

Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

The Vision of the Glorified Son, Part 2

Scripture: Revelation 1:17-19

Code: 66-5

Well, tonight we return to the first chapter of the book of Revelation. Let me read you the text to which we will look tonight, Revelation chapter 1 verses 17 to 19.

"And when I saw Him I fell at His feet as a dead man. And He laid His right hand upon me, saying, `Do not be afraid, I am the first and the last and the Living One and I was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore and I have the keys of death and of Hades. Write therefore the things which you have seen and the things which are and the things which shall take place after these things.'"

Anyone who is observant at all of the culture around us knows that it is obsessed with the metaphysical, obsessed with the paranormal. Our culture is obsessed with fantasies, science fiction, other worldly interests, bizarre kinds of dreams, visions. And all of this leads to a very great preoccupation with imagining and guessing what the future would be like. Books, motion pictures, television programs focus on the future, trying to imagine how it will be. And I suppose it's no different than it's been in any age or in any culture in the history of the world. Men have always been preoccupied with wanting to know the future.

But there is only one book that tells us the future accurately, and that is the Bible. And in the Bible there is one particular book which devotes greatest detail and attention to the future, and that is the book of Revelation. And so in our hands, as we open to this book, is the future. Here we have the chronicle written by god through the pen of John to tell us how the world will come to its end. Here is the last great chapter in human history written before it ever happens.

The focal point of this future book is none other than the Lord Jesus Christ. That's why it's called The Revelation of Jesus Christ. That's why John begins that way, the revelation of Jesus Christ. The main character in this book of 22 chapters is the Lord Jesus Christ. We have already seen Him in the Old Testament as He was prophesied. We saw Him in the gospels as He came into the world and lived His life in humility, died and rose again and ascended. We have heard the Apostles write about the meaning of His humiliation, the meaning of His death and the meaning of His resurrection. All of that is past and present. This book takes us to the future. And so we don't see Christ in humiliation here. We see Him in full glory. This book gives us the unveiling, the apokalupsis, the revealing of the full glory of Jesus Christ in the future. It is not a fantasy, it is fact. It is, if you will, cold, hard, historical data. For in the mind of the eternal God there is no past, there is no present, there is no future, everything is one vast eternal now. He then can tell us the history of what hasn't happened as well as

He can tell us the history of what has happened and what is happening.

And so, you have here history. The history of the end of the world, the history of the glorification of Jesus Christ and His return in every detail.

Now this monumental book was written originally by the Apostle John with the intent that it would be sent to seven churches which were in Asia Minor. And from these seven churches would be disseminated to the whole of the Christian world and eventually put together with the rest of the New Testament books to make up what we now have as the New Testament.

These churches, for the most part, were experiencing difficulty. They were experiencing persecution by the time John wrote it's 96. A.D. Sixty years after the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, Christianity has become an intolerable sect. John himself is in exile on the isle of Patmos for preaching Christ. Believers are losing their lives. The reign of terror under Domitian which began maybe about 81 was the very reign of terror which resulted in John being exiled and taking the life of numerous Christians.

There was much suffering in the church. There was death in the church. And it was very necessary at this time for the church to be encouraged because it looked on the surface as if Jesus had come and gone, ascended into heaven and everything got progressively worse. And the church could have been well on the brink of losing all hope. And so comes this last New Testament book, many, many years after its predecessor. And it is to assure the Christians that all their troubles under persecution are only temporary. That, in fact, Jesus is coming in full glory. In fact, He already exists in the full glory in which He will come. And it gives the detail of His coming. Its intent then is pastoral.

In other words, it is to come as an encouragement. It would have been easy for Christians in that day to be weary of the way the world was. It has been easy for Christians throughout the history of the church to be weary with the way the world was. And frankly, it is not difficult for Christians today to be weary with the way the world is.

I don't like the world in which I live. I don't like a world that mocks God. I don't like a world that mocks and scoffs at Jesus Christ. I don't like a world that belittles the Holy Spirit. I don't like a world that ignores the Word of God. I don't like a world that exalts sin and perversion. I don't like a world that perverts justice and equity. And I would hope that this is not the way it's going to always be. I don't like a world that kills Christians, persecutes those who take a stand for Christ. I don't like it now anymore than Christians have ever liked it.

This book comes then to us as much as to that early group of churches as a comfort. It's not always going to be like this. Jesus is coming and He's coming not in humiliation, to be scoffed at and mocked and killed again, He's coming in full glory. And when He comes He will deliver the world, He will deliver the universe from the wicked, from sin, from demons, from Satan and from death. This is

the promise of this book.

Before the future unfolds, however, the Holy Spirit wanted to reveal to John some other things. And so before the first vision of the future is given, there is a vision given in chapter 1. It is a vision of the glorified Christ in the present tense because the natural question would be...we know what Christ was doing when He was on earth, we have the record in the gospels. We know what's going to happen in the future because that starts to unfold in chapter 4 all the way through the rest of the book of Revelation, but the one remaining question is...what is He doing now? If He is exalted and glorified in heaven, what is He doing now?

And the vision in chapter 1 answers that question. Starting in verse 9 and running all the way through verse 19, the first vision is given and is the vision of the glorified Lord of the church. It shows Christ in vivid, majestic form, ministering to His church. You will remember verses 9 through 11, John introduced himself as the writer. He introduced his circumstances as being on the Lord's day on a Sunday in the Spirit, that is transcending temporal senses. And he heard a voice and was commissioned to write what he saw.

Then in verses 12 to 16, the specific vision was given. And we saw the Lord of the church in blazing glory, moving through His church which is symbolized by golden lampstands. And we said that He is doing many things in His church. He is there moving to empower, to intercede, to purify, to speak, to control, to protect and to reflect and radiate His glory. That is His present ministry. That is what He is currently doing for us, empowering us, interceding for us, purifying us, speaking to us, controlling us, protecting us and radiating through us the reflection of His glory.

So, John sees in verses 12 to 16 the glorified Jesus Christ. He sees Him robed in holiness, majesty, dignity and glory that shines like the blazing brightness of the noonday sun in a regal, heavenly splendor bearing sovereignty, authority and power. And we saw that vision, that absolutely incredible vision last time.

Now tonight, as we come to verse 17 and wrap up this vision, and come to the effects of the vision, the effects of it. How did it affect him, how should it affect us? There are three effects...fear, assurance and duty....fear, assurance and duty.

And I just want us to see these simply and directly. The first response is understandable. What John saw was absolutely overpowering. And so the first effect was fear. Go back to verse 17, "And when I saw Him I fell at His feet as a dead man."

John's response was similar to Daniel's response back in Daniel chapter 10. Daniel had an angelic visitor, a vision that was equally startling. Daniel 10:7, "Now I, Daniel, alone saw the vision while the men who were with me did not see the vision. Nevertheless a great dread fell on them and they ran

away to hide themselves, so I was left alone and saw this great vision, yet no strength was left in me for my natural color turned to a deathly pallor and I retained no strength. But I heard the sound of his words and as soon as I heard the sound of his words, I fell into a deep sleep on my face with my face to the ground." He was devastated. The blood rushed out of his face and he turned as white as a corpse and he fell on his face in the dirt...shocked by the vision that he had seen. He like John fell over like a dead man.

Such prostration, such fear, such shock was the experience of a number of people who had visions. In fact, if you go back to the book of Ezekiel you will find repeatedly that Ezekiel was literally knocked over by the power of the visions that he had. Chapter 1 verse 28, "As the appearance of the rainbow in the clouds on a rainy day, so was the appearance of the surrounding radiance. Such was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord, and when I saw it I fell on my face." The same reaction...just fell over on his face.

Chapter 3 verse 23, he says, "I got up and went out to the plain and behold, the glory of the Lord was standing there like the glory which I saw by the river Chebar, and I fell on my face." Prostrating himself in fear, in awe of the holiness of God.

Chapter 9 verse 8, "It came about as they were striking and I alone was left that I fell on my face and cried out saying, `Alas, Lord God.'" You can go all the way to chapter 43 verse 3, see a similar response. Chapter 44 verse 4, see a similar response. And if you push the point you might even consider Ezekiel the dirty-face prophet.

It was not uncommon for people to be so jolted and so shocked by visions of the glory of God that they fell on their face. You will remember the Apostle Paul giving his testimony, Acts 26, to Agrippa. "At mid day, O king, I saw on the way a light from heaven brighter than the sun, shining all around me and those who were journeying with me. And when we had all fallen to the ground." There it is again.

There is a fear that is inherent in a vision of the glory of God. When Jesus walked the earth generally people didn't fall to the ground. Generally in seeing the incarnate Christ they didn't fall over on their face. Why? Because His glory was veiled by human flesh. But to see unveiled glory is so devastating and so shocking that it causes one to fall over lifeless.

Now you might think this was a strange response for John because John knows Jesus so well. John happily and joyfully, comfortably walked and talked with the Lord Jesus Christ day after day after day in His earthly ministry. John leaned on Him at the Last Supper. John was part of the inner circle. Why then would John be so incredibly shocked? Why is John lying face down in the dirt as if dead?

W.A. Criswell, pastor of The First Baptist Church of Dallas, has unequalled insights into John's reaction. I could not do as well to share with you as his words and give you the feeling of what was

going on. He writes, "That response of John is most strange. It would seem that he would have looked upon the face of his Master with ecstatic bliss and joy beyond words to describe. I would suppose that John, this beloved disciple, knew the Lord all of his life, their mothers were sisters which would mean, according to the flesh, that John and Jesus were first cousins. He was a beloved disciple in that inner circle who lived next to the very heart and ministry of our Savior. He laid his head on Jesus' bosom at the Last Supper. He stood at the cross. He saw the blood and the water flow out like a fountain from his heart. It was this beloved disciple, John, who in obedience to the loving, tender, shepherdly word of the Savior took Mary, the Lord's mother, to his home and cared for her. Yet when he sees the Master on this Isle of Patmos, he falls at His feet as dead. I repeat, it would seem that he would have looked upon the Lord with joy unspeakable, with a bliss and a gladness that would be indescribable. Instead, great fear fell upon him."

Then he suggests there were two reasons for the fear. The first is this, "The beloved disciple is looking upon unveiled deity. In the days of His flesh, in the days of the Lord's ministry in the earth, His godhead was covered over, it was shrouded, it was curtained in the flesh. His flesh, His body was a veil that covered the glory of His godhead. Just once in a while did the glory of the deity of Jesus shine through, such as on the Mount of Transfiguration when His face shone like the sun and His garments were white as no fuller could make them. But for the most part, the godhead of our Lord shined through the veil of His face with only an occasional and softened light. But here John is looking upon the unveiled glory and deity of our Lord Christ.

"This certainly wasn't the vision he saw on earth when he saw Jesus. No, this time he is looking at the Ancient of Days. He's looking at God whose countenance shines like the sun. He's looking into the eyes of the judge of all the earth, eyes that burn in flame like fire. He is beholding the presence, the face of the great living God Himself. As such he falls down before our Lord as one who is dead.

"John could look with undimmed and undaunted eye upon the throne made of jasper. He could look unhindered on the emerald rainbow. He could look unabashed on the seven lamps that burn before the throne of God. He could even gaze in glory and wonder on the crystal sea that was like unto beautiful burnished glass. In fact, when the Lord opened to him the doors into heaven and into hell, his soul didn't tremble and his spirit didn't even quake. But when he looked at Jesus and saw deity resurrected and glorified, he fell as a dead man.

"There's a second reason why John fell over as a dead man in the presence of the great God and Savior Jesus Christ and it's this, he immediately was conscious of the burden of his own nothingness, the burden of his own folly, the burden of his own insignificance, his own shortcoming, his own humanity, his own sin and iniquity. No insect would be expected to live in the furnace of the Son. No sinful mortal can look into the face of God. No man's ear can hear the voice of the Almighty. In awe, in reverence, in godly fear for his own destruction because of his sin, he fell like a dead man at the feet of Christ."

This is a reverential fear that recognizes who it is it sees and recognizes who is being seen by God. And frankly, this is the proper response, I have to say that, it is the right response.

Turn over to chapter 6 for a moment, verse 12. John tells us, looking into the future here, that there is coming a day at the breaking of the sixth seal, that will have a great earthquake, the sun will become black as sackcloth made of hair, and the whole moon will become like blood. The stars of the sky will fall to the earth like shaking a fig tree. The sky will split apart like a scroll when it is rolled up, like a Venetian blind, if you will. Every mountain, every island will be moved out of their places. The whole universe goes pitch black. The kings of the earth, the great men, the commanders, the rich, the strong, every slave, every freeman hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains and they said to the mountains and to the rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the presence of Him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb." Fear, when they see the blazing coming of Jesus Christ, they will be in fear.

So there you have unbelievers who fear the presence. Here is even a believer who falls over in a dead faint, afraid, terrified by what he has seen.

John's reaction actually is not unlike the reaction of Isaiah. One of my favorite passages is Isaiah chapter 6, turn to it for a moment. Isaiah went into the temple upon the death of King Uzziah because he wanted to see God. He was concerned about his people. Uzziah had been king for fifty-two years. And as long as Uzziah was king everything seemed to be okay. It was like God's blessing was on them because Uzziah had brought about prosperity and peace, strong position in the cold war. The people of Israel were still on the surface religious. And having the same king fifty-two years who was basically a good man appeared to be the blessing of God.

And then Uzziah did a foolish thing. He tried to move from being a king to being a priest. He invaded the sanctity of the priestly office and God gave him leprosy and killed him. And it was obviously the judgment of God.

And so, Isaiah wants to find out what's happening because he wants to bring a message to the people. So he goes to the temple. And it says in verse 1, "That when he went to the temple he said I saw the Lord sitting on a throne lofty and exalted with the train of His robe filling the temple." He sees God is still sovereign even though Uzziah is dead, even though they have begun to feel the judgment of God. God is still on the throne. He is still sovereign. He is still ruling. He is still lofty. He is still exalted. And he sees the blazing Shekinah glory in this vision filling the temple where he is. It's as if God's throne appears in the temple and then fills it with blazing glory.

Then he sees in this vision seraphim, angels whose unique task it is to guard the holiness of God. And they're standing above the throne of God having six wings with two to cover their faces, with two

to cover their feet and with two they hovered, or flew. They had to cover their faces cause they couldn't look at the full glory of God or they would be consumed for they're also created beings. They covered their feet for the place where on they stood was holy ground. And their wings were in motion because they were ready to do service at a moment's notice.

And then the angels, you'll remember, called back and forth, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of host, the whole earth is full of His glory and the foundations of the thresholds trembled at the voice of Him who called out while the temple was filled with smoke." This is a vision of God. He sees God as sovereign. He is on the throne, lofty, exalted. He sees Him as all glorious as the emanating Shekinah glory fills the temple. He sees Him as absolutely and perfectly holy...holy, holy, holy. He sees Him as a God of judgment, as fire and smoke fill the temple. This is an overpowering vision.

And what was Isaiah's response? Verse 5, "Woe is me for I am destroyed." That's his response. Some versions say, "I am ruined." Some say, "I am disintegrating." The verb means "I am going to pieces, I am shattered, I am devastated, I am destroyed." What does "woe" mean? Curse, damn, sentence to judgment...I'm damned, I'm doomed, I'm cursed, I'm destroyed.

Now Isaiah was the best man in the country. He was the man of God, the prophet of God, the holy man. But when he saw himself compared to God, all he could see about himself was his sin. See that? Any true vision of God is devastating...it is devastating.

In Judges chapter 13 verse 22 we read about the father of Manoah, you don't need to turn to it, only a reference. The father of Manoah came home and said to his wife, "We'll die, write the will, dear, we're going to die." Why? "I saw the Lord." That's what he said. We saw the Lord. You see the Lord you're dead. Why did he say that? Because if you saw the Lord He saw you and if He saw you, you're dead. You saw His holiness, He saw your sin and unholiness. He says we're dead, we were exposed to God, we're dead.

Job said, chapter 42, "I had heard of You with the hearing of mine ear but now my eye sees You," and you know what his reaction is? "I repent...I repent." Why is he saying that? It's another way to say, "God, don't...what?...kill me. I repent in dust and ashes."

Seeing God is a frightening thing. It fills the heart with fear to see the glory of God.

Go to the New Testament, Matthew 17. I alluded a few moments ago to the appearance of Jesus Christ on the Mount of Transfiguration when He revealed His glory. They went up to the Mount of Transfiguration, Matthew 17 verse 2, He was transfigured before them. And here it is, "His face shone like the sun and His garments became as white as light." That's almost a reduplication, isn't it, of the appearance of Christ in Revelation chapter 1. Blazing light, brilliant as the noon day sun. They saw His glory, the veil was removed, they saw the glorious Christ.

What was their response? Verse 6, following what they saw, "A voice out of heaven, This is My beloved Son with whom I am well pleased, listen to Him. And when the disciples heard it," what did they do? "They did the same thing everybody else does, fell on their faces and were terrified...terrified.

If it weren't so sad and pathetic it would be amusing to hear the silly frivolous testimonies of the people who run around claiming they saw God. If you saw God, you'd be terrified. If you saw the glorified Christ, you'd be terrified. John had the normal reaction of someone who has really seen the resurrected ascended glorified Christ, awesome fear, holy fright. And so should we...so should we. I don't think that we will be able to say honestly that we have understood this vision until it inspires a healthy fear in our hearts. When you see the blazing holy glory of Christ, you have reason to be afraid because of your sin.

I've said through the years and I say it again just as a reminder, the church will never be holy until preachers begin to preach the glory of God. Because until people see God for who He is, they'll never understand their own sinfulness and be driven to holiness.

There was a second effect of this vision, back to Revelation chapter 1. Let's call it assurance...assurance. The Lord was not satisfied to leave John lying in the dirt like a dead man. This is wonderful, verse 17, "And He being the very Christ of the vision, He laid His right hand upon me." Now some commentators think they have to write a whole paragraph on here. How could the Lord put His right hand on John if He had in His right hand seven stars? I read a whole paragraph about where He put the stars when He touched John. Now let's not get too far gone here.

"He laid His right hand on me saying, `Do not be afraid.'" Oh, that's good news, isn't it? That's assurance. No, this wasn't the Jesus John had walked with in Galilee. This wasn't the Jesus that John had watched hanging on the cross. This wasn't the Jesus he had eaten with after the resurrection by the sea when they had breakfast in Galilee. This was the unveiled glorified exalted Lord of the church. Yes he had seen some glimpses of that glory, a few post-resurrection appearances. But this is devastating. And John is undone, just like Isaiah. But also like Isaiah who in the depths of fear and self-condemnation was touched and cleansed, so John is touched. And if you go back to Matthew 17 you will find that Jesus reached over and touched the terrified disciples. And so it says He laid His right hand on me, a touch of reassurance, a touch of comfort.

Those people who saw the glory of God and fell on their face may have felt they were about to get a sword through their chest. They may have felt that they were about to get an axe into their neck. But instead they received a touch. For John a familiar touch, touched from the one he had walked with sixty-five years before. And now a comforting touch for this troubled Apostle. This is wonderful comfort, beloved, to all Christians who feel overwhelmed by the glory of Christ, for all Christians who

feel overwhelmed by the holiness of God.

We preach the holiness of God and sometimes people say to me, "Oh, you frighten people. You're too strong. People feel fear instead of love." Well here is the balance. To all who are overwhelmed by the glory of God and the holiness of God, here is a touch. And Jesus said, "Don't be afraid." Literally in the Greek, "Stop fearing...stop being afraid." And actually He's commanding him to be comfortable. "Stop being afraid," by the way, is a common biblical expression. First spoken by God to Abraham and very often spoken to God's people Israel, at least seven times in the book of Isaiah, in the book of Joel. You even find it in John's gospel chapter 12 verse 15...stop being afraid.

Listen, frankly to be exposed to the absolute unveiled blazing holy glory of Jesus Christ is a frightening thing and comfort is needed. John was so afraid he thought he was going to be killed, he almost died of a heart attack. It's not good when you're ninety, almost died of fear, frightened to death because he knew his sinfulness.

The reassurance is absolutely thrilling. The reassurance is all bound up in who Jesus Christ is. Notice the titles here. "I am the first and the last, the Living One, I was dead and behold I am alive forever more and I have the keys of death and of Hades." All of those are terms to identify Jesus Christ. And they identify Him to John in a way that brings comfort. He begins by identifying Himself in verse 17 as "I am." And let me just stop there to mention to you that John must have remembered those two familiar words, ego amiin the Greek, because they were the very words Jesus used when He calmed the troubled sea. You remember that in Matthew 14:27, Mark 6:50, John 6:20? He said, "Behold, I am, stop being afraid." It's like saying, "Don't be afraid I am is here." And who is "I am"? God. That's the personal name for God, that's Yahweh, that's His name that He took in Exodus 3:14. That's not only His name that speaks of His eternity, but that's His redemptive name. And so He is saying to him, "Don't be afraid, I am is here, the redeemer God is here, the God who...back in verse 5...loves us and released us from our sins."

And then He adds, "I am the first and the last." Now this is one of the great, great texts to affirm the deity of Christ. First, the living Lord, the glorified exalted Christ says, "I am" and takes upon Himself the covenant name, the redemptive name of God. Then He says, "I am the first and the last," and I want you to note please this also is the name God took for Himself throughout the book of Isaiah. Isaiah 41:4, Isaiah 44:6, Isaiah 48:12, in all of those places God says, "I am the first and the last" Here Jesus Christ is saying, "I am the first and the last," and therefore claiming to be whom? God. This same title is applied to Jesus Christ at the end of the book of Revelation, chapter 22 verse 13, "I am the alpha and the omega, the first and the last." Chapter 2 verse 8 of Revelation, writing to the church in Smyrna, "The first and the last who was dead and has come to life says..." Here, beloved is Jesus Christ taking the very Old Testament name of God and applying it to Himself.

John doesn't need to fear because the one who tenderly touched him, to reassure and comfort him was no other than the glorified God/Man. The very one who struck fear in his heart is the one who touches him and tells him not to be afraid. And when the holy glorified Lord Himself touches a sinner with tender assurance, that is encouraging because as Paul said in Romans 8:31, "If God is for us, who can be against us?" The ultimate comfort.

So the glorified Lord of the church is the great King and High Priest without equal. When all false gods have come and gone, He remains. He was before them the first and He will be after them the last. Idols will come and go. He was before them, He'll remain after them.

Then further He says, verse 18, not only, "I am the first and the last, but am the Living One." Here is the third indication of His deity that again identifies Jesus as the God of all comfort who is comforting John. He says, "I am the Living One." That's a tremendous statement. Jesus made it before. He said in John 14:6, "I am the way, the truth and the life." John made it on behalf of Jesus in John 1:4 when he said, "In Him was life." But I just want you to know this, the Living One is a title for God in the Bible. I mean, it's a title for God all over the Bible.

In Joshua 3:10 God is called the Living One. In Psalm 42:2, Psalm 84:2 God is called the Living One. In Hosea 1:10 God is called the Living One. You come in to the New Testament, listen to Matthew's gospel chapter 16 and verse 16, "And Simon Peter answered and said, `Thou art the Christ the Son of the Living God.'" Later on in Matthew's gospel chapter 26 verse 63, the high priest said to Him, "I adjure you by the Living God." You find the same kinds of references in Acts 14:15, Romans 9:26, 2 Corinthians 3:3, 6:16; 1 Thessalonians 1:9; 1 Timothy 3:15 and 4:10; you find it in Hebrews 3:12, 9:14, 10:31. God over and over and over is called the Living One.

And Jesus here says, "I'm the Living One." This is a claim to deity. There is no other explanation for this. He is saying, "I am God the Living One."

What does it mean? He's not a dead idol. He's not made out of stone or wood or metal. The glorified Lord of the church is the eternally living God who was before all gods and will remain after all gods. He is the "I am." And listen, is it not thrilling that that very God is the one who touches the sinner and comforts the sinner? Is that not assurance?

John doesn't need to fear because the living God, the first and the last, the I am says, "Stop being afraid of Me." Then He adds this in verse 18, "And I was dead and behold I am alive forever more." Literally the Greek says, and it's really well to say it this way, "I became dead and behold I am alive for evermore." The living God who could never die became man and became dead. God did not cease to live but the man Jesus Christ died. You remember very carefully, don't you, the words of Peter, 1 Peter 3:18? He was dead in the flesh but alive in the spirit. God could never die. The living God lived but the human flesh of Christ died. I was dead, behold I am alive forever more.

In other words, I died for you, John. I died for you. Yes, I became dead but behold, look. This calls for startling vision, amazement and wonder. I am alive forever more. Hebrews 7:16 says, "He burst the chains of death by the power of an endless life." That's a great statement. "By the power of an endless life." He couldn't die. He's God. He lives again in glorified humanity and deity that will never die. There's nothing to fear for I will always be alive, I have conquered death for you and I will always live to secure you. He ever lives to make intercession for us, says the writer of Hebrews.

Jesus Christ then claims to be the eternal redeeming living God, the God who is before and after all other gods. The God who has personally conquered sin and death and hell and lives forever to secure His people. The God who alone has the power to give life and take it away. And it is that God who says, "Stop being afraid of Me."

And then He reminds John, "And I have the keys of death and of Hades." Death and Hades in a way are synonyms, although if you want to make a distinction, death is the condition and Hades is the place. Hades would be the equivalent of Old Testament Sheol, the place of the dead. He says, "I have the keys." What does that mean? Keys mean access, keys mean authority. A key gives someone the power to open and close. And the living exalted Christ says, "I'm the One who controls the door to death and Hades." I have the keys that open it and let people in. I have the keys to close it. I decide who dies and when. I decide who lives.

What a statement. What does John have to fear? Holy God in the form of the living glorified Lord of the church reaches down and touches this sinner and says, "Stop being afraid." The touch is a touch of comfort, amazing reassurance because it comes from the eternal "I am." The One who transcends all the gods that come and go, the One who alone is life and gives life, the One who has died and conquered death, and the One who controls life and death. John, you have nothing to fear. Nor does anyone who loves Him. No matter what we might see of His glorious holiness, no matter how it might traumatize us and shock us and leave us lifeless, no matter how unworthy we feel, no matter how deserving of the judgment of God, no matter how fearful of death, Jesus touches us and says, "Stop being afraid, you belong to Me, I the eternal God have determined your destiny. I have paid the price for your sin, you have nothing to fear."

And so, from that golden sash that went across His chest and down around His waist hang the keys that unlock death and Hades. John's fear, healthy. We need to have fear, holy fear. But balanced with a tender touch of assurance that if God is for us, who can be against us? How wonderful that the God/Man touched John himself and said, "Stop being afraid."

Then there's a final effect...duty. One who has such an experience of the vision of the glory of Christ, one who has received such assurance is bound to have a duty. For John, verse 19, "Write therefore." In other words, based upon what you've just experienced, get up and do your task. He already told

him what He wanted him to do in verse 11...write in a book what you see. Now instead of writing it, he's laying there on the ground like a dead man. I commend your fear, I give you assurance, now get up, dust yourself off and go to work.

This vision should inspire the healthy tension between fear and assurance. But it also should lead to duty. "Get a grip on yourself, John, get your pen moving, write therefore the things." It's a call to duty. And it's more specific than the call in verse 11, there he was told to write what he saw. And now that's expanded here. He's told to write three things. First, write the things which you have seen. What's that? Well you know, he just saw it. Write what you just saw, John...the vision. This is part one of Revelation...the vision of chapter 1. Write it down, John. Secondly he says, "And the things which are." That's the present. The first one is the past, write what has just past, what you just saw. And then he says, write the things which are, that's the present. You say, "What's that?" The message that's coming immediately in verse 20 and runs through chapters 2 and 3, the letters to the seven churches. That's the present tense. Thirdly He says, "Write also the things which shall take place after these things." That's chapter 4 to the end of the book. That's the future. Write your immediate past experience.

Write the present revelation that I'm going to give you in a split second. And then write down what's going to happen after these things have happened. So John was commissioned to write a three-part book, the vision just seen, chapter 1. The letters to the churches, chapters 2 and 3. The revelation of future history, chapters 4 through 22. And all I want to do is draw out of that the simple principle for you, beloved, that anyone who has the opportunity to experience God, to see God, to fear God and to be assured by God has the duty to pass it on.

Our duty, back in verse 3...read, hear and heed. And here if we can piggy back on John, spread it around, pass it on. The visions that you're going to see in this book are going to shock you. They may put fear in your heart. And the Holy Spirit may have to come and touch you to give you assurance. But their intention is to bring practical bearing on your life and make you responsible to spread this message to others. You have a duty. You have a duty to read it, to listen to what it says, to heed it and then to testify to it when given the opportunity.

One final verse in closing. Turn to 2 Corinthians 3:18. As we go through this book you're going to be changed. No question about it because nothing that I know of could fulfill 2 Corinthians 3:18 as much as a study of Revelation. "But we all with unveiled face beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord," stop right there.

If you look in the Word of God, which is a mirror, and it reflects to you the glory of God...the glory of God is reflected through the Word, the veil has been taken off our face in Christ, we can see clearly, and as we look at the glory of the Lord coming through the Scripture the rest of the verse says, "We are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory," from one level of glory to the next

level of glory to the next level of glory to the next level of glory, from the Lord the Spirit, by the Holy Spirit He means.

In other words, if you study the book of Revelation you are going to see the glory of Christ because this is the revelation of His glory. As you look in the mirror of the book of Revelation it will reflect to you the shining glory of the Lord, the brightness of His glory and that reflection will transform you into His very image from one level of glory to the next as the Spirit of God applies it to your life. So you are and I am in for a life-changing experience.

Father, we thank You for Your Word to us again this evening. How refreshed our hearts are by its truths. How excited we are to know that the Lord Jesus Christ, perfectly holy and all glorious, who inspires fear in us, who makes us tremble, at the same time reaches out to us as unworthy sinners and touches us with tenderness and says, "Yes I am the eternal God, yes I am the first and the last, yes I am the Living One, yes I was alive, I became dead and now live forevermore, yes I possess the keys of hell and death but stop being afraid." Stop being afraid. You belong to Me, your sins are paid for, your sins are covered and just do your duty to spread the truth of My return and My glory. And so, Father, put into our lives that balance of fear and assurance and duty that we might be as we gaze at Your glory transformed into Your image. In the name of Christ. Amen.

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