

Jesus Like You've Never Seen Him Before

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[0 : 00] Good morning. It's nice to be able to gather around God's Word like this freely, even though we have restrictions. It's a privilege, really, to gather around God's Word like we do.

Keep your Bible open in Revelation chapter 1. I'll have a few verses up on screen, but it's best for you to see this in your own Bibles and follow along as we go through it.

So if you look around at our society the way it is at the moment, I think it's fair to say that we are living in probably the first true post-Christian generation.

You know what I mean by that? So just a generation ago, when I was growing up, Christianity was a religion that was fairly well respected by the average person on the street.

Nations would proudly call themselves Christian nations founded on biblical ethics. And most people you spoke to would agree, even if they weren't Christians, that the moral structure that is outlined in the Bible is a good one.

[1 : 08] Most people would agree that Christian biblical ethics are right. But now, look at the world. Just a few decades pass, and Christianity is seen by society as being rather backward, behind the times, bigoted.

And there's a growing intolerance of biblical truth. I'm sure you'll agree with me as you look around in our world and you read what people are saying on social media. Christianity has kind of lost its position of legitimacy in society.

I'm actually reading a book written by a Christian called How to Be the Bad Guys. Because Christians more and more need to wake up to the fact that they're often the bad guys in society now in discussions.

The thing is, though, if you look at that kind of regression of respect for Christianity, if it's true, if we are actually serving the ruler of the kings of the earth, like Revelation 1 verse 5 says, why aren't we winning in society?

You know, why are Christians and Christianity, why is it losing so much ground if what we read in Revelation about Jesus and who he is, is actually true? Why does it seem such a now growing minority view?

[2 : 33] Well, it was actually the same for the Christians in the first century when Christianity started. They were, if you think about it, living under the rule of a pagan Roman empire. And they were a minority as well.

And they were seen as a sect. And most people didn't give them much legitimacy. And they would have been asking the same question. If Jesus has risen and is in authority, why is it like this? Why aren't we winning? And maybe you're asking the same question today. Well, we see that this was the case as we turn to Revelation. We see what John wrote to these Christians that he's writing this letter to.

Have a look at verse 9. He says, I, John, your brother and partner in the affliction. So they were afflicted. They were suffering probably open persecution by the Roman Empire, who was really bothered if anyone didn't worship the emperor as a god.

Often Christians would be persecuted for that reason and for others. And there was a lot of persecution during that time. And so John, he admits that he is suffering affliction.

[3 : 45] And he says he's a partner in their affliction, that the Christians of that time were suffering affliction. And then further down he says, I was on the island called Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.

Most likely he was there because he was exiled there because of talking about Jesus. People didn't tolerate it and so you think cancel culture is a new thing? It's not. Cancel culture was there as well.

And they canceled John by exiling him to Patmos. That's most likely why he was there. But in the same opening words, he says not only that he shares affliction with these early Christians and that they are suffering under the thumb of the powers that are rallied against them.

But look what else he says, verse 9. I, your brother and partner in the affliction and in the kingdom and the endurance that are in Jesus. The affliction but also the kingdom.

He's reminding them that even though they're suffering now, they are part of a kingdom. They are part of an eternal kingdom and they are members of the kingdom that is coming to this earth in the future.

[4 : 53] And therefore, if they're members of the kingdom and they know what the future holds for this world, which has been revealed to them, but they're also under affliction, what they need is this endurance that he mentions.

That's why he mentions all those three things. And those three things, affliction, kingdom and endurance, are really the three words that summarize the Christian experience in every generation. The Christian experience is one of affliction, just by being in a broken world, but also by siding with Christ, who many people don't like. But it's one of kingdom. It's one of being part of a bigger kingdom that stretches into eternity and covers the whole world eventually.

And it's therefore a life of endurance, patient endurance. And that's how John addresses his fellow Christians. And Revelation, the rest of the letter that he writes, is essentially written to help these Christians he's writing to have that endurance in affliction.

And the way that John chooses, or the way rather that Jesus, who revealed this to John, chooses to help Christians endure affliction is by helping them to see what's going on behind the scenes.

[6 : 08] Remember that's what I said last week about what Revelation does. Revelation largely pulls back the curtain to help you to see what's going on behind the scenes in this world, to explain what's going on on the stage of history that we can see.

And that's what Revelation does. And the purpose we see here is to help Christians have this endurance. And now, this passage this morning we come to is the first major pulling back of the curtains.

So Jesus, through John, writing this down, is wanting to show his people something that we wouldn't have otherwise seen, something behind the scenes. And what he's wanting to show, what Jesus is wanting to show his people here in this first revelation, is himself, as you've never seen him before, in all his glory, as he is now.

And so that's what we see first here, a picture, an epic picture of Jesus, like no other picture in the Bible, that depicts him. And what we're going to do this morning is just work through these symbols and the way he's described and see what we learn about him.

So it starts from verse 10. Have a look. John says, I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard a loud voice behind me like a trumpet saying, write on a scroll what you see and send it to the seven churches, Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergam, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea.

[7 : 37] Remember last week I said that the seven churches chosen here is essentially representative of all churches in every age. They were chosen because they are typical churches with typical church problems, and we'll see in chapter 2 and 3.

By the way, we're going to study the letters to each of the seven churches in chapter 2 and 3 in our midweek online sessions. We're going to do small midweek online Bible studies, and then from next week, from Sunday, we'll skip right to chapter 4, but the next seven weeks, in the middle of the week, we'll be studying these letters to the churches, so we'll really be able to get our teeth into them.

But Jesus now is telling John to write something down to the churches. Now, that alone is quite a disturbing thing for John to hear because the prophets were told some of the things in the Old Testament.

The prophets were told when God has a message for the people of the earth to much the same. They would hear a voice and then they would be told to write it down. But normally, nine times out of ten, when this was said in the Old Testament to a prophet, it was a warning of coming judgment. It was like, you know, when your parent says to you, when you're a child, your parent gets that stern voice, and they say, I'm not going to tell you this again. You know, then you know, oh, oh, I better listen up because if I don't listen up, I'll be in trouble.

[8 : 56] Well, that's kind of, this is kind of what God is doing when He says, listen, John, write this down because I've got to say some serious stuff now. And John would therefore be quite disturbed

right off the bat.

But then he turns around and what he sees next is going to disturb him even more. Have a look from verse 12. Then I turned to see whose voice it was that spoke to me.

When I turned, I saw seven golden lampstands and among the lampstands was one like the Son of Man dressed in a robe with a golden sash wrapped around his chest.

The hair of his head was white as wool, white as snow, and his eyes like a fiery flame. His feet were like fine bronze as it is fired in a furnace and his voice like the sound of cascading waters.

He had seven stars in his right hand. A sharp double-edged sword came from his mouth and his face was shining like the sun at full strength. When I saw him, I fell at his feet like a dead man.

[10:00] As you can imagine, you would do seeing that. Now, we've got to understand much of this language that describes Jesus is symbolic language.

It's telling us symbols. Jesus isn't actually walking around with a sword in his mouth. That would be rather uncomfortable. But we've got to understand most of the visions that are seen in Revelation are symbolic visions.

And each of the symbols corresponds to something in reality even though it's not literal. Much like icons on a map. If you look at a map, like a weather map, you see a cold front.

You know one of those synoptic charts? And you see the cold front and it's depicted as this blue arc with these spikes on it. You know what I'm talking about if you've ever seen a weather map? But when you go outside and it actually is coming and you look to the west, you don't see a giant arc in the sky with spikes on it because you know that's just a symbol.

It's just an icon that represents a reality. Well, each of these descriptions of Jesus is also symbolic and that's how we've got to read them and they do start to make more sense if we read them that way in Revelation.

[11:07] But let's work through some of these symbols and see what they tell us about Jesus. The first major set of symbols, the way he's described, this white hair and his magnificence comes actually from Daniel 7.

If you were listening to the Old Testament reading earlier, you would have seen a lot of similarities in the descriptions in Daniel 7. And Daniel 7 tells us about two major figures in biblical prophecy. The first figure, turn there if you have your Bible with you, turn back to Daniel 7 and let's just read what it describes. There's two figures. The first one is called the Ancient of Days and he is essentially the judge of the nations.

Read what it says from Daniel 7 from verse 9. As I kept watching, now this is Daniel talking, he's also much like John, received a vision from God of something behind the scenes.

As I kept watching, thrones were set in place and the Ancient of Days took his seat. His clothing was white like snow, the hair on his head like whitest wool.

[12:20] His throne was flaming fire, its wheels were blazing fire, a river of fire was flowing, coming up from his presence. Thousands upon thousands served him, ten thousand times, ten thousand served before him.

The court was convened and the books were opened. Whoa, that's heavy because what we're seeing here is a courtroom scene, but it's not a courtroom for common criminals, it's a courtroom for the nations and the rulers of the nations.

Okay, so God is a, this Ancient of Days that's described here is a judge who one day is going to hold to account all nations and all rulers of nations for how they've used the will he gave them.

Because really, we're all stewards from the least powerful to the most powerful president of America. We're all stewards of God's world. And we will be held accountable for what God has given us.

And the more he's given us, the more accountable we'll be held. And so, that's kind of what we're seeing here in this picture of a judge of nations. And the nations and the rulers, all of them from history are lining up before him and he's opening the books.

[13:30] And he's looking at how they used the world he gave them. But that's not the only figure we discover in Daniel 7. Later on, there's another figure that enters the scene. from verse 13.

I continued watching in the night visions. And suddenly, one like a son of man was coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was escorted before him.

He was given dominion and glory and a kingdom so that those of every people in Anglication should serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away and his kingdom is one

that will not be destroyed.

So this second figure in this courtroom scene is the one who is going to possess all the nations once the Ancient of Days takes it out of the rule of those who misused them. Okay, so he's going to...

The Ancient of Days is repossessing the nations, repossessing the world and then he's giving it to this son of man, a human being, one like a son of man. Kind of like when the bank repossesses your car if you can't pay it off or your house, if you can't pay off the mortgage and you're in debt.

[14 : 35] Sometimes the bank will repossess that possession because you're unable to possess it yourself. Well, that's what's going to happen for the whole world. There's going to be a great repossession and the one who's going to possess the kingdoms of this world is this figure, the son of man.

So that's the vision that Daniel has. But now in Revelation, you can turn back to Revelation chapter 1, what we discover is that Jesus is described in both terms, as a son of man, as Daniel's son of man, but also as the Ancient of Days.

So these two figures are kind of put into one when John sees this vision of Jesus with, to add to it, a sword representing justice coming out of his mouth.

His words are going to establish justice in the world. And so what we see here is a picture of a figure with ultimate authority in this world, more authority than any human has ever possessed. Authority that blows the mind. The judicial authority of the Ancient of Days from Daniel 7 combined with the executive power of the Son of Man to rule.

[15 : 49] So here we see Jesus as the judge, jury, and executioner all rolled into one. And it's meant to blow us away. That there is a person, a human being, who has this much authority in existence.

But that's not the only set of symbols we see in this description. So some of the symbols take us back to Daniel 7 and help us to see that Jesus himself fulfills these visions that Daniel had.

But we see more symbols. And interestingly enough, the commentators tell us some of the symbols that describe Jesus here are drawn from pagan mythology that were used to describe the pagan idols and gods of the day.

So the eyes of fire, the golden sash, the stars were very important in astrology for the pagans. They also saw the stars we saw earlier as spiritual creatures and they often worshipped them.

But these are all used to now describe Jesus as well as, later on, he says to John, I have the keys to death and Hades. What does that mean? Well, that phrase was used of the Greek goddess Hecate.

[16 : 58] this Greek goddess who was the goddess of the underworld who people worshipped and feared because she, we've got these statues of her, was holding a key.

And so people considered her to be the one who decides your eternal fate. But now, all of these pictures from all of these different Greek and Roman gods are also bound up in Jesus.

It's as if Jesus is saying, whatever you think holds the power in this world, whether it be spiritual forces or human governments or the forces of chance dictated by the stars, Jesus actually holds all of that in His hand.

All of that power that you think belongs to these different gods and these different governments actually belongs to this Son of Man. the Son of God in heaven.

And that's the first thing we need to realize. Before we get anywhere else in Revelation, we need to get this vision of Jesus as the human being, that's why it's called the Son of Man because He's an actual flesh and blood human being who holds all the power and authority of the God of the universe combined into one person.

[18 : 19] And that, if we just get that vision in our minds and let it stay there, it's going to change the way we go about our lives. It's going to change what we think controls our lives and what we think has power in this world.

When we have this vision that Revelation gives us, it's so important for our lives to keep this vision of Jesus in our minds. Now, of course, John sees this. He understands without it being preached to him because he knows his Old Testament and he knows what the pagan gods and goddesses were like.

And so he sees this and he's just blown away. He's petrified. He just falls down as a dead man. He thinks he's going to die. If you come face to face with the authority and power of the universe, it's

like flying a spaceship directly into the sun.

You just won't survive. And John knew that he wouldn't survive. He knew he was a sinner and he can't possibly survive face to face with this person. But then we read on from verse 17.

I saw him. I fell at his feet like a dead man. He laid his right hand on me and said, Don't be afraid. I'm the first and the last, the living one.

[19 : 37] I was dead, but look, I am alive forever and ever. I hold the keys of death and Hades. So this authority, now this is crazy, this authority figure who is actually the one who is going to possess all the nations once God brings justice to this world, even is in authority over death itself because he came to this earth, he took on death and he defeated it.

And so John doesn't have to fear. John's fearing that he's going to die, but then Jesus says to him, Listen, I'm in charge of death, so if you're on my side, you're okay. That's, in summary, that's the gospel message.

Right? Jesus is the boss. If you're on his side, you're okay. That's the gospel in a nutshell. The gospel message is not so much what Jesus did, it's actually who Jesus is.

And when you realize that, then you want to get on his right side and you can, because of what he did on the cross, to pay for the sins of his people, to wash them clean, to justify them in the sight of God, but the gospel itself, the message that we exist to take to the world, the message that changes people's lives when they get it, the good news is actually not so much what Jesus did, but who Jesus actually is.

When people realize that, the rest follows. And this passage here is just to convince us and to help us to grasp that, of who Jesus actually is.

[21 : 09] And that's the first vital backstage view that Revelation gives us as it slowly pulls back the curtains. The first thing we see is Jesus himself in all his glory.

The question is, well, why don't we see that on stage, in history, in the world, around us? If that's the truth, if that's who Jesus really is, why don't we see that in the news?

And this passage also tells us as we dive even deeper into it, because what we discover is that Jesus has something he needs to do before he reveals himself to the world at large, and it involves you and me.

And that's the next thing we discover. So we've seen Jesus in all his glory, but now we also see Jesus in and amongst his people, in and amongst his church in this age.

Look back at verse 12 to 13. Then I turned to see whose voice it was that spoke to me. When I turned, I saw seven golden lampstands, and among the lampstands was one like the Son of Man dressed in a robe.

[22 : 15] Okay, so here we have a picture of these golden lampstands, seven of them, which align to the seven churches that the letter is written to. And walking among the lampstands is Jesus.

He's slowly making his way in and amongst these lampstands. Now, the moment a Jew would have read this, they would have been reminded of something from the Old Testament.

Remember what I said last week? Most of the stuff in Revelation are references to stuff in the Old Testament. And the more we go into the Old Testament, the more it unlocks what Revelation means.

There was a golden lampstand in the temple in Jerusalem, a very special one that God commanded was to be built. It was made out of pure gold. It weighed something like 35 kilograms, and it was adorned to depict the tree of life in the Garden of Eden.

And it would be lit in the temple, and then the priest would continue to make sure that it stays alight. It would be alight all the time. And the symbolism of that lampstand was to represent the tree of life in Eden, so God as the source of life, but also light in the darkness.

[23 : 25] And so this lampstand was constantly in the temple to remind people that God brings life and light into a dark and dying world. That's the symbolism of that lampstand.

But then Jesus comes along, and when He was here on earth, He started telling His followers, His disciples, who became His church, that they are now the lampstands.

They are now the light. He said in Matthew 5, you are the light of the world. You are the ones who are to bring the light of truth into the darkness. And here in Revelation, we discover that each of the churches that Jesus is writing to is represented by, appropriately, a lampstand.

So, right at the bottom, the seven lampstands are the seven churches. Okay, so here you have this picture of the churches being the source of light and life in the world.

because the church, God's people on earth, is the place where other people can come to experience God properly, to experience God's love and God's grace, like they can't anywhere else. [24 : 39] Or at least, that's what the church should be. And if we're not, if people don't come here and they get a sense of God's love and His grace, then we're not doing our job.

because that's what Jesus said we are to be, the light to the world. And not only are we to show people what God is like through how we live and how we serve and how we serve our community, but we are also to tell people what God has said because we can shine light because we have this, we have God's word and we are able to shine truth into a world of fake news and darkness and confusion.

We are sources of light and we've got to take that job seriously. Now here's the thing. In the temple, the priest's job, amongst other things, would be to trim the candles so that they didn't go out and they kept burning brightly.

That's one of the jobs of the temple priest. He would walk amongst the candles and he would go and he would snip them to make sure that they don't go out. And so that's the picture we get of Jesus here walking amongst the lampstands in a priest's robe making sure that these candles continue to burn brightly in the dark world.

The question is how does Jesus trim the candles? How does Jesus keep the light of these seven churches that he's writing to bright and burning? Well, through these letters that he writes to them, through these warnings and through these letters that are written in chapter 2 and 3 that we're going to go into in the next seven weeks.

[26 : 10] His word trims the candles. His word keeps his people burning brightly in a dark world. His word in Hebrews 4.12 is called the sword.

His word is a the word of God is a double-edged sword able to penetrate. And I think if you've come to really dive into God's word you'll realize how it does penetrate. How it changes those who read it when they read it willing to hear what God is saying to them.

And so it's through the word that Jesus takes this role of the priest and trims the candles to keep them burning. Trims us. Keeps us burning in a dark world. But it's only when we take his warning seriously when we read what he said when we come Sunday by Sunday and we listen to him and we take this on board and we don't treat it like good advice but we treat it like a command from our Lord.

That's how he keeps us burning in a dark world. But that's not the only thing he does to help us to keep burning. He also uses his angels. Now it gets weird for us Westerners at least.

Look at verse 20. Because not only does he walk among the lampstands he also holds seven stars. What are the seven stars?

[27 : 31] The angels. Thank you Robbie. The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches. What? What are the angels of the seven churches?

What do they do? Well Hebrews tells us this about angels. Hebrews 1.16 Are they not all ministering spirits sent out to serve those who are going to inherit salvation?

We've got to understand a little bit about angels here. Angels the Bible teaches us are supernatural beings that interact with God's people on earth. Believe it or not. So we've got this picture that we saw in the video earlier of the realm of earth the things that we see and know and the realm of heaven above.

I think we've got it in the next slide. So you remember that from the video. That's just a screen grab. You've got the realm of earth where the animals and the mountains and stuff are in us.

You've got the realm of heaven where God and the angels and the spiritual forces of the world are. But there's this overlap between them and we inhabit that overlap as human beings.

[28 : 41] We have the ability to interact with the spiritual world unlike animals. Cats and dogs just lick themselves and eat food and sleep and dig holes.

That's about all they do and they play and they're fun to be around but they don't have any interaction with the spiritual realms. We do. That's why being made in the image of God.

We of all the creatures of the earth have the ability to engage. We're in that overlap but just as we represent to the spiritual realm the whole of creation and we're in that overlap, the spiritual beings that exist in that overlap are the angels.

And so the angels and humans actually interact in ways that we often don't realize but there are records in the Bible of angels appearing and speaking and having conversations with humans.

The angels are these beings that interact and play a role in what humans are doing on earth. And it seems here in Revelation that there are particular angels assigned to help particular churches.

[29 : 48] Definitely these seven churches but there's every reason to believe that there are spiritual agents, spiritual beings who are given oversight of individual churches. there might be an angel who has oversight of St.

Mark's. It's not inconceivable. It seems crazy but why not? Because what we do every Sunday and Monday to Saturday as we go out into the world as God's church in the world, what we do is supernatural.

It's not ordinary. It's extraordinary. It's what we do when we pray and when we share the gospel with others and when we open God's word. It's supernatural stuff going on.

So it stands to reason that there are supernatural beings who are helping us do that. So there might well be an angel of St. Mark's if you think about it. But either way, what we discover here in Revelation, when we hear of Jesus walking through and concentrating on trimming the candles to keep the candles burning and sending his angels to oversee and deliver messages to the churches, one thing stands out and that's that these regular, ordinary, pokey local churches were very important to the Lord of creation.

And these churches that are mentioned, by the way, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, they probably weren't much bigger than St. Mark's. In fact, they were probably smaller. They were just local gatherings of disciples in these towns.

[31 : 18] And so to receive this letter, and a letter directly from the Lord of the universe that's been revealed as the judge and the ruler of this world who is coming, and to get a letter directly from him, imagine Jesus wrote a letter addressed to St.

Mark's. How would we feel? I'd feel petrified. I don't know about you. But that's the image we have here, this great, grand figure of creation with all the authority bound up in him, and then what he's concentrating on are these little groups of ordinary disciples.

And that's why he hasn't come on stage yet of human history. He will. He will reveal himself to the rest of the world. But the reason he hasn't come yet is because there is unfinished work that needs to happen before then, and that work is work on us in our churches that Jesus is busy doing.

We are his focus in this age, before his coming, before he does his work in the rest of the world.

And he is focused week by week on equipping us to do the task that he's given us, to prepare the world out there for his coming.

That is our task. He is coming. There is no doubt about that. Our job is to help those people out there to realize that and to get ready for it. And that job is so important that before he comes, Jesus is working and engaging with us to prepare us and equip us to do that work, trimming us by his word, Sunday by Sunday, so we can shine brighter as God's light in a dark world and testify to the truth in a world full of lies.

[33 : 04] And so are we going to let him do that? Are we going to let him prune us and trim us as we read these seven letters? Join us midweek online as we study these together. But for now, I'm going to pray and ask for his help.

Lord, we thank you for this epic vision of you, who you truly are now in the heavenly realms. Help us to be awed and humbled by this.

And Lord, we thank you that even though you are just in charge of the cosmos right now, you are hearing us, you are listening to us pray as a church to you, and you are focused on us, just as you are focused on all local churches, to do your work, to work on us, and to make us shine brighter in this world.

Help us as we work through Revelation, Sunday by Sunday, and in our midweek sessions, help us Lord to better be able to exhibit God in a world that so desperately needs to know him, and to shine the light of truth in a world that is in darkness.

We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.