

Introduction to the Series

This Sunday is our third birthday. It was Sept.26, 1999 when our little Sunday night Bible study decided to meet for the first time on a Sunday morning, and we had our first worship service.

It has been an amazing three years. I never dreamed the church would bear as much fruit as it has in that short time – all the people who have come to know Christ, the amazing spiritual transformation and growth of so many, dozens of wonderful ministries that have blessed and edified so many...

It has been the thrill of my life to see what I always believed in theory actually take place in reality: the idea that if we just commit ourselves to the teaching and preaching of God's Word, to fellowship, to worship and to prayer, God would do great things.

It's fashionable for church plants to celebrate birthdays, but we haven't made a big deal of them, because I think measuring the amount of time spent merely existing is a poor measure of the success of a church.

But it serves as a nice time to pause and thank the Lord for all that He has done in our midst.

I believe the best approach for preaching God's Word is to study a book verse-by-verse.

But it's necessary in a church's infancy to cover some vital topics first.

We wouldn't want to worship together as a church for 5 years before we ever study church discipline for the first time, or the Gospel, or worship, etc.

So began with the Gospel, and from there explored the concept of God's calling.

Next we looked at the 4 Core Commitments from Acts 2:42, which are the essence of what a church is to do.

We studied

- Proverbs & Wisdom & Discernment
- Church Leadership
- How to Interpret the Bible
- The basics of the Christian life (Beatitudes, Php.2 & Col.3, Great Command)
- Church Discipline
- Creation and End times
- Spiritual Gifts

So now we have laid a pretty solid foundation except for one thing. If we want to have a healthy, effective church – a church that is pleasing to the Lord Jesus Christ, there is one passage above all that we must examine: Jesus' letters to the churches.

There are a lot of passages that speak to us as individuals, but not all that many that describe what a local fellowship is supposed to be like. What should an individual assembly be doing and not doing?

In Rev.2,3 Jesus Himself sent letters to seven local churches around Asia Minor telling them exactly what they were doing right, what they were doing wrong, and what He required of them.

So before we begin going verse-by-verse through the books of the NT, we need to do this one final specific study.

Revelation is comprised of a series of visions the Apostle John had on the island of Patmos, and in this study we are going to examine that first vision, which goes from 1:10 through ch.3.

Before getting to the letters, it's important that we take a look at this vision of Christ in ch.1, because that vision becomes the basis for much of what is said to the churches.

10 On the Lord's Day I was in the Spirit

It's typical of John to give details like the day of the week, or even the time of day things happen.

Here he starts out this grandest of all prophetic visions by saying, "It was a Sunday on Patmos, and I was in the Spirit..."

I was in the Spirit

This is a description of a prophetic vision.

When a prophet saw a vision, he was **in the Spirit**, which means the Holy Spirit enabled him to be aware of things that cannot be apprehended by the normal, human senses.

John is fully conscious – it's not like a dream (we see later that at one point he falls unconscious from fear).

This is a unique, prophetic experience of God directly revealing something in a visual way to a prophet.

and I heard behind me a loud voice like a ram's horn (When you see the word "trumpet" in the Bible, it's talking about a ram's horn.)

This calls to mind the sound of a ram's horn at Mount Sinai when God came down on the mountain with all the fire and smoke and earthquakes.

In OT prophecies references to the ram's horn are very common. They generally illustrate an important, official proclamation, or an alarm.

Most of the time trumpets are associated with the end times, so it's no surprise that they are mentioned more in Revelation than the whole rest of the Bible combined.

11 which said: "Write on a scroll what you see and send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea."

It's very likely that these seven cities were chosen, because they were the seven hubs of the postal districts for Asia Minor (Mounce).



But there can also be little doubt that the number seven is used in its very common symbolism for completeness. The idea is that what is said of these churches is applicable to the entire Church.

There is absolutely nothing in the text to suggest that they represent 7 ages of the church.

Even though there are specific things said to each church, all of it applies to every church.

When Jesus tells him to send this scroll to each city, it's not that only the relevant portions would be read in each place – the entire scroll would be read to each church.

12 I turned around to see the voice that was speaking to me. And when I turned I saw seven golden lampstands

The fact that he sees the lampstands instead of the voice is significant. We will look into that in detail next Sunday.

Christ's Presence in the Church

13 and among the lampstands was someone "like a son of man,"

Christ is walking among the lampstands. The point of this is to highlight the presence of Christ among the local churches.

The very last sentence in the Gospel of Matthew is Jesus saying **surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.**" (Mt.28:20) And here He is.

And that's significant, because, as we will see in ch.2,3, at least 5 of these churches are seriously flawed. They have some drastic problems – and yet Christ is still among them.

If you were going around the area visiting churches,

- one week you would go to one that had lost its first love,
- the next week one that has idolatry and sexual sin going on,
- the next week another one like that
- the next week you visit a church that is dead and has only a few actual Christians
- and the next week you walk into a place that is worthless and nauseating to Christ and that is wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked spiritually.

That was the condition of the churches, and yet Christ is still among them.

Christ loves His Church even with all her faults.

You have heard quite a bit from this pulpit condemning much of what goes on in churches today. I have had a lot to say about problems in the church and trends that I believe must be denounced, and unhealthy churches ought to be avoided.

However, we don't want to get so carried away with that that we become cynical about the Church.

Some people become so unhappy with the condition of churches that they drop out of church altogether. They can't find a church worthy of them, and so they just stay at home.

But we should remind ourselves that Christ was moving among these flawed, sin-riddled, churches.

Now it's true that the worst ones were about to be rejected altogether by Christ. The church that lost its first love was in danger of having its lampstand removed, and the one that was lukewarm was in the process of being totally rejected by Christ.

But if a church remains faithful to the Gospel, it remains a church. And Christ's promise still holds: **surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.**" (Mt.28:20)

Some of these churches that had these terrible problems, when they are being commended for their good points, sound like they should get a church of the year award.

Even with their problems, Christ Himself speaks very highly of them.

Sometimes when we see a flaw in a church, we write off everything they do. But if they are preaching the Gospel, we should appreciate that and rejoice over it.

We should notice and praise the good things, the bad things notwithstanding.

So the vision begins with Christ among His churches. From there we see the description of Christ, which is the main point of the vision.

The Description of Christ

One absolutely vital point to remember for understanding not only this vision but the rest of the book is this: these descriptions are not intended for the purpose of giving us a visual representation of Christ that we can picture in our minds.

If you try to imagine what is described, all you get is some bizarre image of a very strange looking individual with a sword protruding from his mouth.

The point is not for you to picture it visually. The glory of Christ can't be described visually to us in this life, because there is nothing in this world to compare it to.

Each feature represents something that is true about the exalted Christ. They are intended not just as images but as symbols.

So don't let yourself miss the point by trying to conjure up a visual image. (I read a whole paragraph in one commentary about the problem that Christ held the stars in His hand, and then in the next verse touched John with that same hand – speculating on where He put the stars!)

13 and among the lampstands was someone "like a son of man"
TT Dan.7.

That phrase **someone "like a son of man"** is a quote from Dan.7:13.

In ch.7 Daniel sees a vision of a truly awe-inspiring scene – he is permitted to see the very throne of Almighty God.

9 "As I looked, "thrones were set in place, and the Ancient of Days took his seat. His clothing was as white as snow; the hair of his head was white like wool. His throne was flaming with fire, and its wheels were all ablaze. 10 A river of fire was flowing, coming out from before him. Thousands upon

thousands attended him; ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him. The court was seated, and the books were opened.

What a scene. This is a description of God the Father sitting in all His awesome, majestic glory. And He is seated as Judge, about to pass judgment on His enemies.

His clothing was as white as snow He is perfectly, infinitely, totally pure and holy.
the hair of his head was white like wool. The white hair is a picture of wisdom and honor.

The age of an elder spoke of his experience and wisdom and was the basis for which he was honored. The point here is that God is eldest of the elders – infinitely experienced, infinitely wise. Worthy of infinite honor.

His throne was flaming with fire He is a mighty Judge, before Whom no guilty person escapes or goes unpunished.

13 "In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was *one like a son of man*,

- **coming with the clouds of heaven** (only God travels on the clouds)
- **He approached the Ancient of Days** (No mere mortal can approach the Ancient of Days)
- **14 He was given authority, glory and sovereign power** (God shares His glory with no one. Only God has sovereign power)
- **all peoples, nations and men of every language worshiped him.** (God alone is worshipped. It is idolatry to worship anyone besides the one, true God)
- **His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.**

So which one is God – the Ancient of Days, or the Son of man?

15 "I, Daniel, was troubled in spirit, and the visions that passed through my mind disturbed me.
Daniel is greatly troubled at this vision. It's confusing.

It's confusing, because the Ancient of Days is clearly Almighty God.

But the Son of man is described not only as being God, but in the most exalted terms that are normally used to describe God's *surpassing* greatness: **glory, sovereign power; all peoples...of every language worshiped him... everlasting dominion...**

So Daniel is confused. Turn back to Rev.1.

John sees the one like a son of man, and **14 His head and hair were white like wool**, and *He* sits as judge

You see what's happening in this vision? Jesus is finally relieving the tension of Dan.7. How can the son of man approach the Ancient of Days? Because the Son of man and the Ancient of days...are one.

Jesus is revealing Himself as the awesome Ancient of Days and the Son of man from Dan.7.

The High Priest

The significance of churches

13 dressed in a robe reaching down to his feet

This robe, in the context of being among the lampstands, is priestly garb (Ex.28:4, 29:5).

Jesus' care for the churches

And part of Christ's role as High Priest is to tend to the lamps. That was one of the duties of the high priest – to trim the wicks, replenish the oil, remove the old wicks, and generally make the lamps fit for use in the Holy Place.

So the picture is of Christ doing that with the churches. During this age, Jesus Christ tends to the individual, local churches maintaining us and keeping us fit for our task of expressing the glory of God in a dark world.

How does He do that? It's not some magical, spiritual action. We see how He does it in ch.2,3 – by commending, rebuking, correcting, warning, admonishing and exhorting the churches.

And that's what He is going to do to us as we study these chapters. This study over the coming weeks is going to be Christ tending to this lampstand.

13 dressed in a robe reaching down to his feet and with a golden sash around his chest.

A fabric sash around the chest was an indication of high rank or royalty. A gold sash indicates the highest dignity.

Jesus appears here as the Great High Priest walking through the Holy Place among the lampstands, and He is similar to the supernatural being in Dan.10.

Dan.10:5-6 I looked up and there before me was a man dressed in linen, with a belt of the finest gold around his waist.

It's hard to say for sure if the being in Dan.10 is an angel or God. He is described with even more exalted terms than Gabriel, terms very similar to those used to describe the vision of God in Ez.1.

But either way he is an exalted being who represents God, and Christ even outstrips the being in Dan.10.

14 His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and his eyes were like blazing fire.

That point of all that is to portray Christ as the Great, divine Judge.

- He sits as the Ancient of Days ready to pass judgment
- His white hair illustrates His surpassing knowledge and wisdom and fitness to judge, and
- His fiery eyes picture His penetrating knowledge of those He judges, as well as the wrath of God for those declared "guilty."

15 His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace

If you look at all the parallels to this in the visions of Ezekiel and Daniel, you will notice that all the references to glowing metal appear in passages that are describing the glory of God.

Ez.1:1,4 the heavens were opened and I saw visions of God.

4 I looked, and I saw a windstorm ...with flashing lightning and surrounded by brilliant light. The center of the fire looked like glowing metal,

Ez.1:27 I saw that from what appeared to be his waist up he looked like glowing metal, as if full of fire, and that from there down he looked like fire; and brilliant light surrounded him.

And remember the Dan.10 vision? **6 his arms and legs like the gleam of burnished bronze**

I read and read last week trying to get a handle on what the ancient people would have thought when they saw this imagery. I was getting nowhere, until last Sunday Jude walked up out of the blue and asked if I had ever seen molten brass being poured (!)

She had no idea I was studying this. It was just something that popped into her mind.

Jude is a professional sculptor, and in college she remembers how it effected her when she watched them do this. If you talk to her about it, you will realize immediately that it was an experience that had profound effect on her.

At first I thought that was a little odd. What's the big deal about seeing brass?

But after she described it, then I understood.

I'm tempted to have her get up here and describe it, so you really get the sense of how much it effected her, but I'm afraid she would take up my whole sermon time.

Let me just tell you two things the stuck out:

1. Danger. Working with molten brass is dangerous.

Now I'm sure in our day and age we have much, much more sophisticated equipment for doing that than they had in Daniel's time.

But still, people get hurt. They have to wear all kinds of special protective equipment, and they have to make sure they do everything over a big sand pit in case the crucible cracks.

If the crucible cracks (which happens, even with our modern equipment), and the molten brass runs on the floor, people can really get hurt.

2. The other thing that stuck out was the brightness of it. She said it doesn't look like metal. It looks like fire.

And it's so bright, you can hardly look at it.

I knew from my research last week that Jesus bronze feet had something to do with both purity and judgment, but I wasn't sure why. Now I understand.

You see, the point isn't so much that they were brass, but that they were brass in the furnace.

What John was seeing when He saw this vision of Christ was someone who was extremely pure, someone you could hardly look at, and someone who was very, very dangerous.

And the imagery of coming out of a furnace calls to mind the idea of purity – no dross, just solid, pure, unmixed, beautiful, gleaming brass.

The image Daniel saw in his vision in ch.2, which was an awesome, powerful, mighty image, had feet of clay and iron that were smashed, toppling the whole image.

Another thing Jude pointed out about brass sculptures is that even though they are generally hollow, they are virtually indestructible.

Brass is hard stuff.

Jesus' feet are totally pure, unmixed, solid bronze. He is not vulnerable in any way. And if He crushes you under His feet, you are thoroughly crushed.

and his voice was like the sound of rushing waters.

Ez.1:24 describes **the voice of the Almighty** as being **like the roar of rushing waters**

Ez.43:2 I saw the glory of the God of Israel coming from the east. His voice was like the roar of rushing waters, and the land was radiant with his glory.

I have been on a boat in a rapid that was so loud I could literally shout at the top of my lungs, and someone just a few feet away on the boat couldn't hear me.

The whole vision started with John hearing a voice like a ram's horn, now it's like rushing waters. The point is that it is loud, clear official and authoritative. This book is the most commanding thing Christ ever said to His Church.

The word "loud" occurs 21 times in Rev. (only 2 times in all the Epistles – and both of those are referring to Jesus).

This was not a silent vision. It comes to John not only visually but audibly, with tremendous volume.

When Daniel had the ch.10 vision of the one **dressed in linen, with a belt of the finest gold around his waist. 6 ... and his voice like the sound of a multitude....**

The rest of that passage goes on to say that all who were with Daniel at the time when he saw this ran away in fear, and Daniel collapsed in fear.

Then an angel told him not to be afraid and enabled him to speak again, but you can tell as you read the chapter that he is really in bad shape.

He is finally able to stand up, but he never does stop shaking.

So that's a well-known OT passage, and then when John sees this vision of Christ he says, "It was like what Daniel saw."

In fact, John combines all the images of the vision of Daniel 3, Daniel 10, Ez.9, the Ancient of Days in Dan.7 and the son of man in Dan.7 all in one.

And the effect on him is even more devastating than it was on Daniel: **17 When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead.**

This is the most exalted terminology that is available to human language.

16 In his right hand he held seven stars

In the OT and in Revelation angels are called stars (Job 38:7, Rev 9:1). And we find out in v.20 that these stars represent angels.

There is a huge discussion over who and what these beings are. The word “angel” means messenger. So it can refer to a literal angel, or it can refer, in rare cases, to a human messenger.

Some have suggested these are the messengers who carry the letter to the churches. Others have said these are the pastors of the churches.

The word *aggelos* appears 67 times in Revelation, and all the other references are clearly references to literal angels.

And the fact that they are called **stars** also points to them being angels, because several times Scripture refers to angels as being stars. Humans are never called stars.

We read in 1 Co.11 that there are some things we do in our corporate worship because of the angels. Angels are involved in what we do as a church, and here we find that apparently there are specific angels assigned to specific churches.

I say that, because if you look at the beginning of each letter you will see that the letter is addressed to that church’s angel, and yet by reading the letter you can see that it is for the people in the church as well.

So by addressing it to that church’s angel, He is addressing it to that church.

One argument used against the angel view is the rebukes in the letters. But that isn’t a problem. If there are angels who are assigned to each church, certainly they must have a duty, and can in some sense be held accountable for the things that go wrong in that church. (see Caird)

The fact that the angels (and, by implication, the churches they represent) are in Christ’s hand demonstrates

1. His protection of the churches. We are in His grip, and nothing can touch us without His permission. This is crucial for us to understand – especially given what’s coming in the rest of the book.

But more than protection, this illustrates...

2. His sovereign control over the churches.

What happens to Creekside church is not in the hands of the Boulder County government, or Louisville, or the elders or deacons... Christ determines what happens with us.

and out of his mouth came a sharp double-edged sword.

This imagery comes from Isa.11:4, which says the Root from the stump of Jesse (the Messiah) will someday come and **He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth; with the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked. 5 Righteousness will be his belt and faithfulness the sash around his waist. 6 The wolf will live with the lamb...**

Also Isa 49:2 **He made my mouth like a sharpened sword**

The word sword is *ramphaia* – that’s the huge, 3 foot Roman broadsword. They were big and heavy and very difficult to move with very much speed or precision or skill, but they would do massive damage.

Basically, if you received a direct blow from a *romphaia* you were finished.

This sword coming out of His mouth is referred to several times throughout Revelation. He utterly destroys by mere command. That’s the power of His Word.

His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance.

Glory beyond what can be looked upon by man.

17 When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead.

He didn’t just get dazed or a little light-headed. He was out like a light. This same phrase is used to describe the soldiers guarding Jesus’ tomb in Mt.28:4.

They were unconscious – so much so that they had no awareness of any of the amazing events that were going on.

This vision literally knocked John out cold.

No matter how frightening something is, people generally don’t pass out from fear. I’ve seen a lot of people do a lot of very scary things, but never have I seen someone pass out from fear.

You may read this description and think, “That doesn’t sound so scary.” But keep in mind, the point of the description is not for you to picture in your mind what it looked like. These descriptions are symbolic – they highlight not the appearance but the meaning.

But there were some visual things that John saw. But you can’t tell what it looked like by imagining all these symbols.

If you want to know what it looked like, just look at how it effected John.

If you can’t imagine something so terrifying that it would render you unconscious, then you can’t imagine what it was like to see this vision of the glorified Christ.

A true vision of God is devastating. Look anywhere you want in Scripture and you’ll see it.

What a contrast this is to the liars that get on TBN and say, “God gave me a vision last night. I saw Jesus and we were laughing and wrestling...”

They may have seen some angel of light – some spirit masquerading, but if they saw the glorified Christ (or even a genuine angel for that matter), they would be huddled in the corner of their room shaking in fear if they even had consciousness at all.

Then he placed his right hand on me

Jesus restores him.

This is just like Daniel, who, when he saw the vision in Dan.10, was out cold as well.

Dan.10:8 **So I was left alone, gazing at this great vision; I had no strength left, my face turned deathly pale and I was helpless. 9 ...I fell into a deep sleep, my face to the ground.**

(I saw a drunk college student on the beach like that one time – he was so out of it that he was laying there like a corpse with his face in the sand. That’s how Daniel was – same with John.)

and said: "Do not be afraid.

That same hand that held the stars, now *touches* John! And then the words: **Do not be afraid.**

Those words are not a rebuke. It’s not that John was responding inappropriately and Jesus has to correct him.

John’s response was entirely appropriate. The words **Do not be afraid** come not as a rebuke, but as *permission*.

You see the glorified Christ in His posture as mighty judge in perfect purity and holiness, with the sharp, double-edged broadsword of judgment coming out of His mouth and the only right response is fear.

You had better fear. You have no choice but to fear unless... He gives you permission not to. Unless He says to you **Do not be afraid.**

Sometimes I preach on the holiness of God, and people react against that and say, “What you are saying is generating fear, not love. God wants us to love Him intimately, not to be afraid of Him.”

I agree God wants us to love Him and to have a comfortable, confident, reassurance by His presence.

But you don’t start with that. That comfort can only come after you have been afraid.

First a person must come face to face with the Holy, fearsome Judge and in fear fall at His feet in repentance like Isaiah.

Then He forgives, and reaches down and touches you, and only then can you know real intimacy.

Only then do you hear the words, **Do not be afraid.**

It is only the ones who have known the terror of the holiness of God who can really know the true intimacy and who can say, “Abba, Father.”

Jesus is God

It’s inconceivable to me that anyone could study this section with even the most basic knowledge of the OT references and have any question at all about whether Jesus is described here as Almighty God.

I know of no other passage in the Bible that more forcefully portrays Jesus as Almighty, Yahweh God than here.

- The one "**like a son of man**" in Dan.7 is Almighty God. Here it’s Christ.
- The Ancient of Days whose **head and hair were white like wool** in Dan.7 is Yahweh God, here it is Christ.
- Molten metal in the OT visions always described God’s glory, here it describes Christ’s feet.

- Elsewhere in Scripture only God has a voice **like the sound of rushing waters**. Here Christ has that voice.
- Only God has sovereign control of the universe, here Jesus holds the stars and the fate of humanity **In his right hand**
- Throughout Scripture it is only Almighty God who is the final Judge, here it is Christ.

This passage is one of the most compelling, unarguable proofs of Jesus' deity in the Bible.

You would have to do unbelievable violence to this text of Scripture to somehow twist it to say anything other than what it is obviously, clearly saying: Jesus is Almighty God. He is the one, true God. And anyone who can't see that here is willfully blind.

But in case someone has been sleeping through the whole description up to this point, Jesus removes any possibility of confusion in v.17.

I am the First and the Last.

Isa.48:12 **"Listen to me, O Jacob, Israel, whom I have called: I am he; I am the first and I am the last.**

In Isaiah, when God wants to make it crystal clear that it is He who is speaking and not an angel or anyone else, He identifies Himself as the one who is the originator of all things and the consummator of all things.

And notice from Isa.44:6 that there is only one who is **the first and the last**.

"This is what the LORD says--Israel's King and Redeemer, the LORD Almighty: I am the first and I am the last; apart from me there is no God.

There is no other first and last – only **God, Israel's king and Redeemer, Yahweh Almighty**.

He is the only one who is the first and the last, and here Jesus is saying, "That's Me."

18 I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever!

Throughout the OT God distinguishes Himself from the pagan idols by calling Himself the living God. He alone, among the gods, is actually alive. He alone is able to speak and act in the world.

God the Father is called the one who lives forever in Dan.12:7

Rev 4:10-11 **the twenty-four elders fall down before him who sits on the throne, and worship him who lives for ever and ever. They lay their crowns before the throne and say: 11 "You are worthy, our Lord and God, (also 10:6)**

18 And I hold the keys of death and Hades.

Throughout Jewish literature there are references to the fact that only God holds the keys to death and Hades.

This passage has echoes from every corner of Biblical prophecy depicting God in His glory.

19 "Write, therefore, what you have seen (this vision of Christ) **what are** (plural – ch.2,3) **and what will** (sing) **take place later.** (the Tribulation and consummation of all things – the rest of the book)

In favor of the view that gene, sqai meta. tau/taÅ (what will take place) is a reference to ch.4ff, the exact same phrase appears in 4:1 – **the voice I had first heard speaking to me like a trumpet said, "Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this."** It's true that ch.4ff include portions about the past, but generally speaking they are about the great hour of trial that is coming upon the whole earth.

The whole purpose of Revelation is to get the Church to look at the now in light of what's coming.

Sometimes people treat Rev.2&3 as if it were a totally different book that is unrelated to the rest of Revelation. If you do that, you will miss entirely the message of the book.

Everything that's said to the churches is said to prepare them for what is coming in the rest of the book.

So What?

"OK Darrell, that's a lot of theology about Christ. What is the practical application?"

Nothing could be more practical. You have to see this vision before you will be able to make it through the coming Tribulation.

In His earthly ministry Jesus warned us over and over to be prepared for the time of great trouble that is coming. And His warnings were so passionate and vehement and urgent – He made it sound like if you aren't ready going in, you'll never make it.

But what do you do to get ready? Other than become a Christian, what other preparation is there?

The answer is this: you want to be prepared to handle any tribulation, any suffering, any torture, any trial? Burn this vision into your soul.

You have to have seen this vision. You have to know this Christ, who is sovereign and powerful over this whole thing. Otherwise you will be overcome.

And it will effect your prayer life too. Last Wednesday I was praying and asking the Lord to give us that property on McCaslin – have someone step forward with a gift of \$2 million. And it really seemed like a ridiculous request.

Then I had to run and errand, and I was driving around meditating on this vision of Christ. And after a while I kind of drifted back into prayer, and found myself asking once again for that land, and at that moment I felt kind of funny – speaking to such an exalted, mighty being, and asking Him for something so small.

You can't see things as they really are until you have seen Christ as He really is. In John's day the church was a tiny, insignificant, persecuted, illegal group of people. Rome was a colossal superpower.

No one would have dreamed that the church would outlive Rome. (Except for those who read this vision)

This gets back to the purpose of this kind of literature. Some people read Ezekiel or Revelation and say, “Why didn’t God just speak in plain language? Why all the images and figures?”

The answer is there is an important role that apocalyptic literature plays. For one thing, it moves our perspective from the earthly to the heavenly.

Usually God gives us an apocalyptic vision during a time of great difficulty, when we would be tempted to get overwhelmed and discouraged and hopeless.

During hard times we find it so difficult to look at things from an eternal perspective. That’s why these kinds of visions take place from the vantagepoint of heaven – to readjust our perspective.

If you have any exalted thoughts of Christ as a result of this sermon, that’s all the practical application we need.

Let me just leave you this morning with a summary. Put down your Bible and pen and just sit back and meditate on the exalted Christ:

Summary

someone "like a son of man," The Glorious, Sovereign, Eternal King. The object of all worship, whose **dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.**

That’s who John saw. And He was as an exalted, royal High Priest, moving through the holy place ministering to the Father.

And He is not only the Sovereign, Glorious son of man, and the exalted, royal high priest, but He is the Ancient of Days Himself – with the heavenly courts seated all around him and thrones in place, He takes His seat to pass final, decisive judgment on all His enemies.

And no one will question His judgments, because He has eternal wisdom and ultimate honor, **and his eyes were like blazing fire** – penetrating to the very soul and full of wrath.

Even His feet were like molten brass. Dangerous. Perfect purity. Staggering might. Overwhelming glory. Deadly holiness.

Those feet that once walked through the streets carrying His cross to Golgotha – the feet that were covered with dust that no one bothered to wash at the last supper, in ch.19 we see those feet **tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty.** (Rev.19:15-16)

And His voice! That bone-rattling, soul-shaking voice! It was the very voice of God. Divine Authority and infinite power.

He grips the very universe in the palm of His hand. In His right hand He holds the destiny of the Church and everyone else. Supreme in sovereignty.

And the words coming out of His mouth level everything in His path like sharp, double-edged *romphia*. His judgments are devastating. Nothing escapes.

And then, His face. His face...was nothing less than the glory of God.

No wonder John collapsed.

And Jesus said, **I am the First and the Last.**

In Christ is the scope of all history.

Christ had no beginning. He never came into existence. He was always there.

He is the first and the last. Everything begins and ends with Him. He was prior to the earliest thing and outlasts the most enduring thing.

I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades.

Hades is the grave. It's the place your soul goes from the time you die until the resurrection.

He is the source of life, the Author of life, and has even been to the grave and back.

And so He has full authority over life and death. He decides who dies and when. He decides who lives and in what way. He decides when and if to release someone from the grave.

The eternal destiny of every person is 100% dependent upon what this man, standing before John, decides. His decision is essentially the one and only factor that determines your eternal destiny as well as your fate in this life.

Benediction: Heb 3:1 **Therefore, holy brothers, who share in the heavenly calling, fix your thoughts on Jesus, the apostle and high priest whom we confess.**