

The Only Vision Of Jesus You'll Ever Need

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Tonight, I invite you to turn in the scriptures to the last book of the Bible, the first chapter. Last time we had basically an introductory sermon to the book of Revelation and tonight, we're going to begin by looking at this first vision beginning at verse 9 of Revelation chapter 1. This is the word of the Lord beginning at verse 9.

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. 10 I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet 11 saying, "Write what you see in a book and send it to the seven churches, to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamum and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea." 12 Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking to me, and on turning I saw seven golden lampstands, 13 and in the midst of the lampstands one like a son of man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash around his chest. 14 The hairs of his head were white, like white wool, like snow. His eyes were like a flame of fire, 15 his feet were like burnished bronze, refined in a furnace, and his voice was like the roar of many waters. 16 In his right hand he held seven stars, from his mouth came a sharp two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining in full strength. 17 When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. But he laid his right hand on me, saying, "Fear not, I am the first and the last, 18 and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades. 19 Write therefore the things that you have seen, those that are and those that are to take place after this. 20 As for the mystery of the seven stars that you saw in my right hand, and the seven golden lampstands, the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches.

There is the reading tonight of God's word.

Well, often throughout the scriptures, especially in the Psalms, we are given descriptions of the people of God as often cast down at times in life and living in this world, and of course, it often comes with the language of being in deep tribulation and sorrow and

affliction and trial and persecution and great testing. Think of Psalm 23, "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil." Psalm 84 speaks of us making our pilgrimage as we pass through the valley of Baca, which some have realized is called the Valley of Tears. How many times do the Psalms mention enemies? Well, in my count, and it could be more or less, but I think it's pretty close, it's a whopping 76 times. 76 times. Life under the sun, for the believer is likened in the scriptures to a time of great tribulation. It's all throughout the Bible. In fact, it was Jesus who said, through much tribulation we enter the kingdom, didn't he? Those are his words. We try to cover that and hide that reality, but that is his description.

Oftentimes, the people of God are depicted in scripture as cast down. They feel trampled. They feel perplexed. They're in despair. They're discouraged. And we have images given strongly of people who felt like giving up. Even more than that, the Bible portrays our existence here as a persecuted people. At times, things rise up against us. Societies go in cycles and things rise up against us and we don't understand, or we have a very difficult time explaining what is going on. We see things happening and moving. Nothing's static. It seems to always be moving somewhere and behind it is an intense spiritual battle that all over the scripture we have described for us. We could go to something like Ephesians 6 which describes this warfare that we're in and that we are called to put on the armor of God. All of that, all of the tribulation, all of the hardship, all of the ways the scripture describes that is captured for us in the book of Revelation. This is the context in which this book is given to us. It all culminates with this picture of a crushed, persecuted people. And in many ways then, when you get chapter 1, you're really understanding the whole direction of the book. This chapter is essential to understanding the book. This is an initial tonight introductory vision that is the vision of all visions in the book. It's the vision to understand the book. It's the vision that helps us as we look at all other vision. It's the one you have to hold on through to make it through the book, to be strengthened for everything else that he's about ready to describe.

There's a reason the Bible says fix your eyes on Jesus, but I'm not so sure we've understood what that means. I'm going to submit that that verse is oftentimes greatly misunderstood. What does it mean to fix your eyes on Jesus? Do you see him? Do we run around trying to depict him? Keep your eyes on Jesus says the Bible, but where is he? I don't see Jesus. That's a real enigma for us. That's a real challenge for us. That doesn't make sense to us. Fix my eyes on Jesus, but I can't see him. And I believe Revelation chapter 1 is helping us a bit with that. As a believer, you have a beautiful answer provided for you tonight because it's what we see about him that Revelation 1 is helping us through life and through the hard realities that are being described here.

John himself, in the time of his life, was in a time of great tribulation. In the midst of this, he is given a wonderful vision of Jesus to encourage, and this is the great purpose here, and the great purpose of the book of Revelation, to encourage the church not to lose heart in the midst of this struggle. That really is the goal of this, to call the church to stay loyal to their King in this struggle, to be faithful to their King in this struggle. What he's saying to you is what we looked at last time in the book, he's victorious. He's going to win the battle. Revelation is giving us imagery of this tribulation as a battle. John sees a vision

tonight of the glorified Christ, and the whole thing really does function to be a reminder that when things and times are difficult and when things are hard, it's a reminder of who is in control. It's something you can hold onto. It's the one vision I'm going to say go ahead and hold on to tonight. Hold on to this one of Jesus, and it should help you a lot to remember his call, as Revelation says, to endure to the end, to be faithful as his body, speaking to the church here corporately, as his body to be faithful to the purpose for which he left us here. Remember his high priestly prayer, "I pray that you don't take them out of the world, but that you would keep them from the evil one." Revelation is functioning then for us to understand how we are to operate in the world, how we are to think in the world.

So we see in progression that happening in Revelation 1, to maybe help you with an outline for this particular section tonight, what we have first is a disturbing outlook described in the life of John. A disturbing outlook. Then we have an awe-inspiring perspective given in this vision of Jesus, all with the goal of encouraging a strong loyalty in the church to the Savior. Okay, so we have a disturbing outlook, an awe-inspiring perspective with the goal of encouraging a strong loyalty to the King.

Everything that follows tonight in this first vision follows from verse 7 that gives the announcement, "Behold," he says, "I am coming, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him." It has in view the second coming, and it has in view the judgment day that is a righteous judgment that is to come. "Even so, Amen." So there's a reminder here that this has that goal in mind and that hope as we've considered, and from here Revelation is concerned about the church and its place and how it's functioning, how its witness is going in this period between the first coming and his ascension and the second coming. It's very concerned about that. This is the heart of the book. Its eye is on the church. Its eye is on God's people in the tribulation and that's why in this first cycle of addresses, the first seven here you'll notice here are the seven churches. We'll come to that. That's next.

Now we move to this opening scene, and what we have is this disturbing outlook, this disturbing scene that is presented to us, a sad one, an initial scene that is really intended to invoke a sort of sense of sadness as we read it, a perplexing portrayal in the New Testament. Perplexing portrayal. "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." John is here on the island of Patmos. He was banished here. Remember last time we considered and he states here the reason that he was banished, the reason he was banished in verse 9 was for the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. Here is an old man at this point considering Revelation being written later, which is the generally received later date, around 90, Revelation here presents John as an old saint banished to this Roman penal settlement. What a hard go at the end of life, huh? A sad portrayal. All of his other brothers, all the disciples are dead. They'd been martyred. Here he is. He's left. Martyred for the faith, here is John. That's not an encouraging outcome for faith in Jesus, is it?

He describes and he says, "I'm in this period of awful tribulation." Listen, no family. Most of them have died off. Disciples martyred. Big world, millions of people bowing to another king and no Jesus. Nowhere to be found is Jesus. This doesn't look like much of anything. This doesn't look like much of a victory at all. This doesn't look like anything is happening. In fact, this is a pretty pathetic outcome to it all at the end of life and he's supposed to believe through all of this that Jesus is the King over all. He's supposed to believe that all authority and power has been given to his Jesus. And where are his subjects? A king has subjects. He's never without subjects. Are you kidding me? Didn't John write in 1 John, wasn't it written and inspired that it's faith in Jesus that overcomes the world? Really? This is the victory that has overcome the world. Our faith. Huh. You've got to be kidding. He's being persecuted by this beast called Rome. Is this Christianity? Am I part of something that's greater than this? Am I part of something that's bigger than all that? Well, let me tell you what, if you're looking at things outwardly with the present outlook of things, that's a really tough pill to swallow, isn't it? That's a hard thing to believe. Is the cost of it all here that I'm the disciple whom Jesus loved, banished, persecuted, struck down, defeated? And then you start to think of how ludicrous are the claim in the midst of this book Jesus is going to win.

Rome, if you just take this journey with me just for a second here about Rome, there was a real spirit of enthusiasm for Roman rule. They had consolidated power. Many individuals were economically prospering from what was known as the Pax Romana. We built our Pax Americana off the Pax Romana, all the principles we borrowed from Rome. The peace of Rome. Rome was called the gift to the world and provision for the people. Peace and security was promised. Happiness. Within the borders of the Roman Empire, prosperity prevailed. All sorts of merchants were making great money and it was a land of peace, and what was encouraged by the Roman government was the total and complete acceptance of Roman ideology. It was the most powerful nation on the face of the earth and that faithful subjects to Rome could be economically prosperous. Much was promised to the people in Rome. The citizens were overall quite happy in that empire.

Now, Revelation's going to come along and unmask the lie of this and that's tough for us. It's hard for us to accept that. I believe, just as an interjection, I believe in common grace. I believe that God ordains governments. I believe that God gives governments. I support Romans 13. But at times, I think we've been a little too friendly with that and forgotten the antithesis. Revelation is telling us don't forget to look at things a little bit differently. We don't err on the side of taking the battle in this world too seriously, do we? I don't think so. I don't think we err on the side of taking the battle too seriously. In fact, if anything, the call to not love the world, that is something we have not taken very seriously at all.

Revelation is helping us look at things in their worst state and looking at things from a different perspective, what we call a beastly perspective of the nations and kingdoms of the world. And the goal here, don't lose this, that is why John is meant to be looked at as a representative of the entire church in this passage. He represents the church in this passage in struggle, weak, little, seemingly defeated. And that's why Jesus is about to speak to him and tell him, say, "I want you now, John, to tell your story and then write

down what you see and hand it to the church. Tell it to the church. Put it in a book for the church." That's the goal of this. But hold this thought for a minute.

"I was on the island of Patmos. Here's my story. I was on the island of Patmos for the word of God and the testimony of Jesus." Well, what a moment for John, that John's perspective is really shining through this. "I may have faced and be facing all these things in great tribulation, but I understand why I'm here. I understand my purpose here. My purpose here," I think it's so important for the church, isn't it, "My purpose here, you'll see here, is for the testimony of Jesus and for the word of God." You know what the tendency is in the midst of times of opposition and in times of great hardship and in great tribulation is the sense of wanting to give up, wanting to quit. You all know this, that it's easier in moments like this to simply think about how can I get out of this? It would have been easy for John to compromise and to think about how he could get off the island of Patmos, and the easy way would be to lighten the claim about Jesus, wouldn't it? The easy way would be to not be so hard-lined about his position on who Jesus is. Adopt Rome's ideology. Adopt their view of Caesar.

We can get out of a lot of tribulation when we lighten the commitment to Jesus. We can get out of a lot of tribulation in life when we lighten our commitment. This is why, John, Jesus is saying, "Tell your story. You function as an encouragement to the church." Jesus is about to say to many of the churches, "You've abandoned the testimony." This is what he's gonna say, "You're abandoning the word of God in the midst of all this hardship. In all this pressure, in all this hardship, you're taking the compromised route. You're not counting the cost. You're not remaining loyal." And so he's saying to John, "Show them and represent them. Show them." And John functions like that here. John functions that he's on this island in tribulation and what is he there for? For the witness. For the witness of the word and the testimony of Jesus.

"I was on the island for the testimony of the word of God. My presence in this tribulation is a witness." That's what he's saying. Tribulation, your tribulation, the church's tribulation, our hardship fulfills the word of God. This is what he's told us we're going to face. It puts on display that we identify with Jesus. That's a witness because it gives evidence to the claim of his righteous coming and his righteous judgment. This is what was said to the Thessalonians in chapter 1, "We boast about your perseverance and faith in the face of all persecution and affliction that you're enduring." All of that is clear evidence of God's righteous judgment. John understood the place that the Lord had him. John was able to see through it. He was at how to witness. Imagine if we looked at life that way and all the tribulation and the things that happened and the hardships and the things that come at us. This is part of the witness that I'm to endure. This is part of the witness that I am to have in it instead of always trying to get out of it.

"I was in the tribulation and kingdom and patience of Jesus." We'll get to patience. It's a major theme in Revelation. John was saying, "I learned through all this to be patient." The patient weight of the saints. But I love what he emphasizes. In this banishment and hardship and tribulation, what does he want to highlight to the church the day that he received the greatest encouragement, the day that he received the greatest help? Well,

that's verse 10. "I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day." Huh, Lord's Day has always been accepted in our history, in Christian history as being Sunday, day of resurrection. You were just given a clear indication in the New Testament that the apostles understood that the Sabbath principles still mattered and that in the New Covenant, they took the worship of the Lord very seriously on Sunday. This is your pattern. You have it right here.

It's interesting in the midst of this, in the midst of tribulation, this is what he wants to highlight to you, doesn't he? I find that remarkable. I can't help but think, this is John's way of saying to the church that the way when he found himself banished and found himself in hardship and in tribulation and in persecution and in all manner of hardships under the sun, the way that he was taught patience, the way that he made it through was the blessing of Lord's Day worship in the Spirit. I love it. It's everything we've ever taught you. It's everything the New Testament has ever been saying to you and here it is again. There has always been a crucial scriptural testimony of how the saints looked at the Sabbath. This was the way they were strengthened in the tribulation. This was their food to make it. And next week, we'll come back and commune together and do that.

"In the tribulation," says John, "suffering. I have to be patient. Continuing to worship. Now in this age, persecuted, at times struck down, at times experiencing seeming defeat, my experience, dear church, I want you to know, is meant to encourage you. I, old John, am a partner with you in this." Doesn't that help you? This old saint, "I'm a partner with you in this." And here we go. All of a sudden, he's in the Spirit on the Lord's Day, and he hears a roaring voice behind him. He says it was like the sound of a trumpet. Every voice of the Lord that has ever been described throughout history all culminates right here. In whatever power you can imagine, the voice of the Lord, it all comes together right here in fulfillment. He says, "I turned around as I'm in worship, praising, glorifying God, and all I hear is this voice, and I turn around, and as I turned around to look, I saw seven lampstands." That should help a little bit our study with Exodus. When the lampstand was described, remember, right in the holy place, and those lampstands lit up the holy place to provide light, remember that, in the midst of these lampstands says John, "I turned around and I looked, and there in the midst of the lampstands in the holy place was one like a son of man. And I looked at him and he's clothed in this long robe and around his chest has this golden band." You'll notice in verse 20 that the seven lampstands are specifically said to be the seven churches. Put this together. "I, John, tribulation, banished, imprisoned, weak, frail, discouraged, not seeing anything of strength in this, all of a sudden, as I'm worshiping, I'm strengthened, And I look around and I see a figure dwelling among his churches. Walking in the midst of his churches."

Standing in the midst of the lampstand is this described glorious warrior-king. Where does this come from? I believe this is Old Testament history. Remember when Elijah's servant was deathly afraid because the Syrian army had surrounded him and Elijah said, "Lord, open his eyes that he might see." "The servant of the man of God rose early in the morning and went out and behold an army with horses and chariots was all around the city. And the servant said, 'Alas, my master, what shall we do?' He said, 'Don't be afraid. for those who are with us are more than those who are with him.' Then Elisha prayed and said, 'O Lord, please open his eyes that he may see.' So the Lord opened the eyes of the

young man, and he saw, and behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha." In the greatest moment of fear and tribulation and distress, John just realized what Elisha's servant realized, Jesus is with us. You know, we think of heaven as some far off place up there, and Jesus sitting far off on a throne and you know, as you study the scriptures and you look at this, there really isn't much warrant for that thought. It's more another dimension that's right upon you. Remember the curtain I described last time. You just can't see behind the curtain. Heaven is described as a present reality if you could only see.

What a moment. Jesus is present with his church. Can you imagine if we lived like that? It would make us want to be here, wouldn't it? What have I to fear? Why are you downcast, O my soul? Put your hope in God. Lo, I'm with you always. I know people want to be able to see something. We've had this debate in our time whether we can make images of Jesus and people kind of roll their eyes, and what's weird is that we always kind of create the Jesus that is of our cultural background. When I grew up, the Jesus behind the church was a blond-haired, blue-eyed Jesus. He was either Swedish or Dutch. You know Jesus was a Jew in his humanity. Do you know this is the only image of Jesus given to you in the Bible? This is the only image of Jesus given to you in the Bible. I don't mind if you want to hold on to this, but you can't draw it. Let me tell you why. It's all symbolic. He was clothed with a garment down to his feet, girded about the chest with a golden band. His hair was like white wool, white as snow. His eyes were like a flame of fire. What has John seen? Well, John is describing Jesus in blazing, resplendent glory, the one who dwells in unapproachable light. Sheer majesty. And he's taking the Old Testament and putting together imagery to help us here of this vision that he saw.

He says his head and his hair were like white wool, white as snow. His eyes were like a flame of fire. Boys and girls fire is different colors. When it's red, it's still consuming something. Just a visible red is about 980 degrees. A dull red is about 1,300. Fire at its highest intensity is white. So you get to orange and it moves up to about 2,000 degrees white. White-ish is about 2,400 degrees. Bright is about 2,600. Dazzling white is about 2,700. Notice the end of this description, his glory was like the sun shining in its strength. Not only is he pure white, the sun is about 27 million degrees Fahrenheit. His countenance was like that. Go ahead and try to draw it. How can it happen? There's something very symbolic happening here, isn't there? It's the same concept of the burning bush, where Moses saw the bush and it wasn't consumed here. Christ is on fire in front of John in the most powerful description of symbolic glory that could be provided with human language.

His eyes are like a flame, full of wrath. Feet like fine brass as if refined in a fire. Burnished or polished brass doesn't really explain it. Revelation 10 will describe an angel who comes down from heaven having feet as pillars of fire. Christ's feet are burning. They are on fire as if they've been in a furnace in the sun and he comes out with his feet lit up to trample all the enemies underfoot. That's the imagery. All of this is taken from this place.

"I watched till thrones were put in place and the Ancient of Days was seated. His garment was white as snow. The hair of his head was like pure wool. His throne was a fiery flame. Its wheels a burning fire. A fiery stream issued and came forth from before him. Thousands upon thousands ministered to him. Ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him. The court was seated and books were opened. I was watching in the night visions, and behold, one like the son of man coming with the clouds of heaven. He came to the Ancient of Days, and they brought him near before him. Then to him was given a dominion and glory and a kingdom that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion which shall not pass away, and his kingdom which shall never be destroyed." You know what you have? You have a vision of Christ in his kingdom, the true King of kings and Lord of lords coming to deliver and coming to judge.

Now, I want to close tonight with the encouragement of this. John sees him and what does he do? He falls down as dead. Anyone who ever saw a glimpse of even the glory of God did this. It's reminiscent of all the times in the Old Testament this happened. When Isaiah saw that vision, he fell down and he said, "Woe is me, I'm breaking up in front of this glory. I'm being consumed by this glory." It's him. Daniel said the same thing. "When I was left alone, I saw this great vision. No strength remained in me, for my vigor was turned to frailty, and I retained no strength. Yet I heard the sound of his words, and while I heard the sound of his words, I was in deep sleep on my face, with my face to the ground." In the midst of this, Jesus takes his right hand, and he lays hold of John. John's face is to the ground. John can't move. John is deathly afraid. Jesus takes his right hand, which is the symbol of all power in the Bible, and embraces him and he says, "I don't want you to fear. I am the first and the last. I am he who lives and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore. Amen. I have the keys of death and Hades."

Now aren't you thankful for this? It kind of comes together, doesn't it? What is he concerned about in the earth? You? His people? He's jealous for you. His eyes are on you. Sure, he's King of kings and Lord of lords over this whole realm and every knee will bow and every tongue will confess, but his eye is on his people. And the whole Old Testament said this about our God, that the problem the Old Testament, now closing the book of Exodus, we saw was when Israel faced discouragement along the way, what did they fall into? You should know that answer. Idolatry. They plummeted right into idolatry. They got discouraged and they began to compromise. They faced tribulation, they felt like giving up. They complained along the way. They murmured along the way. And John says, "Write this down for the church. Let the church have this, John. Use your story." There are gods among them. Just like God was among them and the temple dropped, the tabernacle dropped down and his glory was there. "I am among my people. I'm walking among my lampstands. I'm with my church. And I know you need this. I know you need to understand this." Your holy God walks among you, his people. You are diffusing his light in the earth. See, witness comes into this?

But what's happened? Well, you're going to learn in the next weeks, many of the churches were failing in their witness. The sad reality was already in the first century, these churches were facing mass discouragement, their great compromises then followed, they

weren't standing for truth, they were letting all kinds of heresies in, every mess you could ever imagine was happening in the early church, and Jesus is saying to the churches, "I am your King. You need this vision. You need this vision of me."

I have friends over at LA Fitness, and the other day they were asking me about stuff about Jesus. Both of them came out of Roman Catholicism. And somehow it came up, why don't we wear a crucifix? And had I said second commandment, which I did, that might connect, but I said to him, "Because he's risen. Why am I leaving him there? Why am I running around touching him on a cross? It's not where he is. He's victorious." Boy, that really got him. That got him. "Never heard that." You've never heard that? Where's our witness?

Here's the only vision you need of Jesus, he stands in blazing glory, jealous for his church. This is Zechariah 1. "So the angel spoke with me and said, 'Proclaim saying thus says the Lord of Hosts. I'm jealous for Jerusalem and for Zion with great zeal. I'm exceedingly angry with the nations at ease for I was a little angry and they had evil intent, therefore thus says the Lord, I'm returning to Jerusalem with mercy. My house shall be built in it.' I read that all over this. "I'm zealous for you," says the Lord. "I'm zealous for the Escondido URC. I'm zealous in all of the hardship, and I know this is hard. I told you it would be hard. I told you people would let you down. I told you there would be great tribulation. Don't compromise my mission. This is what you're doing. This is the purpose I have you here. And if you're being persecuted for the truth, if you're facing opposition, you're called to stand for my name exclusively. If you face death, as many of you will in Smyrna, remember this vision." When Daniel's friends were thrown into the fire, how many were in there? Four, not three. "I know your situation more intimately than you do. I know the situation of the Escondido URC more intimately than you do. And here's what I want you to remember, I am he who is alive and lives and was dead and behold, I'm alive forevermore. And guess what? I hold the key of death and Hades. I'm the one that opens up the kingdom and closes it. I control destiny."

This should be a great encouragement to you tonight in all of our weakness and all of our frailty. The one who is sovereign over all, who is coming as judge, is the one who triumphed over death in the grave for you. And he puts his hand on you and he says, "Don't fear but remember who you are. Remember what I called you to be." Fix your eyes on Jesus. This is the vision you need. May the vision of the exalted Christ in his glory, in all these symbols, drive us to be faithful witnesses to the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.

Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, thank you for this opening vision tonight in the book of Revelation. What an encouragement and help to us to think tonight of what we consider this morning that this woman, Mary of Bethany, dumped an alabaster flask on Jesus' head in his humanity, in his humbled state and now tonight, we consider the risen Jesus putting his hand on us, lifting us up and encouraging us. This is so wonderful. Thank you for such a vision that encourages the church here to be faithful. And bless our work here, Lord, in

your name. May our lampstand burn bright and may the truth of your gospel prevail here and in your churches all over the face of the world this day, remembering who we are, who we belong to, and who we bow to. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.