

Yours Faithfully, Jesus

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 10 July 2016

Preacher: Ian Naismith

[0 : 0 0] Good afternoon everyone. I repeat John's welcome this morning. It's afternoon delighted to have you here with us as we start a new series, not ploughing straight into the letters to the churches, but looking this morning at the Lord's introduction to what he has to say to the churches in Revelation chapter 1.

So we're going to read together, if you have a Bible or you can get access to one, we're going to read from Revelation chapter 1 and starting from verse 9, and the words will come up on the screen. Revelation chapter 1 and starting from verse 9.

And this is John, almost certainly John the disciple of the Lord Jesus, writing. He says, I turned round to see the voice that was speaking to me, and when I turned I saw seven golden lampstands.

And among the lampstands was someone like a son of man, dressed in a robe reaching down to his feet and with a golden sash around his chest. His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and his eyes were like blazing fire.

His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of rushing waters. In his right hand he held seven stars, and out of his mouth came a sharp double-edged sword.

[1 : 5 2] His face was like the sun, shining in all its brilliance. When I saw him, I felt his feet as though dead. Then he placed his right hand on me and said, Do not be afraid.

I am the first and the last. I am the living one. I was dead, and behold, I am alive forever and ever. And I hold the keys of death and Hades.

Right there for what you have seen, what is now, and what will take place later. The mystery of the seven stars that you saw in my right hand, and of the seven golden lampstands, is this.

The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches. I'm sure God will help us as we look at this passage from his words this morning.

There must be a temptation when you're planning a summer series on the seven letters to the churches in Asia in the first century, to start with Ephesus and to miss out the introductory section in chapter one.

[2 : 5 7] It's slightly strange in many ways. It feels slightly weird when you first read it. And perhaps you're impatient to get on and to look at the letters themselves. Well, I'm glad John didn't do that when he put our series together, because chapter one of Revelation is a very important introduction to what follows in chapters two and three.

It is the Lord Jesus presenting himself to the churches before he gives the message that he has for each of them. I was reminded reading of it of something like a job interview.

Not the Lord needs to justify anything he says to the church, but there are some similarities to a job interview. If you go for a job interview, there are two things that are vitally important.

The first is what you look like, and the second is what you see. Your appearance is vitally important. That is what creates the first impression.

So you dress to impress, you make sure you look reasonably smart, you polish your shoes or whatever, so that when you go into the room, people look at you and think, yes, this is someone who could be suitable for this job.

[4 : 07] You probably can't get a job purely through your appearance, but you certainly can lose one in the first few seconds when you arrive in the room. And so a lot of what we're reading this morning is about the Lord's appearance and what that tells us about him.

And then the second thing with the job interview, obviously, is you've got to present your credentials. You've got to explain to people why you are the right person for the job. And you do it hopefully concisely and convincingly.

And the second part of what we've read this morning is the Lord Jesus talking about his credentials, why he is the one who is in charge over the churches, why he is the one whom we can rely and depend on.

And we're going to look in a little bit of detail at the vision of what John saw and also of what John heard in a minute or two, and also, thirdly, of what John did. And we'll learn some lessons, hopefully, for ourselves.

A bit of introduction, though, before we do that. And we're looking at John, as said, probably John the Apostle of the Lord Jesus. John we read about in the Gospels. And he has been exiled on the Isle of Patmos.

[5 : 19] Now, you see the map. Patmos is down towards the bottom left there. It's an island in the Aegean Sea, but not too far away from the seven churches that the Lord is going to be writing to.

John says he was on Patmos because of the Word of God and the testimony of Jesus. That probably means he was exiled. He had been imprisoned there as someone who was being persecuted for his faith in the Lord Jesus.

And equally, he was writing to people who were being persecuted, as he makes clear in verse 9, as he talks about being a companion in suffering and patient endurance.

So the book of Revelation is very much a pastoral letter or a book that John is writing, giving the visions that he saw of the Lord Jesus and trying to encourage God's people to live for the Lord Jesus in difficult times.

And they're very relevant to us, not that we have the same level of persecution, but certainly difficult times to make a stand as being God's people and standing for God's truth.

[6 : 23] And John is on the Lord's Day, probably that means Sunday. He is in the spirit. He is in the right attitude for coming before God. And he sees this great vision of the Lord Jesus.

Here's the voice first, turns around, and he sees the vision. And the vision, if you look at it, if you think of it in the round, it's quite strange. Now, fortunately, we've just finished Daniel, so we're quite used to strange visions.

And this one shouldn't hopefully cause us too many problems. Indeed, it's quite a lot of references to Daniel in it. But what did John see? Well, he saw lots of different things, and we'll focus on them individually.

I think it's quite important that we understand individually what they mean, and that will give us a feel for what they mean collectively. So the first thing he saw was seven golden lampstands and someone walking around in them.

And hopefully at the end of the chapter, the Lord Jesus explains what the seven lampstands are. They are the seven churches. Really good picture of a church as a lampstand. Lord Jesus used the picture of a light on a hill.

[7 : 27] It is very much similar. Us as light in the world-ish, giving light in the darkness that is round about us. And we have these seven lampstands there.

The traditional Jewish lampstand, the kind you find in the temple, is one stand with seven branches to it. Probably here, as in the picture, we're looking at seven different single-strand lamps.

That John saw. And among those lamps was walking someone who would look like the Son of Man. Now again, Daniel will help us with this. Daniel chapter seven.

We get the introduction to the Son of Man, the one who has given power and authority eternally over all the kingdoms of the world. When we come to the New Testament and the Gospels, again and again, Jesus identifies himself as the Son of Man.

And there's no doubt at all that what John is seeing here is a vision of Jesus appearing as the fulfillment of the prophecy in Daniel, but appearing also as himself, as the one who came and lived in our world as the Son of Man.

[8 : 33] And he's walking among the lampstands. In other words, he's walking among the churches. He is in the midst of his people.

One of the books I referred to, what I was preparing for this morning said this, Jesus, the risen, glorified Lord, walks among his churches. Jesus protects them, cares for them, watches over them, corrects them.

He walks past and through and around the church you are part of. He examines the leaders and the hearts of every person. His eyes see every secret.

He speaks with the sharp sound of his word. So Jesus walking among the churches, Jesus present with us in our church here, on one hand, it is a comfort and a strength to us because we know he is here to protect us and to help us.

On the other hand, though it is a real challenge because as he walks around, as he is present with us, he sees into our hearts, he sees into the essence of every one of us, he also sees into the essence of our church.

[9 : 43] And that is very much what the letters are about that we're going to be looking at in subsequent weeks. Is the Lord examining his church, finding some things he can commend, finding some things that need to be corrected?

Very important in the coming weeks as we look at these churches that we think, what is the Lord saying to us about our church? What can we learn as a church? What can we learn as individuals?

What perhaps do we need to change? So we have the Son of Man walking among the lambs. So then we get a description of this person. And the first thing that John notices is his robe.

It's a long white robe with a gold band, gold sash around his chest. Now maybe that the robe speaks of the high priest. The high priest would be a similar kind of robe to that.

It also could speak of a king, of someone with royalty. It probably in this case is speaking as much as anything else about the Lord Jesus as being the judge. But it's someone who has the authority to walk among the churches and to give his judgment on them.

[10 : 51] Having seen the robe, what John observes next is his hair. It says, the hair on his head was white like wool, as white as snow. Now again, there's probably a reference back to Daniel here.

Again to Daniel chapter 7. And there's someone in Daniel chapter 7 who's called the Ancient of Days. And his hair is described as being like wool. Probably John, or the Lord Jesus, in presenting this version, is consciously looking back to Daniel.

Although the Ancient of Days is different from the Son of Man, both are relevant when we think about the Lord Jesus. What does white hair speak of? Well, it speaks of age. It speaks of someone who's been around for a very long time.

Jesus, when he was on this earth, wouldn't have had white hair because he was only a young man when he was crucified, rose and ascended. But the picture here is of the one who has been around for eternity.

White hair speaks too of wisdom. The wisdom of age, and I'm sure that that is part of the picture here. It may also speak of purity. The purity of white, white as snow, could speak of the purity of the Lord Jesus.

[12 : 01] What do we see next? We see his eyes. His eyes were like blazing fire. And that, I think, speaks of the Lord's penetrating gaze.

That he is able to see through everything that there is. There is nothing that is hidden from him. His eyes are able to burn away all the veneer that we might want to put around our lives.

He can see things exactly as they are. Next thing is his feet. Feet feature in Daniel as well. The bronze feet that are described here.

Feet like bronze glowing in a furnace. They speak, I believe, of judgment. Of the one who is able to put everything under his feet, who is able to judge all things.

And then there's his voice. Like the sound of rushing waters. I picture it like a waterfall. Quite a few people do that. If you go to Niagara or to Victoria Falls, as well as the majesty of what you see, you are really struck by the sound of the waters as it cascades down.

[13 : 09] Perhaps also John was thinking of the island where he was in the middle of the Aegean Sea and the waters rushing past that. But what I think it speaks of is something that can't be ignored.

If you're standing under Niagara Falls, you don't have much chance to say much to others because the sound of the rushing waters is so great. Here is someone who can't be ignored, whose voice demands to be heard.

And then there's his hand. His right hand, he has seven stars. Now again, helpfully in the passage, we're told that the seven stars are the seven angels of the churches. A lot of debate about what that really means.

Are the angels, angels in the sense we might want to think of them, are they heavenly beings, sort of guardian angels of the churches? Or is John here just using the word angel, which also can be translated messenger in the Greek, word means both things.

Is he talking about the leaders or the pastors of the churches or messengers to the churches? Probably doesn't matter that much. What is important is that he holds those whom he gives the messages to, the Lord holds them in his hand.

[14 : 19] He is protecting them. He is also directing them. And then there's this rather strange picture of the sword coming out of the mouth.

Coming out of his mouth with a sharp double-edged sword. The word for sword isn't quite the same, but I think we naturally look back to the book of Hebrews chapter four, where it talks about the word of God being like a sharp double-edged sword.

It is something that can pierce through the exterior of us, get right to the heart of things and really make a difference to us. So I think that's the picture there.

And then the final thing is, face is shining like the sun, there is a real brilliance to him. As I say, if you think of the whole picture together, you get a sort of kind of almost grotesque image in your mind.

But if you think of the things individually, what do you get? You get a picture of someone who is holy, of someone who is powerful, of someone who is able to judge others, or of someone who has this world in his command.

[15 : 26] And that is the picture that John sees, the vision John sees of the Lord Jesus. And I wonder, what vision do we have of Jesus?

I suspect the vision that we, most of us have of Jesus, doesn't look very much like what was in this chapter. Now some people would say they have literally seen a vision of the Lord Jesus, and that would have changed their life.

That's not what I'm thinking about here. When you picture Jesus, what do you have in your mind? Sometimes perhaps we have the picture, particularly at Christmas, of the baby in Bethlehem, of God incarnate, come to earth, and living in the form of a young, helpless baby.

Perhaps sometimes we have the picture of the Lord Jesus, and he's up on the mountain, beside the sea, and he's pre-teaching God's word. He's speaking to the multitude in the Sermon on the Mount, or one of his other great teaching discourses.

Or maybe we see him in his power, perhaps in front of the 5,000, feeding them, perhaps at the grave of Lazarus, and reckoning Lazarus forced from the grave. Perhaps we see him, and maybe more regularly in other things, we see him on the cross.

[16 : 34] We picture him there suffering for our sins, taking our penalty, and through his crucifixion and death for us. Perhaps we see him as the risen Lord Jesus, coming out of the grave.

Perhaps we see him as the saviour of the world, that great statue in Rio of the Lord Jesus, a saviour of the world. Perhaps we see him, as some of us did earlier this morning, as the lamb on the throne, in Revelation chapter 5.

Lots of different images, and all of them are valid, all of them are good ones for us to picture, of the Lord Jesus. But all of them, I think, if we're not careful, can become quite comfortable for us.

Even the crucifixion, through familiarity, if we're not careful, can become rather too comfortable for us. I think it's good to have an image like this, that is really quite disturbing, that we've seen this morning.

Something that shakes us up, and that reminds us of the greatness of Jesus, that yes, Jesus is the man who walked among us. He is the one who had many friends on this earth.

[17 : 32] And yet also he is the great king of heaven. He is the judge. He is the all-powerful one. And I think it'd be good if we take away, in some measure with us this morning, that vision of Jesus, of his greatness, of the difference that there is between Jesus and us.

Our vision of Jesus. The second thing I want to look at very briefly is what John did. So as John sees this vision, and he sees the Lord Jesus, what happens?

He falls at his feet as though dead. Now remember who this is. This is John who was perhaps the closest of all disciples to the Lord Jesus.

The one who describes himself in the gospel as the one whom Jesus loved. He was one of the three who were the inner circle among the 12 disciples, who went up in the Mount of Transfiguration, and who were seen very much as being the leaders of that group of disciples.

And he sees Jesus, the one who he has known for many years on this earth. And what does he do? He must recognize who he is, but rather than go up and hug him or to greet him in some kind of way, as John sees the glory of Jesus, he falls at his feet as though dead.

[18 : 59] John realizes this one, this man who he had been around with for a number of years during his life on earth. He was someone still who was awesome and great and majestic, and before whom John and all of us was unworthy.

I think it's good again to think about what is my reaction to Jesus? What is my vision of Jesus? How do I react to Jesus? How do I relate to Jesus? Very often when we're talking as a church or discussing among one another, we'd like to think of our relationship with Jesus.

Jesus is our friend. He is someone who is close to us, who is there for us, and who is always around to help us.

And I think that's a good way to think of him. We were on holiday last week, and while we were on holiday, I read Bear Grylls' book about his climbing of Everest. There's a great description by his grandfather of what he achieved.

He said it was guts and godliness. That's a great phrase, guts and godliness. Bear Grylls, of course, is a Christian. And as he was climbing Everest, he took with him a shell that had described on it the words of Matthew 28, be sure of this, that I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.

[20 : 20] The words of Jesus. Very popular, incidentally, because I think that Bear Grylls' climbing Everest was a great witness to those around him as he did it, and I think his book also is a great witness to his faith.

So the making disciples, which precedes that, is also relevant. And Bear Grylls, when he was at Camp 2 in Everest, which is kind of halfway up the difficult bit, if you like, of Everest, well beyond base camp, not quite at the top, he wrote this.

He said, The more time I spend here, the more I believe the only way to survive is to stay close to Jesus. The more time I spend here, the more I believe the only way to survive is to stay close to Jesus.

And that for us, hopefully for many of us, is something we can identify with. We may never be climbing Everest, but when we come through the difficult times of life, we know that we have Jesus there to be our friend, to help us, to guide us, to see us through the difficult periods of our lives.

And that's good. And we should absolutely cling on to that. And yet there is something here that is different in this passage. Because we also need a time to react to the fact that we are very different from Jesus.

[21 : 36] That he is holy, that he is all-powerful, that he is so much greater than us that we don't deserve by ourselves to even be in his presence.

If Jesus were to appear before us this morning, I suspect our reaction would be the same as John's, that we would fall on our faces as though we were dead. Because we are utterly unworthy to have a relationship with Jesus.

And only by the grace of God can we do that. And it's wonderful that we're able to have that relationship and to know him as our friend and our companion. And yet we also need to recognize our utter unworthiness before him, that he is so much greater than us, that we are sinners, that he is pure and holy.

And so we react, I think, rightly at times in the same way as John did in recognizing how unworthy we are before Jesus. And then finally, there's what John heard.

So John falls at his, the Lord's feet as though dead. The Lord places his right hand on the same right hand that has held the stars in the vision that John just has. And Jesus says some really comforting words to John.

[22 : 56] He says three things. He says, first, I am the first and the last. What does that speak to us of? That speaks to us of the fact that Jesus is God, that he has been there from eternity past.

He will be there through eternity future. Earlier it was talked about as the Alpha and Omega. In first and last letters of the Greek alphabet, the thought is the same. So the one who is before God is the one who has always been and who always will be.

He is the eternal God of heaven. Second thing the Lord Jesus says, I am the living one. I was dead and now, Luke, I am alive forever and ever.

I was dead, probably better translated, I became dead. It was a voluntary action by the Lord Jesus to take our place and to die on the cross at Calvary. But he's pointing to his time in this world.

That he took on the form of a man. He lived a perfect life and he died our death on the cross at Calvary. But that wasn't the end because he says, I am alive forever and ever.

[24 : 01] The one who was crucified, who took our death, took our place. He has risen from the dead. He's alive forever. And he says, Thirdly, I hold the keys of death and Hades.

Keys of death and Hades. Death is, we understand what death is. It is when we die physically. Hades probably is the place where those who are dead and don't know the Lord Jesus go until they are finally judged by him and condemned for their sin.

And Jesus is saying, I hold the key of death and Hades. In other words, I can free people from the fear of death and the power of death. I can also free them from the just penalty for sins which comes to those who have rejected the Lord Jesus.

The New Living Translation Life Application Study Bible says this, I find it really helpful. Our sins have convicted and sentenced us, but Jesus holds the keys of death and the grave.

He alone can free us from eternal bondage to Satan. He alone has the power and authority to set us free from sin's control. Believers don't have to fear death or the grave because Christ holds the keys to both.

[25 : 18] All we must do is turn from sin and turn to him in faith. When we attempt to control our lives and disregard God, we set a course that leads directly to hell.

When we place our lives in Christ's hands, he restores us now and resurrects us later to an eternal, peaceful relationship with him.

In other words, we should have a total dependence on Jesus. We should recognize there is nothing in us that would justify God accepting us in any kind of way because we have rejected him.

Only through Jesus, only through trusting in him, can we have confidence that our sins are forgiven, that we have eternal life. And only in Jesus too can we have real peace and security in this life, knowing that he is with us, that he will protect us, that he will help us through everything that comes upon us.

So there's a challenge at the beginning of our reading this morning, the challenge of what we see of the greatness of Christ. But there's a real encouragement at the end if we know Jesus, that he has control over everything, and that we needn't fear death and the grave if we know him.

[26 : 39] And the challenge to all of us this evening is whether we have that relationship with Jesus, that we know that we trust him, that we love him, that we have that confidence that he can see us through and that he can bring us forgiveness for all the wrong that we've done.

And if we have that forgiveness, that we depend on him utterly for everything in our lives. So I think, as I said, there's a challenge and an encouragement.

As we go forward into the letters, we'll see many reflections of what we've read about in this passage today. The Lord picks up some of the themes, strictly a description of himself. He gives us some encouragement as a church if we're struggling, if we're fighting against heresy or persecution or whatever else.

He also gives us the challenge about being complacent or if we've lost our love for him. Lots of things we'll see in the coming days. But let's keep before us that great vision of the Lord Jesus, the Son of Man, the one who is God, who is God who became man and yet who is very much still God and still so much greater than us.

And let's bow down, perhaps not fall in our face, but certainly bow down before him, and recognize him as the great God of heaven and give our allegiance to him and be willing to listen carefully to what he has to say to us.

[28 : 08] Let's pray together. Father, we thank you for your word to us this morning. We thank you for this vision that you gave to John for the way in which he was enabled to see something of the glory of the Lord Jesus, to understand something of the greatness of Christ, and to recognize before him his own inadequacy.

But we thank you for the great comfort that the Lord gives, for the fact that he has overcome death and the grave, that he is the one who is alive forevermore and is alive and is able to save.

Pray it all of us may, if we haven't already come to that point of putting our trust in him, of passing from death to life, and of knowing him as Savior and Lord. And those of us who do know him, help us to listen to his voice, to recognize that as we listen to him, that he is speaking the words that penetrate into our life, that reach us in our situation, that he understands everything about us, and help us to be willing to be obedient to him and to fall before him in worship as we commit our lives wholly to him.

We thank you for our time together. We pray for your blessing on us through the rest of the day and through the coming week as we give you our thanks in Jesus' name. Amen.