

"Stop Being Afraid"

Revelation 1:9-20

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, 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. (ESV)

If you are visiting for the first time, this is the third in a series I think might take a year or two. After the last service, someone who has been a member of this church for quite a long time came to me and said, "I've been a Presbyterian my whole life, and I was tempted to shout "Hallelujah" at the last service. You'll be glad to know, many of you, that she did not succumb to that temptation, but we're making progress.

Just a couple of business notes, all of the audio for the sermons are on our website as well as the slides. The reason I'm telling you that is because even those complainers in my family say that I talk too fast (that was a joke too). At any rate, I came home yesterday after spending several hours at church, and Judy said, "How'd it go?" And I said, "I could do three sermons on what I have to do tomorrow morning." And she said, "Why don't you just do that?" And I said, "Because I just spent the past five hours making it into one." So the point is that I'm going to have to keep going at a good clip, and if you want the slides, you can download them from the website. Also, we're playing around with a screen cast, which actually will be a screen cast of the service on YouTube. The last two are there already, so we figured out we can do it right through our sound system here.

With all of that said, we're looking at Revelation 1:9-20, and this passage is a bit of an introduction as well before we jump into the churches. I'm not going to review everything. I did two whole weeks of introduction, so if you're new to this, you might want to revisit that. There's just a couple things I'll point out to you. [Slide] Consider this picture (if you're listening on audio, it's a picture of a dragon eating a city). Now with no context, what does that mean? If you found this picture of a dragon eating a city a thousand years from now, and you took it literally, and you look back in time, what would it mean? Well, does it help you understand what this picture means if I tell you that it was published on July 1, 1997? That's the day Communist China took over Hong Kong. Knowing that information, does the picture make a difference? It doesn't just make a big difference, it tells you what the people thought of the Communist Chinese, and how they thought it was going to affect their city, and all of these things. The point is that when you use pictures, sometimes you can actually say a lot more. If John had to write out the Book of Revelation in doctrinal proposition, my guess is it would be as big as the whole Bible is now. But he uses pictures, and since he uses pictures, he is able to say a lot more. So keep that in mind.

The other thing I just wanted to remind you of is the interpretive lens we're using, or the approach that we're using. Remember, last week I said there are generally four approaches that people use: There's the historicist, there's the futurist, there's the preterist, there's the idealist. One of them looks at the Book of Revelation as if everything is in the past, one says that everything is in the future, and the other two are somewhere in between. And I told you that we wouldn't be using any of those. I mean there is some truth to all of the approaches we looked at, but that's not the lens that will drive us. The lens that will drive us is going to simply be what I'm calling a gospel-centered approach. And it's the same approach, at least that I use, when I preach from any book of the Bible. In other words, whether you're looking at Genesis or Exodus, or Samuel, the question is, What does this book say about the Person and work of Jesus? How is it pointing us there? If Jesus is the culmination of everything that the Bible is about, how is this book teaching us that, and how is it building upon that? Same with the Book of Revelation; how is the Book of Revelation helping us understand more effectively the life, death and resurrection of Jesus on our behalf, and as it applies to the world around us? With all of that said, we have three points today:

1. John's commission. He's actually commissioned to write something.
2. John's vision. John has a vision this morning, at least in the passage.
3. John's confidence. In other words, John is given this vision, and he doesn't respond to it very well, and what ultimately gives him confidence to go ahead and finish the book - what gives him confidence to keep writing.

Let's look first at John's commission. Let me read this to you. It says:

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.*

So what's going on here? The first thing, notice he says, "*I, John, your brother and partner.*" Now, remember this is an apocalypse, it's a prophecy, but it's also a letter. And generally speaking, when an apostle writes a letter, they're not that touchy-feely. In other words, when Paul writes a letter, he says, "Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ." He's letting them know right up front, that "I'm writing you a letter that bears the authority of God, because I am an apostle." John, on the other hand, doesn't do that here. He writes them, "John, your brother and partner." Why is he doing that? One simple reason may be (remember John was the disciple whom Jesus loved), at the end of the day, that he just may have been a little more touchy-feely than Paul. I'm guessing that's the case. On the other hand, he's really making an attempt to identify with the people to whom he's writing. In other words, he's not writing them as an apostle who is coming down with new information from on top of the mountain; he's writing them as someone who shares in their suffering, who is going to tell them what Jesus has revealed to him for them. So, he says he's their brother and their partner. And he mentions three things in which he's their brother and partner. He says "*the tribulation, and the kingdom, and the patient endurance,*" and don't miss the part that says "*that are in Jesus.*" In the Greek, there's only one article there. In other words, the three things, tribulation, kingdom and patient endurance are meant to be taken together, because they're all dependent upon one another. In other words, if there's persecution going on, the only reason there's persecution and tribulation for Christians is because they're Christians – at least in the Roman Empire. And John says, "I'm a party to that, but also I'm a party to the patient endurance, and I'm a party to this thing called 'the kingdom.'" Because what John is going to try and help us make sense of in the Book of Revelation is, on one hand, Paul says we're coheirs with Christ; we're seated with Christ in the heavenlies. On the other hand, the emperor is killing people. So how do we make sense of that? What does it mean to reign with Christ on one hand, and on the other hand, to live in a pretty gritty environment, a pretty hard place? And John tells us right there. He says, "I'm your partner in the tribulation, in the kingdom, and the patient endurance, which are in Jesus." Just as a side note, a lot of different traditions make a big deal about tribulation; there's going to be a great coming tribulation, at least according to this passage. And it's the same word that's used in the rest of the New Testament. John's opinion is that *the* tribulation is right now; that the end times, the hardness is happening right now. Now, will there be some other greater tribulation? I don't know, to be honest with you, but from John's perspective right here, things are hard right now – that the end times that started with the coming of Jesus the first time are going on right now, and he is their partner in it.

So what else is going on? He says, "I was on the Island of Patmos on account of the Word of God and the Testimony of Jesus." We know from the secular historian Eusebius that John was on the Island of Patmos, and he was there because of what he says, "preaching the Word of God and the testimony of Jesus." And we also know that the mission, starting in 92 AD, upped the ante as far as persecuting Christians. And the question is, Why didn't he kill John? All the rest of the apostles were martyred according to tradition; why wasn't John killed? And the answer, I think, is in the word "martyred." In other words, we can only speculate why he was exiled and not just flat out killed. And the best speculation is that they didn't want to make a martyr out of him; they didn't want to give him more fame. So what's the best thing to do? Instead of making him into a martyr, they just put him on this island called Patmos. It was exile; it wasn't prison. Oftentimes you see pictures of John in prison writing—like the apostle Paul was—but John was just on an island, sort of a rocky island where he was free to come and go, but it was only 10 miles from one end to the other. So he was on the Isle of Patmos; he was exiled because of his preaching, apparently because of his testimony of Jesus; he wouldn't stop. The one thing I want to make sure you don't miss on this is the phrase, "in Jesus." We tend to think of tribulation, and trials, and endurance as being outside of Jesus – that Jesus needs to help me with them. And what you're going to see over and over in the Book of Revelation is that Jesus is sovereign, or Jesus is in control of all these things. So if there is tribulation, it is not outside of Jesus' control. If there is trial – if there is patient endurance to be had, it is in the context of his lordship and reign over us as king. So what do we have next? In verses 10-11, John says:

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.*

I think every slide that I'm giving you, I could probably give 45 minutes on; you're going to get 45 seconds right now. What I want you to just notice on this one [slide], He says, "Write what you see." If you read through the Book of Revelation without being careful, it's easy to miss things. I don't know if you've ever seen where they'll put up words backwards, and

you look at them, and you can read them because your brain switches them. When you read the Book of Revelation, you've got to actually look closely, because we tend to think "write what you hear. I'm going to dictate a letter to you." He doesn't say that. You've got to pay attention. He says, "Write what you see." Because what's important in the Book of Revelation are all these images that are going to come up. And He says, "Write what you see in a book, and send it to the seven churches." Again, I'm going to do at least one sermon on every one of the seven churches. But what I wanted to point out to you here is just this: The number *seven*. Remember what the number seven represents in the Bible? Generally speaking, it represents "completeness." It represents the fullness of something. So if Jesus has seven eyes, that means He sees everything. If He has seven horns, that means He is all powerful. So by addressing the seven churches, most people think—I think—what he's getting at is he's addressing all churches – that these seven churches represent every church for all time. Because what he could have done is written to the eight churches that are in Asia Minor, or nine or ten. He could have pushed it a little bit and said, "To the seven churches and Galatia," "to the seven churches and Philippi," and to all these other places. He didn't. For some reason, seven churches were picked, and that's going to become important later on when we find out what's going on with these churches.

As we continue on to the next thing, it moves into John's vision. So, we have the setup where he says, "I heard this voice like a trumpet behind me saying, 'Write.'" By the way, in the New Testament at least, the trumpet always is a sign of the end times; it's the coming of the Day of the Lord. When you hear the trumpet sound, that's when you ought to be worried. So John hears the trumpet, and he has to turn around, which I want to make sure you get that as well. And he sees something, and the question is, What does he see? What makes John's vision different in the Book of Revelation than say Peter's in the Book of Acts, or Paul's, is that they're sort of caught up into heaven, or they're caught up in this grand thing. John, if you remember from the letters of 1 John and even from his gospel, John is really big on touching and the physical aspect. So in John's vision, he has to actually turn around to see. And later on, we're going to see that John is touched by someone. It isn't just an ecstatic thing in his head; something is happening; it's being revealed to him. And what is it that he sees? Well, if you see with only your eyes, you see one thing. So John turns around, and if he only saw with his eyes, he would see something like this [slide]: It's a fresco from Italy, I believe. He would see a man with a golden robe and a sash around him, and He would have seven stars in His hands, and He would have a big sword coming out of His mouth, and He would have woolly white hair. And it would be sort of odd, if you think about it, if he only saw with his eyes. Yet, if you see with a heart that has eyes to see, you see something not completely different, because he sees that picture, but the picture says something else – the picture is a realization of all the Old Testament promises. In other words, instead of listing out all of the Old Testament promises—remember last week we talked about that all the promises of God are "yes" and "Amen" in Jesus. Instead of listing those out, what John sees is a picture, and the picture tells him all he needs to know about the whole Bible basically, but especially the Old Testament as it works its way forward to the Person and work of Jesus. So, what does he see? It says:

¹² *Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking to me, and on turning I saw seven golden lampstands.*

Immediately, from this point on, we're in the Old Testament. All of these images come directly from the Old Testament. He says, "I turned and I saw seven golden lampstands." Well, the golden lampstand is found in Exodus 25:31 and Exodus 35:17, where God tells Moses to make one, singular golden lampstand to be in the temple. It was in the tabernacle; ultimately, it was in the temple. That's in chapter 25 of Exodus. In chapter 35, this guy, Bezalel is commissioned to make it, so he makes one golden lampstand, and this golden lampstand would be placed in the inner depths of the temple, and it was the only light in the temple. And the lampstand, by the way, bore light; it didn't produce the light, but it was a holder of the light. It was the only light in the temple, and that light came to represent God's presence among Israel. Can you think of anyone else who said, "I am the light of the world?" Right, Jesus said that. But it also came to symbolize God's empowerment for Israel to carry out their blessing to the world. If you look at Zechariah chapter 4, basically what's happening here is the one lampstand that represented Israel and represented God's presence among Israel has now turned into seven lampstands. There's no longer just one, but there is seven. And we're going to find out later exactly what those seven lampstands represent, but among other things, they represent the fact that God dwells among the churches. And God dwells not just with His people Israel, but that somehow has been expanded, that His presence is not just in the temple any longer, but it's somewhere else, and we'll look at that. What else does he see? He says in verse 13:

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.*

If you remember what the phrase "Son of Man" sounds like in the Ancient Near East, the most presumptuous thing you could call yourself would be "the Son of Man," -- from any particular religious tradition, but especially from a Jewish one. And that comes from the Book of Daniel; Mike read it this morning as a call to worship. In chapter 7, verses 13-14, Daniel says: "*And behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. And to him was given 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 one that shall not be destroyed.*" So think how this vision starts; John turns around, and he sees these golden lampstands, and he looks up. And

notice what he does not say. He does not say, "Jesus, my ole buddy! Remember, I'm the one whom you loved – your pal." He doesn't say that. John is immediately struck by what he sees, and he says, "I saw one like a Son of Man, and the one who is like a Son of Man is the one who is given dominion by God Himself, the Ancient of Days who is given dominion over every tribe, tongue and nation. And they will come to Him, and they will worship Him, and He is sovereign over all of them. He has been given that by the Ancient of Days. And John says, "The first thing, I turned, and that's what I saw; not only that, but He was clothed with a long robe and a golden sash around His chest." I hate to say it, but what you wear is important. When John looks around and he sees one like the Son of Man, on one hand that connotes this One has been given all power and authority. On the other hand, the only people who would wear robes would either be priests or kings, and we don't know which one. But what makes sense of the outfit is the golden sash, because in the Ancient Near East, if you wore a sash, typically to work, you would wear it around your waist - like something men wear, but it's not a kilt. I don't know what it is, but it looks sort of like a dress. Anyway, when they would work in the fields, they would pull up their skirt and tuck it into the waistband. And when you were completely finished with work, you could take that waistband off and put it over your shoulder across your chest because you weren't working anymore. So what is this saying? He says, "I saw one like the Son of Man; he was dressed like a priest or a king, and He had this golden sash, and it wasn't around His waist; it was around His chest. It was around His chest, because apparently whatever His task was, it was completely and utterly finished – that the work of this Son of Man, the work of this Priest/King is completely finished. Remember, you were told over and over again in the Book of Revelation what you're going to see is Jesus through John pointing us to the fact that His work was completely and utterly finished on the cross – that on His cross and by virtue of His resurrection, He has completely conquered sin and death, and it is done. Everything else is just the working out of the details. That's what John sees.

Also, if you want to study more later, there's a lot of this particular part of the vision that comes from Daniel chapter 10. The next part is easy to read over and think, "Oh, it's about his hairdo." It says:

¹⁴ *The hairs of his head were white, wool, like snow. His eyes were like a flame of fire.*

What is this telling us? On one hand, people say, "Of course, people with white hair are older and therefore wiser, so it's pointing us to the wisdom of this One called the Son of Man. Or it says, His hair was white like snow, so it's pointing us to the purity of the Son of Man." And there may be some truth to that, but if you're consistent with where all this stuff is coming from, much of it from Daniel, it's saying something a lot bigger than that even. This is before the Son of Man is given stuff; it's just this picture of the Ancient of Days, and Daniel 7:9 says, "*As I looked, thrones were placed, and the Ancient of Days took his seat; his clothing was white as snow, and the hair of his head like pure wool; his throne was fiery flames; its wheels were burning fire.*" So this One is like the Son of Man, He is dressed like a priest, His work is completed. Could the vision get any bigger? Could it get any more scary for John? Because One like the Son of Man is pretty big. I mean the only other way that you could sort of outdo the Son of Man would maybe to be the Ancient of Days. So, what is John seeing? I think he's seeing this: that Jesus is also the Ancient of Days, or He is certainly equal to the Ancient of Days. In other words, Jesus *is* God; He's just not One who was sent by God, because when you look through the Old Testament, you see some visions that are like this that are messengers from God. But this one is no more mere messenger; this is actually God Himself. He's not just One like the Son of Man, He's also like the Ancient of Days, who has all power and all authority. That's going to be huge, because remember what this book is about — in many ways, it is comforting people who are being afflicted and who need comfort. And the only way you can have comfort is if you know that there is someone who is absolutely in charge of everything and knows every hair on your head and every breath you take. That's what John is getting at, I believe. Verses 15-16—I wish I had an hour right now—say:

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.*

The reference to His feet could come from Daniel. Remember, the kingdoms of this world have feet that are made of iron and clay, and because their feet are iron and clay, they can't bear the weight of responsibility, they can't bear the weight of what is put upon them, so they fall to pieces – but *not* the Son of Man. The Son of Man's feet are like burnished bronze, purified in the fire. You also see this kind of imagery in the Book of Ezekiel, and especially His voice like the roar of many waters. Notice it says, (this is a side note) "*In his right hand he held seven stars.*" What does he mean there? Well, later on in this passage, we're going to see he says specifically, "*The stars are this: _____.*" On the other hand, when you read anything that John writes, like the Gospel of John, oftentimes he seems to use things in two different ways, or he tends to use one image to make two or three different points. It's just interesting here at this point, when he talks about the seven stars, because we're moving toward showing this One who is like the Son of Man – that is Jesus Himself – being sovereign, being in charge of all things. In the Ancient Near East, according to the Hebrews, and according to the Romans and the Greeks, there are only seven planets in the solar system, and they called them stars. That was before Pluto was added, I guess, and then got ditched. So there is a sense here in which He holds the seven stars in His right hand. According to the Greeks and

according to the Romans, the stars were what ran the universe - for people who maybe these days actually follow horoscopes and things. This may, in fact, be saying that not only do the stars not run the universe, but Jesus is the One who rules the stars; that you look to the stars for advice, you look to the creatures for how to run your life, and Jesus Himself actually holds the stars in His very hand. What else does He do? It says, "*from his mouth came a sharp two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining in full strength.*" That reference to the mouth and the two-edged sword probably comes from somewhere in the Psalms; there are a couple different places. And where it says, "His face was shining like the sun in full strength," there is no greater blessing, in the Old Testament at least, or curse, I guess, than to have God's face shine upon you. Right? "*The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make His face shine upon you.*" (Numbers 6:24-25) Well, only if God intends to bless you is that a good thing, because if you're not right with God, and he shines upon you, then you disintegrate. Remember, Isaiah said that. "*Woe is me, for I am become undone.*" (Isaiah 6:5) And John sees all these images in there - all to point us to this whole idea of this One like the Son of Man, like the Ancient of Days, Jesus Himself - being the culmination of all these things in the Old Testament.

And that leads us to John's response to that - his confidence. In other words, what is John's confidence. He sees one thing, and what he sees are all these images from the Old Testament combined in one Person that is Jesus. What is his confidence going to be? Because we're going to see in a minute that he becomes very afraid. What you see in this part of the passage is Jesus describing Himself. If you want to know what Jesus is about, just listen to what He says about Himself. In other words, you can interpret what I just told you maybe in a number of ways; I think the Old Testament is the best way to do it. But in this part it's hard to do anything but listen to Jesus. So what happens here? John says in verse 17a:

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

Boom! Now that shouldn't surprise you if you're familiar with the Bible, because in the Old Testament, basically what happens here with John is what scholars call sort of a fourfold prophetic pattern. It's the same way every single time a prophet gets new revelation, and the pattern is basically this: The prophet has a vision - some kind of heavenly vision goes on. He falls on his face in fear. He is strengthened by a heavenly being. Then finally, he receives further revelation. That happens in Daniel 10. By the way, it happens in a few other places in the Old Testament. It makes sense. I mean if God wants to reveal something to a prophet who is just laying there as if dead, God has got to do something, so He helps the prophet up, and He helps him to continue, and He re-commissions him. But what is important for us to get is just this in verses 17b-18: How does Jesus and Jesus' description of Himself help John to deal with his fears? Let me show you what I mean. He says:

17b But he laid his right hand on me, saying, "Fear not."

In the Greek, it literally says, "Stop being afraid. Stop it!" What's interesting is remember this grand vision that we just had of Jesus that John can't even bring himself to do anything but just describe: "His hair was like wool. His feet were like bronze." All these things. That same Person reaches down and touches John - He touches him. And He says to John, "Stop being afraid." Then He gives the remedy to fear. But before I look at that, I need to say something about fear. Fear, at the end of the day, is what drives almost every person in this room. You're afraid of losing control. You're afraid that your kids might not turn out right. You're afraid you might not have enough money. You're afraid that your husband doesn't really love, or you're afraid that your wife doesn't love you. You're afraid that things at work might go wrong. You're afraid. You're afraid. You're afraid. And at the end of the day, the root cause of fear is ultimately a fear of death. Whether it's a fear of losing something, and it's sort of the death of your dream, or the death of what you thought you wanted to have, or the death of your control - or ultimately death itself. So the only remedy, ultimately, to fear is Someone who could actually conquer death. So John falls down as if dead himself, and he is completely and utterly afraid. Jesus touches him, and says, "Stop being afraid." Why? "I am the First and the Last." Revelation 1:8 says: "*I am the Alpha and the Omega,*" says the Lord God, "*who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.*" And Jesus says to John, "Stop being afraid. I am the First and the Last," which, by the way, is another way of saying Alpha and Omega. What is meant by *Alpha and Omega* is that God is the "First and the Last"; He is the Beginning, the Middle and the End; that—remember we looked at Colossians chapter 1—everything was created through Him and by Him and for Him; that He is at the root of creation, and He will be at the culmination of all that He is doing. And He is telling John now, "John, I am in control of all things. Are you afraid? Try this on for size: I'm in control of everything." And we know that the promise of God is that all things work for the good who are called according to His purpose. So he says to John:

17b "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."

So what is the remedy to John's fear? Remember what I told you in the introduction the first time, and the introduction the second time? It's the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. He said, "I lived, I died, and behold, I am alive forevermore. The

only thing that could harm you – the only thing that you could justifiably be afraid of is death. Check this out John. Not only am I the First and the Last – that's big, but I am the Living One. I died. You saw that. But behold, now I am alive forevermore. I have conquered the only thing for which you need to be afraid, and if you don't believe Me, check this out. I've even got the keys. I hold the keys to Death and Hades. No one else can send you to your grave without Me okaying it. No one else can touch you without first coming through Me. I have the key to all this." And the question is, Do you really believe that, Church? Do you believe that about your own fears? About your own desire to control? About your own desire for everything? Do you really believe that Jesus is the First and the Last, that it is His life and His death and His resurrection on your behalf that somehow was able to get rid of those fears? Because what Jesus is saying right now is that it should. And not only that, but that He is the One that holds the keys to Death and Hades. It keeps going.

John's commission is expanded. I want to show you how it applies to what we just said. He says, "Because of this, because I've overcome death, because I am the living One, because I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys to Death and Hades," He says, "therefore continue writing." And He tells John three things: "Write the things that you have seen, those that are, and those that are to take place after this." Now, in scholarly circles, people spend a lot of time writing about verse 19 of chapter 1, trying to say it is the interpretive key of Revelation, that what He is saying is this is a chronology. For example, what He's telling John is the chronology of Revelation is going to be is something you are going to write – write what happened in the past, write what happened now, and then write what happens in the future. After all week, what I have figured out is that the Book of Revelation—this verse—is not about the chronology; I think it's about something else altogether. Because he is re-commissioning John. He is saying, "Get up and basically, "Write what I was going to tell you to write, and I want you to write that which was in the past, that which is in the present, and that which is in the future." And do you remember what we said over and over again? You're going to see that the Book of Revelation is in the past, the present, and the future. In other words, another way for him to say this might be, "John, write, therefore, that I have won; write, therefore, that I am winning; and write, therefore, that I will win. Write the things that have happened - my death, life and resurrection, my victory over sin and death. Write the things that are happening right now - my victory over sin and death. And write the things that will happen in the future – my victory over sin and death and all of creation.

What do we see next and finally? In verse 20, he says,

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.*

The seven stars are the angels, and the seven lampstands are the churches. Now, I could spend a lot of time talking about who are the angels of the churches, and at the end of the day, no one is sure exactly what He means there. Because an angel could either be a human messenger, or it could be the winged creature. In the Book of Revelation every other place the word "angel" is used, it means "the heavenly creature." So to be consistent, it would be heavenly creatures. And the question is, Why would He say the churches have an angel? Well, some would say, "Just like the other places in the New Testament seem to imply that there is at least one angel assigned to each church, and they bear some responsibility for what goes on in the church." That's one way to look at it. Another way to look at it is to try and remind the churches that they exist on a different realm; that we exist down here oftentimes in sort of the petty - who did this, and who did that? And who said this to me, and who didn't say that to me? And I think what John is trying to do, or Jesus through John, is to remind them that you exist up here – the church is in a different place than the rest of the world; that you exist on the same realm with the angels. But what's more important is that he interprets - he says, "The seven lampstands are the churches." Why is that such an important thing to get? It's important in a lot of ways, because it's a connection between Israel of the Old Testament and Israel of the New Testament. But for our purposes this morning, I wanted to remind you what was said in verse 13. Do you remember where this one like the Son of Man was? John turns around, and he sees seven golden lampstands, and now we know—it's been revealed to us—that the lampstands are the churches. Now was this one like the Son of Man sitting way above the lampstands? Was he sitting far away from the lampstands? Was he was sitting up in the cheap seats of Safeco Field looking down at the lampstands? The one who is like the Son of Man was walking in the midst of the lampstands. In other words, He is not an absentee landlord. When we get to the seven churches and we talk about each of those, the letters to each one of the seven churches begin something like this: "I know. I know what you have done. I know what's good. I know what's bad." And this is the reason Jesus knows what is happening in each of the seven churches. He knows because He's involved. He knows because He walks in the midst of them.

I think one of the things people in church tend to forget is that very fact – that most of us go through life, and we assume that Jesus is just somewhere way out there – "I trust that He's forgiven me for my sins. I believe the right theology. But at the end of the day, He's way out there, and I'm down here in the muck. At the end of the day, He's seated at the right hand of God the Father in glory, and I'm down here going through my day-to-day business wondering if I can even pay my bills." And what John is saying here – what the Book of Revelation is saying here is that Jesus is not an absentee landlord. The reason He knows what's going on in the seven churches is because *He is there*. And get this: This is also the reason that

Jesus knows what's happening in *our* church. *He knows*. And that should change everything if you thought Jesus was walking in the midst of us. I mean think about it, oftentimes in popular culture, you hear "WWJD" – you know, “what would Jesus do?” That's actually pretty easy, because He's not there. And they know why they think Jesus would do this, or Jesus would do that. What I think this is getting us to is something like WIJWT (what if Jesus was there?). What if Jesus *was* there? When you're out in the narthex, or you're at home with your friends, and you're tempted to gossip, what if Jesus was there? Would you still do it? Or when you're tempted to complain, what if Jesus was there? Would you still do it? When you're tempted to do any number of things, would you still do them if Jesus was there? Because, you see, as we move into the Book of Revelation, on one hand, we see that God is sovereign, and we see that Jesus is sovereign. On the other hand, we see that we bear responsibility, and the churches bear responsibility. And if they do the right thing, they're blessed, and if they don't do the right thing, then they will be disciplined. And the question is, How does the fact that Jesus walks in our midst change the way we behave? How does this change the way you interact with your neighbor? How does it change the way you do *anything*? Think about that.

Let me pray for us. Father, I do pray that as we continue with this series that You would, on one hand, convict us and draw us closer to You. On the other hand, I pray that we would be encouraged and engaged, and we would look and see the fact that Jesus is the First and the Last, and that He lived, and that He died, and He rose again for us. And because of that, He not only represents us, but He promised to be with us, and *He is with us*. And I pray that You would just, in fact, open our eyes to see that. In His name, we pray. Amen and amen.