

Apocalyptic Hope: The Unveiling of Jesus

Revelation 1:9-20; 2 Timothy 3:12; John 15:20; James 1:2-4; Matthew 5:14; Daniel 7:13-14; Hebrews 4:12; 7:23-25; Proverbs 16:31

Last week we learned about what the word Revelation means. *Apokalypsis* or *Apocalypse* means revelation, unveiling, or disclosure.

We are continuing in the first chapter today. Before we can set up the rest of the book of Revelation, we have to understand the setup first. Before John sees a single seal opened, before one trumpet blows, before any of the things we usually associate with Revelation, God gives him a vision. It isn't a vision of the future, but of a person. We see who Jesus is. I think that's exactly the order we need in Revelation because the question underneath most of our fears isn't really "What's going to happen?" The real question is "Who holds the future?"

John:

Read Revelation 1:9-20. The vision comes to John while he is in exile as a prisoner. Look at how John introduces himself in verse 9. He doesn't call himself "John the apostle" or "John, the disciple Jesus loved." He calls himself your brother and your partner. Your companion.

A companion in what? Three things: the tribulation, the kingdom, and the patient endurance that are in Jesus. I want you to notice the order here. The kingdom sits right between tribulation and endurance. That's what the Christian life looks like between the resurrection and the return of Jesus. We really do belong to His kingdom. But we live in that kingdom through faithful suffering, not around it.

John is writing from real suffering. He tells us he was on the island called Patmos "because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus." Patmos was a small, mountainous island, about ten miles by six, in the Aegean Sea off the coast of what is now Turkey. John was not there on vacation, and he wasn't there on a mission trip. He had been exiled there as punishment for preaching the gospel. Conditions would have been harsh.

John isn't sitting comfortably in a study somewhere, speculating about the end of the world. He's an old man in exile because he would not stop talking about Jesus. He's writing to churches that were facing persecution from the outside and compromise from the inside.

That's who Revelation was written for. People who needed encouragement to persevere when they were persecuted, and people who needed to be challenged to stay faithful and not compromise. For people like that, these visions are timely, much-needed.

Encouragement:

Serving Christ will not be easy. Paul told Timothy, *"All those who want to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted"* (2 Timothy 3:12). Jesus Himself said, *"A slave is not greater than his master. If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you"* (John 15:20).

But look at the three words John uses, because there's real encouragement in them. First, **partnership**. John says, *"I am your brother and partner."* Partnership means we are not alone in

our suffering. We suffer as a family. Whatever you're carrying this morning, you are not the only one carrying it, and you were never meant to carry it by yourself.

Second, **pain**. "Tribulation" means pressure, trouble, affliction. We will have it. But tribulation doesn't have to sidetrack our walk with Christ. In fact, look at John, Peter, Paul, and our Lord Himself. They received the greatest revelations and climbed the highest spiritual mountains during times of extreme suffering.

Third, **purpose**. That word "endurance" means to stay under a heavy load. To stay with it and hang in there. Any crisis or tribulation you face does not catch Jesus off guard. Read James 1:2-4.

Most of us in this room will never be exiled to an island for our faith. However, the believers John wrote to were suffering socially, politically, economically, and some were being killed. We have freedom they never had. But here's a question worth sitting with: with all our freedom, how many of us have the courage to share God's Word with anyone? If we hesitate to speak about Jesus in easy times, how will we do it when times are hard?

The Churches:

John was in a supernatural state of inspiration. It was the Lord's Day, the day of worship, most likely the day the church gathered. But John couldn't gather with his church. He was cut off. However, on the day of worship while in exile, Jesus meets him.

John hears a voice behind him, loud like a trumpet: sharp, clear, and impossible to miss. From what follows, we learn that the speaker is Jesus Himself. The command is simple: write what you see in a book and send it to seven churches: Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea.

These were real, historical churches in Asia. In fact, those cities lie roughly in order along a circular road. This letter was meant to be carried from church to church and read out loud. The number seven stands for completeness and these seven churches also represent the kinds of churches that have existed all through history. Churches like ours.

We're going to spend time with those seven churches next week. For now, just notice this: John's suffering didn't end his service. The island took away his freedom, but it didn't take away his calling. He was still writing, still serving, still pointing churches to Jesus.

The Churches:

When John turns around, the first thing he sees is seven golden lampstands. Those lampstands would have been significant for anyone who knew the Old Testament. Moses built a golden lampstand for the tabernacle (Exodus 37:17-24). Zechariah had a vision of a lampstand (Zechariah 4). In Revelation 1:20, Jesus tells us exactly what these seven lampstands are: they are the seven churches.

Lampstands held small oil lamps. They existed for one reason: to give light. That's what the church is. God's light is meant to go out into a dark and evil world through His people. Jesus said, *"You are the light of the world"* (Matthew 5:14).

But here's the part I don't want you to miss. Revelation 1:13 says, *"and in the middle of the lampstands I saw one like a Son of Man."* In the middle. Jesus isn't watching His churches suffer from a distance. He's not up on the balcony. He stands among them. He walks among them. That means three things for the churches John was writing to, and for us: Jesus knows what they are going through, He will not fail them, and He is in the middle of everything they experience.

That title, "Son of Man," goes all the way back to Daniel. Read Daniel 7:13–14. It tells us Jesus is the heavenly Messiah, who is also truly human, and who will receive an everlasting kingdom.

John recognized Him. John had traveled with Jesus for three years, had seen Him as the Galilean preacher, and seen Him shining on the mountain at the Transfiguration (Matthew 17:1–8). Now he sees Jesus again: risen, glorified, and standing in the middle of His people...in the middle of the churches. When a church faces pressure from the outside, it should remember Christ's deep love and compassion.. When a church is torn up by strife and conflict on the inside, it should remember that the One standing among us cares deeply about purity and will not tolerate sin. Both of those are true because of the same fact: He is present.

The Unveiling of Jesus:

Now John tries to describe what he saw. I want to say up front: what John saw, human words could not properly portray. It's not a literal picture of Jesus, It's symbolic portraiture. So the question to ask isn't "What did He look like?" The question to ask is: What is John trying to make us see about Jesus?

Revelation 1:13–16

The Unveiling of Jesus

John's portrait of the risen Jesus and the Scriptures behind each detail

What is John trying to make us see about Jesus?

Glorious, holy, wise, authoritative, powerful, divine

13	One like a son of man	14	Eyes like a flame of fire	16	Seven stars in his right hand
Receives an everlasting kingdom	Nothing is hidden from him	His churches are held in his hand	<i>Daniel 7:13–14</i>	<i>Daniel 10:6</i>	<i>Revelation 1:20</i>
13	Long robe and golden sash	15	Feet like burnished bronze	16	A sharp two-edged sword
Our Great High Priest	Strong, solid, and stable	He judges by his word	<i>Exodus 28:4</i>	<i>Psalms 110:1</i>	<i>Isaiah 11:4; 49:2</i>
14	Hair white as wool and snow	15	Voice like many waters	16	Face like the sun in full strength
Daniel's words for God himself	The voice of the God of Israel	The glory of the Transfiguration	<i>Daniel 7:9</i>	<i>Ezekiel 43:2</i>	<i>Matthew 17:1–8</i>

Almost every detail is borrowed from the Old Testament. Let me walk through just a few because once again, we don't have a lot of time to get into the details of all of this!

His clothing: A robe down to His feet and a golden sash across His chest. That's the clothing of the priest in the Old Testament . Exodus 28:4 describes what the garments looked like when Aaron was being made priest. In Hebrews, we see what it means that Christ is our Priest. Read Hebrews 7:23-25.

His hair: White like wool and white as snow. This is one of the most powerful details in the passage. In Daniel 7:9, that's how Daniel describes the Ancient of Days, God Himself. John takes words used for God and applies them to Jesus. It speaks of eternity, wisdom, and dignity.

Read Proverbs 16:31. Our culture often links age with fading strength. But Jesus has all the wisdom of eternity and all the steadiness of age, yet He is never weak, never weary, and never faltering in His step.

His eyes: Like a flame of fire. This indicates penetrating insight. Nothing is hidden from Him. Every one of us is fully transparent to His gaze.

His feet: Like burnished bronze, refined in a furnace. He is strong, solid, and stable. He is not going to be knocked over.

His voice: Like the sound of many waters. In Ezekiel 43:2, that's the sound of the glory of the God of Israel.

His right hand: Holding seven stars, which verse 20 tells us are the angels, or messengers, of the seven churches. Scholars debate whether that means heavenly beings or human messengers, like pastors. But either way, the point is the same: Jesus's churches are held in His right hand, under His care and His authority.

His mouth: A sharp two-edged sword. This is not actual steel but speech. It's His Word. Isaiah says, *"He has made My mouth like a sharp sword"* (Isaiah 49:2). Read Hebrews 4:12. God's Word isn't just information. It cuts like a surgeon's knife. It shows us who we are and who we are not. It demands a response. We don't just listen to the Word; we let it shape our lives.

His face: Shining like the sun at full strength. His deity is gloriously on display.

Put it all together and here's what John wants us to see: Jesus is glorious, holy, wise, authoritative, steady, powerful, and divine. This is the One who stands in the middle of His church. He is a Prophet, Priest, and King.

Do Not Be Afraid:

Reread Revelation 1:17-18. John falls down like a dead man. That's exactly how Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel reacted when they saw God's glory. In our sinful condition, the magnificence of His glory would overwhelm us too.

Look at what Jesus does next. He puts his right hand on John. The same right hand that is holding the seven stars. The hand that holds His churches is the hand He lays on a frightened, exiled old man. And He says, "Do not be afraid."

Then He gives John three reasons not to be afraid. First: *"I am the first and the last."* In Isaiah 44:6 and 48:12, that's God's own title. He starts and He finishes. He was before everything

and He will be after everything. All of it is under His sovereign control. Your story didn't start without Him, and it won't end without Him.

Second: *"I am the living One. I was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore."*

Everything rests right here, on the cross and the empty tomb. Jesus isn't asking us to trust someone who's never faced death. He has faced it, gone through it, and come out the other side, forever.

Third: *"I have the keys of death and of Hades."* Hades is much like the Old Testament Sheol: the grave, the place of the dead. Death claims the body. Hades claims the soul, but not unless Jesus says so. He has the keys. He has the authority. He alone opens and closes the door.

Think about who first heard these words: churches facing persecution and some believers facing martyrdom. For them, this was the most important truth in the world. The worst thing their enemies could do to them was still under the authority of Christ.

That's the most important truth for us too. Our sin had convicted us and sentenced us. When we try to run our own lives and ignore God, we're on a course that leads straight to death. But when we put our lives in Christ's hands, He restores us now and He will raise us later to an eternal, peaceful relationship with Him.

So hear it again: **Jesus doesn't merely know the future. Jesus holds the future.**

John's Assignment:

In Revelation 1:19, Jesus gives John his assignment: *"Write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after these things."* Many see this as a preview of how the whole book is laid out. *"What you have seen"* is this vision in chapter 1. *"What is"* points to the letters to the churches in chapters 2 and 3. And *"what will take place after this"* points to chapters 4 through 22.

In Revelation 1:20, Jesus becomes our teacher and interpreter. He explains the mystery: the stars are the messengers of the churches, and the lampstands are the churches. He's looking for people who have ears to hear what the Spirit is saying.

Wrap-up:

So let's go back to where we started. John is in exile. The churches are under pressure. The future looks uncertain. Jesus doesn't answer them with a detailed explanation of their circumstances. He answers them with a vision of Himself. He shows them a Jesus who is alive. A Jesus who is present in the middle of His church. A Jesus who holds their future, and even their death, in His hand.

That's why this matters for our whole series. The One who promises to make all things new is the One who has already defeated death. His promises about the future are only as good as the one making them, and this is the One making them.

So whatever you're afraid of this morning, the diagnosis, the job, the child who's wandered, the world your kids are growing up in...hear the same words John heard, from the

same Jesus, with the same hand on your shoulder: *"Do not be afraid. I am the first and the last. I was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore. And I have the keys."*

Before Revelation shows us what will happen, it shows us who Jesus is. And because of who He is, we don't have to fear what's coming. Jesus doesn't merely know the future. Jesus holds the future.

Reflection Questions:

- What pressure, suffering, or uncertainty are you currently carrying, and how might Jesus be calling you to endure faithfully through it?
- What does it mean for you personally that Jesus stands “in the middle” of His church and holds His people in His hands?
- What fear do you need to surrender to Jesus as you remember that He holds the future?
- Before Revelation tells us what will happen, it shows us who Jesus is. What attribute of Jesus from this chapter do you most need to remember this week?