sentinel sees that fire and lights the fire on his mountain. And the summons-by-fire spreads across the breath-taking scenery of the kingdom, from mountaintop to mountaintop, and the sentinels shout the triumphant news — "***The Beacons Are Lit!***"

Two thousand years ago, it appeared that the forces of darkness had won their ultimate victory. The Son of God was dead, buried in a tomb. Those who followed Him were in total despair. That was Friday. Sunday was coming. And when it did, Jesus blew the doors off His grave and walked out under His own power, leaving death — man's ultimate enemy — vanquished and powerless. And that Easter morning, the beacons were lit. From the mountaintop of that generation, the message that Jesus is alive and death has lost has ignited a fire on the mountain of the next generation. And today, twenty centuries later, we are the ones

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<sup>5</sup> The conclusion is adapted from the email newsletter "A Word With You" by Ron Hutchcraft, 4/9/04.

left here by Jesus to light the beacon for our generation.

I love what one of my friends often says: "If non-Christians want to know what belonging to Jesus is really all about, let them come to our funerals." Well, it's there — the beacon from Easter morning shines the brightest when everything from earth has no answers. It is there, at our moments of greatest loss, that we win because Jesus wins.

In **Revelation 1**, the living Christ appears to the Apostle John in **all His glory** and says, ***“Fear not, I am the first and the last, and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades.”*** The blazing beacon of Jesus' victory over death means there is nothing in your life that is bigger than He is, and if you belong to Him, nothing can defeat His plans for you. Today, He's counting on you to light the fire for the people in your world. They can't see Jesus, but they can see you. Tell them that He died for them. Tell them He's alive for them.

And if you have never given your life to your rightful King — if you've never committed yourself to the King who died and rose again for you — then let this be your day to trade your guilt for His forgiveness and your death penalty for His eternal life. You don't have to live in the darkness anymore. From the empty tomb of the Son of God ... ***“The Beacons Are Lit!”*** **The King is coming!**

Think about that. You need to pray.

Take a moment to do that, and then I'll close.

*Lord Jesus, how encouraging to know that the most repeated command throughout the whole Bible is “Do not be afraid.” The angels spoke these words to startled shepherds at Your birth, and now You speak these words to our hearts, “Do not be afraid!”*

*Because you are the First and the Last, Jesus, we don't have to be afraid of anything in between. You are God, and we're not. You never have to scratch your head in confusion. You never have to resort to plan B. You are perfectly executing Your sovereign will, from naming the stars to numbering our hairs.*

*Because You are the Living One, who was dead and who is now alive forevermore, we don't have to be afraid of Judgment Day, this day, or any day. For Your death on the cross and Your resurrection from the dead is our assurance of being eternally accepted by God.*

*Because You hold the keys of death and Hades, and to everything else, we don't have to be afraid to die, and we don't have to be afraid to live. You have defeated all the powers of darkness! We don't have to be afraid of people. We don't have to be afraid of failing. We don't have to be afraid of getting old.*

*Place your right hand on us today in the gospel, that we might be freed more fully from our fears and live more fully to the praise of Your glorious Name.*

*Amen and Amen and Amen forever!*

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**Revelation 1:4-6**

*“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, and from Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth. To Him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by His blood and made us a kingdom, priests to His God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.”*