

Christ at Work in His Church

Revelation 1:10-20

80-141

As I mentioned earlier, I had the privilege this week of preaching in Atlanta, Georgia, to the southern Baptist pastor's conference in the Georgia Dome, and I decided that I would share with you this morning something of what I shared with them on Monday night. No two sermons are ever alike, even though the text may be the same. But this is generally along the lines of what I gave to them, as I trust it was an encouragement to them, it will be to you.

It's easy, frankly, to become discouraged about the Church. In fact, it's not uncommon for people to become very disillusioned and even depressed, no less than the noble soul himself, the Apostle Paul, as we have already learned in 2 Corinthians, told the Corinthians that he was depressed about their condition. For those who have any kind of passion for the Church, those who have any great concern for its life, its future, its impact, its destiny, there is plenty of reason for discouragement in the life of the Church. And we all are very much aware that the Church is to be the all-glorious and all-beautiful bride of Christ, but frankly, she most often looks like a ragged Cinderella for whom the clock has struck midnight.

And that is a grief to us, as the Apostle Paul said, "Physical torture certainly brought its pain, but it couldn't be compared with the concern for all the Churches." The agony over the Church exceeded physical torture for him. And as I think about the things in the life of the Church that concern a shepherd, a pastor, and I'm sure even the people of the Church, who are devoted to Christ, they kind of fall into some very simple categories. Let me share them with you.

We are concerned that people have a deep communion with Christ. We are concerned that they experience His power, that they experience His movement in their lives, His fellowship. That's important. Not a shallow communion, not a trivial approach to knowing Christ, but something deep and profound. Secondly, we desire that people have victory over trials and testings and temptations and sins, that continually beset them. This, obviously, is a concern to anyone who is in a spiritually shepherding role. We pray for their spiritual strength, that they'll be able to stand against the less of the flesh, the less to the eyes, the pride of life, that they'll be able to sort out the Satanic influence that is around them in the culture. Thirdly, as shepherds of God's sheep, we are constantly burdened about the holiness of the Church. We despise the unholiness of the Church. We long for its purity and its virtue and its righteous character, and we can't be content with a kind of Christianity that tolerates inequity and sin. And fourthly, it is a passion for me, and I'm sure for many like me, who serve the Church, that the Church would come under the authority of the word of God. That the Church would submit itself to the truth.

First of all, that the Church would be a place where the truth is proclaimed. Fifthly, we are burdened that the Church experience, the leadership of godly people. It is a tremendous burden to see churches that are led by people who are less than virtuous, less than holy and godly and devoted to

Christ.

And then there are a couple of other things that fit into the category of passionate concern for the Church. One would be, we desire that the Church be protected from Satanic deception, knowing full well that Satan disguises himself as an angel of life, and so do his emissaries, and that seducing spirits bearing doctrines of demons ply their trade in the life of the Church. It is always of concern that the Church be protected. Paul was very much aware that grievous wolves would come in, not sparing the flock, and perverse men would arise inside the Church and lead them astray, and that is always a concern.

And then, finally, we're concerned that the bride of Christ, the Church, be an effective evangelistic agency in the world among the ungodly. In other words, that it shine as lights in the world. That the blazing glory of Jesus Christ would radiate itself through the Church.

And when I've said those seven things to you, I basically summed up concern for the Church. I am concerned, first of all, that the Church, that is Christian people, have a genuinely deep and real communion with the living Christ and know His life and His power. I am concerned that they have victory over their trials and their sins. I am concerned that they come to a place of holiness and righteousness in their living. I am concerned that they know the truth, that they believe the truth, that they live the truth. I am concerned that they be led by godly men and women. I am concerned that they be protected from Satanic deception, and that they reflect, effectively, the glory of Jesus Christ, to a watching world, who can then be drawn to the knowledge of Him.

And certainly, every genuine shepherd carries those very same heavy burdens in his heart. Those are the things that drive us. And sometimes, as I say, when we look at how the Church is doing as a measure against those things, it can be a bit discouraging. But I'm here to tell you this morning, there's reason to be encouraged. It doesn't mean that the battle is won. It doesn't mean we can stop fighting, because we can't, but there is reason to be encouraged. There is reason to have tremendous confidence in the future of the Church. Not because of what we are so clever at doing, but frankly, because of what Christ is doing in His Church.

Whenever I get discouraged about what I may or may not be doing, or what I may or may or may not be able to pull off, no matter how hard I try, when I get discouraged about the state of the Church, and I see it in every form imaginable, from one corner of the world to another, when I get discouraged about that, I get encouraged about what Christ is doing in His Church. I go to, the last few weeks, I think I've been gone nine out of eleven weeks. I go to the backside of the Tibet/China border, to Kazakhstan, and I see a fragile Church existing in a very, very difficult and poverty-stricken part of the world, and all kind of insurmountable problems, that from a human viewpoint, look like they're beyond solving.

When I go into Byelorussia, in the city of Minsk, and I see a dying culture, I mean a whole nation dying from Chernobyl, and I see not only maimed children, but adults who are literally dying out, a declining population, and a small group of 200 pastors trying to figure out how to reach a dying civilization, that is post-Communist and literally enraptured with materialism and Western humanism, and you wonder how it can ever happen. Little churches there even struggling with legalism and things like that, and confusion about theology, and being victimized by false teachers coming in for their own ends.

All the way to England, where I was told by the leaders that 4,000 churches in the last year in England have gone into the Toronto Blessing mentality, to the craziness of laughter and barking and roaring and all of the rest of that, as if it were the Holy Spirit of God. The apathy there, the spiritual deadness so severe that they're literally vulnerable to the most bizarre and ridiculous kinds of things, to our own country, where our form of Christianity has become, in one corner, politicized and the other corner pragmatized, to the point where you wonder whether it has much resemblance to biblical Christianity. I've seen it all in my travels all over the globe, and it's easy to sort of feel like this whole enterprise is a very fragile, frail thing, hanging, frankly, by the proverbial thread.

And then I'm reminded of John the Apostle. Dear old John, and when I say old, I mean old. Somewhere around 90, sitting on a rock called Patmos, in the middle of a section of the Mediterranean Sea, in exile, with a lot of other prisoners, riff raffs, scum of humanity, sent there, so that they would be dispossessed of any influence on normal society. And there sits John, the noble soul, who had leaned his breast on the chest of Jesus at the Last Supper, who had been there with Him through all of His agony.

And I see John, and I remember what it must have been like for him, as he sat on that rock, before having received the Apocalypse and realized that Jerusalem had been destroyed. He had lived through that. The whole promise of a saved Israel and a Kingdom and a Messiah seemed pretty remote when the city was turned to rubble, and a million, one hundred thousand Jews were massacred. He had lived through the events that followed, when 985 towns and villages in the land of Israel were sacked and the people massacred, as the rest of what was left of Judaism was attempted to be stamped out. John lived through that as well. He had outlived his beloved fellow Apostles, some of whom had been sawn in half and some had been crucified upside down, but systematically, the Christ haters had basically exterminated all of them, and only John was left. And here he was, sitting on a 5x10 mile rock in the middle of oblivion, the only survivor of an enterprise, that from a human viewpoint, looked as if it went bad.

And all John would have to would be to then think about the churches. He knew about the churches in Asia Minor. He knew that the church in Smyrna was small, but holding the truth. That he knew the church in Philadelphia was holding on, but the rest, that was a different story. John knew about Ephesus. Ephesus had left it's first love, and the Lord was about to shut it down, and eventually did. And then there was Pergamos, and Pergamos had become enamored with idolatry and had become with immoralities, sexual sin. And God was about to fight against that Church Himself. And then there was Thyatira, so utterly compromised by sin, so totally married to the world, that it faced divine judgment. And then there was Sardis, and that Church was dead. And then there was Leathessia, and that Church made the Lord vomit. Not much to be glad about, if you're one who lives and breathes for the Church. And there he sat on a rock. It looked like there wasn't much of a future, a very bleak picture.

Not unlike today. We sit and look at a Church that's literally been infested worldwide with liberalism, legalism, compromise, immorality, heresy, carnality, apathy, materialism, et cetera, et cetera. The pragmatics of today, the bizarre, un-Biblical activities of the charasmania, all of this kind of stuff has presented to us a bleak picture. And as you know, there are times when I address this in the pulpit and write books and try to call the Church back, and you see the small little bit of evidence that it might help over here and yet it moves like wildfire somewhere else. 4,000 churches in the U.K. in one year, going into the Toronto Blessing. I want to tell you, folks, it's hard to start a movement. I

don't care what kind of movement, it's hard to start any kind of movement, but to imagine a little handful of people by the Toronto airport, acting in that manner, affecting 4,000 churches in England, is beyond imagination. How it could happen, but it has.

You seem like you fight the battle on one front, you just get it to a certain point and it pops up on another. The enemy is fast, the enemy is deadly, the enemy is untiring, and it's easy to get discouraged. You watch churches that once had a great testimony for Christ disappear off the map. Theologically and spiritually, battles are being fought on every front, and it's easy to be disillusioned about what the Church is and what it might become.

And that's why you have a lot of people in the ministry who get into burnout and things like that, and decide that they're going to leave the ministry. It's just more than they can bear. But when that happens, and if that happens, the place to go is Revelations, Chapter 1, and that's where I want you to go right now.

Revelations, Chapter 1. Because here, in the midst of John's bleakness, as he sits on that rock, and I've sat on that rock, in the place they say he was sitting when he received the Apocalypse, and it's a rock, and it's a barren one. And as he is sitting there contemplating surely the bleakness of his own life and the sad reality of five of the churches in Asia Minor, the tragedy of what has happened to Israel, it all seems like a small and fragile enterprise. The Lord begins to move, and from that barren little piece of earth, Heaven opens up. And John is given the first of a series of visions, and it starts in verse 10, Revelations, Chapter 1. "I was in the Spirit, on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a loud voice, like the sound of a trumpet."

It was Sunday on Patmos. John had a way of maintaining his knowledge of the days, even though they passed by with the sameness and a monotony that was dulling. It was Sunday. It was the Lord's day. It was the when believers always celebrate the resurrection of Jesus Christ, and he was in the Spirit. What does he mean by that? He was carried out of his flesh, he was elevated, he was culled, as it were, out of the shell of human life and taken into the Heavens. He was lifted to the supernatural, to see things and understand things, which naturally are not comprehensible.

And in that elevated state of spiritual sensitivity, he says, "I heard behind me a loud voice, like the sound of a trumpet." Clear and loud and blaring. And it was saying something very specific. Write in a book what you see and send it to the seven churches, to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamos and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Leathessia. This voice says, "Write. Write in a book what you see," and there are coming a series of visions that fill out 22 Chapters that we know is the Book of Revelations, and send it to the seven churches, which meant that he not only had to write it once, but he had to copy it at least six times. Because a copy of the Book of Revelation was to go to each of the seven churches. And from there, it would be disseminated to believers everywhere. And particularly note, in Chapters 2 and 3, there was a specific message given to each of those seven churches.

By the way, those seven towns in which there are those seven churches, were the seven postal centers of Asia Minor, now known as modern Turkey. They were the postal centers. We would call them, in Middle America, the county seat. They were the main town in a given region, and from there, the truth could be disseminated of the great Apocalypse, the revelation of Jesus Christ to John. They also are listed in order of the postal route. It's a circle that takes you right through Asia Minor, or modern Turkey. And so, here was coming a revelation which was to be sent from that rock

back to those churches, and from there, disseminated to all believers and bless God right down to us today, and here we hold it in our own hands.

Having heard the voice, and been commanded to write, verse 12 says, "John turned to see the voice that was speaking with me." The natural response in this supernatural experience called a vision, a revelation, he turns to see who is speaking. "And having turned, I saw seven golden lamp stands and in the middle of the lamp stands, one like the Son of Man." He turned and what did he see? He saw Jesus Christ, the exalted crowned and coronated Jesus Christ, called here, Son of Man, in the middle of seven golden lamp stands.

What is this? Well, these would be lamp stands set on the floor. They would be tall enough, probably up to shoulder level, and on the top of those golden lamp stands was placed a golden lamp, a little oil lamp is all it is, a little container with oil in it and a wick out of one end. The wick was lit, and that's how light was maintained. Made of gold, they speak of that which is precious, preeminently precious and valuable. Seven is the number of completion, and verse 20 tells us, end of the verse, "The seven lamp stands are the seven churches." You see how precious the church is, in that they are gold. The seven major, seeing here, while it's certainly reflective of the seven churches of Asia Minor, but the number seven is the number of completeness, so they are really symbolical or emblematic of the whole church. And the church is seen as the light of the world, holding forth the Word of Life, holding forth the light in a dark place.

So, here is the precious church, precious because it was purchased with the blood of Christ, the blood of the lamb, without spotting, without blemish. The precious, valuable gold church, putting out it's light. Seven of them, that's the complete ministry of the Church. And moving in that Church is the Son of Man. So, John sees the glorified Christ in his church. And the picture is one that is very simple and yet is very clear. Moving through the Church is Christ. And the idea is that the one moving is tending to the lamp stands, endeavoring to keep them shining gold and to keep them full of oil, to keep them lit. He's ministering in His Church, and this is the great encouraging passage.

Let me tell you, this is the only passage anywhere on the pages of Scripture that gives you this picture. And in that sense, it is monumental. It is in the Book of Revelations, but it is not what Christ will do, it is what He is doing. In fact, in verse 19, "Write the things you have seen, the things which are and the things which shall take place after these things," and this is one of those things that exists in the current time. This is Christ, carrying on His ministry. John looks, it's going on right as he sees it, Christ moving in His church. That is such an encouraging thing in itself. Sometimes, of course, we get the point where we think like Elijah did, "I, only I, am left," and we forget that God is alive, the Lord is alive, and He's working in His Church.

So, that's the imagery. Now, the question is, what is He doing in His Church? And the vision unfolds that clearly. Number one, He is - He is building His Church, or if you like it better, He is growing His Church, or He is empowering His Church, or He is bringing His Church into communion with Him, whichever way you'd like to say it. But it all comes down to the fact that He is shaping, forming, building the Church. In fact, in Matthew Chapter 16, Jesus said, "I will build my Church and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it." In John 6, He said, "All that the Father gives to me will come to me. That is, there's no one who's chosen who won't come, and all that come to me, I will contain, I will keep, I will preserve, I will lose none, I will raise them at the last day."

Now, let me tell you something that is very important to understand. Here you see Christ moving in

His Church, lighting the lamp, keeping it lit, making sure the oil is there. Keeping the light bright. He is building His Church. He is the light and the life, He is the oil, He is the flame, He is the one that lives life to His Church, and He will give life to His Church. He will build His Church, He will, and the gates of Hell can not prevail it. All that the Father gives to Him will come to Him. He will hold them, lose none of them, bring them all to glory. In other words, listen carefully, He will fulfill this aspect of his ministry with the same perfection and the same precision that he fulfilled every other aspect.

What do you mean by that? Let's go back to the beginning of the Gospel record, when Jesus came into the world. In the incarnate man, when God became flesh, the virgin birth. There was a perfect fulfillment, a precise fulfillment of the plan of God. A virgin was with child, she brought forth a son. That son was Emmanuel, God with us. Born of the seed of Abraham, born of the line of David. He was of the land of Israel, of the nation of Israel, and He was of the tribe of Kings. That is coming from the loins of David, He had a right to rein. Everything was precise. Everything was exactly precise. It had to be in Bethlehem. He had to be called, as it were, out of Egypt and all of those prophecies had to come to pass. In the incarnation, absolute perfection, absolute precision. No glitch, no failure, no deviation. Throughout His ministry, same thing. He fulfilled His ministry perfectly. He preached the Gospel to the poor. He gave life to the dead. He gave sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf, and a voice to the dumb. He fulfilled all that the Word of God has said about His ministry with perfect precision, absolutely perfect.

Then it came time for Him to go to the cross. When He went to the cross, it was perfectly in accord with the determined counsel of God and the plan which had been ordained from before the foundation of the world, when He, as a lamb, slain from before the foundation of the world, was programmed to this end. And that's why He said, "I came into the world not to be served, but serve and give my life, a ransom for many." When He went to the cross, He fulfilled everything to the very letter with exact precision. Every detail of the cross. They didn't break His bones. He was thirsty, the Old Testament predicted all of that. The mockery, the bloodshed, the lifting up, every detail of His death was exactly as prescribed. The same is true of His resurrection. He came out of the grave just as Psalm 16 had said, just had been promised. Just had been really, I think, detailed in the demonstration of Isaac and his son. In other words, His incarnation was precisely the way it was planned. His life was precisely the way it was planned. His death and His resurrection the same, and even His exaltation and coronation at the right hand of God when He ascended into Heaven.

Now, when you look down into history at the future, and you look at what's going to happen when He returns, the details are laid out in the Book of Daniel. The details are laid out in the Book of Ezekiel, even Isaiah talks about those details. Another prophet, Zechariah, they are carefully delineated in the Book of Revelations. We know all of the things that are going to come to pass, at the coming of Christ, when He comes to the earth, when He puts His feet on the Mount of Olives, when He creates a valley, judges a nation, set up the Kingdom, brings the new Heaven and the new Earth. All of it is absolutely precise.

Why then, would we not assume, that when it comes to the building of His Church, it would be the same? I will build my Church. Nothing can stop that. All that the Father gives to me will come to me, I will lose none of them, but raise them at the last day. So, you can be sure that as exact and precise as was His incarnation, His life, His death, His resurrection, His ascension, and will be His second coming, so exact and precise will be the building of the Church.

It's a tremendous truth. You say, "How do you get all of that out of that line in the beginning of verse

13?" I'll tell you how. In the middle of the lamp stands, one like a Son of Man, there's the key. In Daniel 7:13-14, you have the title given to the Messiah, Son of Man. But what is the scene in Daniel 7? Here it is. The Ancient of Days, which is God, the eternal one, is depicted in Daniel's vision, the Ancient of Days, comes to the Son of Man, and it says there, "One like a Son of Man was given dominion, glory, and a Kingdom." A Kingdom, it says, made up of all people and nations and men of every language. And then it says in Daniel 7, "And they would serve Him, and His Kingdom is an everlasting Kingdom, and it cannot be destroyed." So, the term "Son of Man" is associated in Daniel 7, with the Father giving to the Son, a Kingdom of people from every tongue, tribe, and nation, who would serve Him everlastingly, and could never be destroyed. It is an invincible and eternal kingdom. And when you see Christ, then, in this image, moving in His Church, called Son of Man, what you're seeing is the exalted Christ taking His Kingdom, building His Kingdom, receiving His dominion of people and nations, from every language, who will everlastingly serve Him and never be destroyed.

Yes, the Son of Man will enter into His Kingdom. Yes, the Son of Man will build His Church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. The Church is His own. The Father gave it to Him as a gift of love, and He is in unceasing communion with His Church. He gives life to His Church. He lives in His Church. Our body is the temple of the Spirit of God, or the Spirit of Christ. Christ lives in us. That's repeated again and again and again. Matthew 28:20, "Lo, I'm with you always." John 14:18, "I will not leave you. I will come to you," and He did, in the form of His Spirit. John 14:23, "If anyone loves me, I will make my abode with him." And in Colossians says, "Christ is all and in all." And so it is, that no matter how the Church struggles, no matter how long that the Church would have a deep and real fellowship and communion with the living Christ, and no matter how hard we work for that, it seems like we fail. We can be confident that the Lord is alive in His true Church. He is alive in His true Church. He lives in His people.

Secondly, He not only is giving life to His Church. In becoming the life of His Church as the Son of Man moving among the candlesticks, He interceded for His Church. That great reality is indicated to us in the middle of verse 13. It pictures Him clothed in this vision in a robe reaching to the feet, all the way down to the ground, and girded across His chest is a golden sash. That robe could be the robe of a king, and it could be Christ in His Kingly role. That robe could be the robe of a prophet, and it could be Him in his prophetic role, but as soon as you put the sash across His chest, it becomes the robe of the High Priest. And you can read about it in Exodus 28, Exodus 29, and then again in Exodus 39, that the garb of the High Priest was a robe to the ground and a sash across His chest.

Here we see Jesus Christ in priestly ministry. We want the Church to have a deep communion with Christ, and this text says they do. We want the Church to have triumph and victory over sin, and this says He is their High Priest. And what does a High Priest do? Hebrews 2:17 says, "A merciful and faithful High Priest comes to the aid of those who are tempted." He intercedes. Jesus is a High Priest of our confession. Faithful over His house, who's house we are. He is faithful to us. Hebrews 4:15, he's a High Priest who can sympathize with our weakness. He provides a mercy seat, where we can find mercy to help in time of need. No matter how great the temptation, no matter how severe the trial, no matter how severe the test, no matter how unreachable the path of victory seems, there will no temptation take you but such as is common to man, and God is faithful, who will never let you be tempted above that you were able, but will, with the temptation also may the way of escape that you may bear it. And the way of escape depends on the intercession of the merciful, faithful, High Priest.

We indict the Church, I admit it. We address it's weaknesses, and we decry the fact that it falls in it's tests and trials and stumbles and fails. It stumbles into stand and it even enters into sin willfully and

we hate all of that, and we mourn its inequities, but never forget this, beloved. There is an interceding High Priest, who always provides enough mercy and enough grace so that no sin and no failure is ever fatal. That's why there is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus. Why? Because there's an interceding High Priest who takes our case before the Father and pleads on our behalf.

Who is he that condemns us? It can't be God, because He's already made us just in Christ. We will never be separated from the love of Christ. Read the end of Romans 8, it's all there. Christ, the High Priest, is at work, and moving with an unequalled, unparalleled, undiminished love and affection and sympathy for His beloved, and He's there in all their dangers and all their trials and all their sorrows and all their temptations, and they never fall. Jesus meant it when He said, "All that the Father gives to me will come to me, and I'll lose none of them." He was exposed to all of our trials and all of our temptations, tempted in all points like as we are, so that He could be a perfectly sympathetic High Priest.

I want the people of God to know a sweet and deep communion with Christ, and Christ is in their midst providing it. I want the people of God to know triumph and victory over trial and testing and temptation and sin, and Christ is there as a High Priest, guaranteeing that it comes to pass.

Thirdly, in this image, John sees the Lord purifying His Church, not just interceding for it and commuting with it, but purifying it. It says in verse 14, "His head and His hair were white, like white wool, like snow." That speaks of purity. "His eyes were like a flame of fire." That is the penetration of laser-like wisdom that goes into the deepest recesses of every soul and can seek out every hidden sin. In verse 15, "His feet were like burnished bronze when it has been caused to glow in a furnace," and if need be, the Lord comes against even those He loves in judgment. The flashing, blazing, burning feet of judgment. That's always the symbol of judgment in the ancient world, because subjects were always beneath the king, who sat on the throne, elevated, and to be under his feet meant to be under his authority or judgment.

So, the whiteness is not the white, some kind of flat white, but the blazing, glowing white light, glorious holiness. And His eyes like flames of fire. It's penetrating holy intelligence and omniscience. There is nothing hidden from His sight. "All things are laid bare to His eyes," Hebrews 4:13 says. And though He intercedes for His Church, and nothing will ever cause Him to stop loving a believer, or to let go of that believer, and though he communes in fellowships with that believer, all the time, at the same time, He stands against their sin and wants to press it out, to stamp it out. Hebrews 12 says, "Every son that He loves, He scourges." It's the discipline for our purification. It seems grievous for this time, but it perfects holiness.

The Lord wants a chaste virgin. He wants a Church that is without wrinkle, without spot, without blemish, that is blameless and holy. He wants His Church above reproach, and He'll judge His Church. He'll purge - sometimes, He'll even kill people, like Ananias and Sapphira. Like those at the communion table in the Corinthian church, and those for whom prayer was useless in 1 John 5, because they had committed a sin that put them beyond mercy, at least temporal mercy, and God had to take them to Heaven to get them out of the way. Peter said it this way, "Judgment begins at the house of God." Listen to the words of Jesus, the words that come through the inspired pen of John. They are very, very significant words. They are unforgettable words, words of comfort and yet words of tremendous accountability. "I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine dresser. Every branch in me that doesn't bear fruit, He takes away, and every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it."

Purges it. What's that? Cutting off the suckers that grow and divert the strength away from the fruit. He purges every branch. So, you see the Lord purifying His Church. I want the Church to have deep fellowship. I want the Church to have victory. I want the Church to be pure. So does He, and He's seeing to it that it happens.

Fourthly, we see Him in this picture commanding His Church, commanding His Church. In verse 15, "His voice was like the sound of many wars." Listen, John would know that. If you go to the top of Patmos, some of you were there with me a few years ago, and you stand on the top, you can see the ocean that surrounds that rock. It's not hard to imagine in a beachless place, sitting on the edge of that ocean, during a storm, the crash would be deafening as it pounded itself against the rocks. John describes the thunderous voice of the Lord of the Church, like the crashing, pounding surf, familiar to his ears during a storm. What does that speak about authority? It's a commanding mode. The Lord speaks to His Church, and we're reminded of the great commission to teach men to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you. The voice of the Lord of the Church thunders in the Church. God speaks to His Church. He finds His voice, as He finds His ways to get the message through. The Church is the pillar and ground of the truth. It's where the truth is laid down, as the foundation. It's where the truth is, the support structure that holds up all of life. John sees the Lord, then, as the voice of authority in His Church. That is our prayer, that is our passion, that the Church would hear the thundering voice of the Lord of the Church and believe and obey.

And then there's a fifth picture that is revealed here. In verse 16, He controls His Church. Sometimes, you think the Church is completely out of control, but it's not. The imagery here in verse 16, "In his right hand, He held seven stars." Down in verse 20, it tells us that the seven stars are the angels, or the Greek word angulas, meaning messengers of the seven churches. It is best to see these seven stars, or seven messengers, as the seven pastoral representatives from the seven churches of Asia Minor, who had come to Patmos to get these letters to distribute them. Apparently, in those ancient times, even though John was in exile, it was possible for him to have some visitors to come to care for him or to meet some need or, in this case, to receive from him these letters to be taken back to the churches.

Surrounding John, then, were these seven pastoral representatives, seven elders from those churches, who really were probably very influential. Even in the five bad churches, these were probably good men. Those churches, you remember, were mixed, and though the trend and the drift was bad, there were certainly noble souls there, who were identified in those letters in Chapters 2 and 3. Here were the men who were going to take the letters back, and these were men who were in the hand of the Lord of the Church. What it's saying is that God always has some men in His hand. It doesn't matter whether the Church is Laedessianor whether it's as dead as Sardis, or whether it's as corrupt as Pergamos, or whether it's as apathetic as Ephesus, there's going to be somebody in His hand. And if the Lord doesn't have me, He'll have somebody else. In His right hand, He has His messengers. We want God to have leaders in the Church who represent His heart. We want that, we desire that. We don't relish the idea of unfaithful, sinful leaders, leaders that don't teach sound doctrine, that don't set an example for their people. That's a grief to everybody's heart. It was to Paul's, it is to mine. It is to anyone's, who understands the things of the Scripture. But it's comforting to know that where those people have to be set aside, God is still going to have some in His hand, because the Church will be built. That's the promise. He controls His church, and there are going to be some messengers in His hand. Some others might be messing around with the doctrine of veilum, some might be fooling with the Nicolaitans, some might be compromising with the world, some might have entered into bed with Jezebel, but in the end, there's going to be some in His hand. The key

leaders, those whom He gave to the Church, Apostles, prophets, evangelists and teaching pastors, those real ones that are of His choice.

We long that the Church have fellowship, deep fellowship with Christ, and I can promise you, Christ is having fellowship with His Church. We desire that the Church have triumph over trials and sin, and the great High Priest is making sure they do. We long that the Church would submit to the truth, and I can tell you, the true Church, here is the truth, and knows that it's the truth and follows it. We long that the Church be pure and holy and righteous, and Christ is seeing to it by His own discipline. That, indeed, is taking place. And we long that the Church be in His control, and I promise you, it is. He may be setting some aside, but He's holding some who serve Him well.

Number six, He protects His Church. This couldn't be more dramatic or more vivid. Verse 16, "And out of His mouth came a sharp, two-edged sword." Now, what is this? Somebody might say it's the Word of God. Well, it might be in some other context, but not here, because if you go down to verse 16 of Chapter 2, it tells you what it is. It says there, "Repent, therefore." Who's he talking to? A church, the church of Pergamom, or Pergamos. He's saying to the church, repent, or I'm going to come to you quickly and I'm going to make war against them with the sword of my mouth. It's a sort of war, and who's them? Well, going back, they are defined as those who are following the false teaching of the doctrine of veilum, verse 14, the false teaching of the Nicolaitans in verse 15. These were heresies, false doctrines, satanic deception had come into the church, and I'm going to come with the sword of my mouth and fight against them. This is the sword of protection.

You know, I suppose I grew up this way. My dad was always this way, always wanting to fight the cults and attack false doctrine. And we worry about the cults and the isms and lies and deceptions and the frauds and the fakes and the phonies who try to destroy the Church, but as much as I'm concerned about that, I'm greatly comforted in the fact that the Lord of the Church has a sharp, two-edged sword, with which he slices them in both ways. Whatever may be my commitment to that, the Lord of the Church has a greater one. Whatever may be my small effort to try to thwart the onslaught of that deception, His is a violent, cutting, and deadly assault on those who teach error. They don't get away with that. Out of His mouth comes a sharp two-edged sword. Isn't it wonderful to know that the Lord is moving in His Church? And He's defending His Church against deception. The true Church is going to be okay.

And then lastly, He evangelizes through His Church. He evangelizes through His Church. At the end of verse 16, it says, "His face was like the sun shining in it's strength." Now, this is a remarkable vision, and here is a more wonderful thing than anything else, really. He looks at the face to see the face, and all he sees is like looking at the sun at high noon on a cloudless day. He just sees the blazing shacain of Christ, and that blazing light is coming through the seven golden lamp stands and bouncing and reflecting off of them. And what he is seeing here, what he is seeing, is what Paul talked about in our beloved 2 Corinthians, the light of the knowledge of the glory of God shining through the face of Jesus Christ, which is the treasure in earthen vessels. He's seeing the Church radiating the glory of Christ and evangelistic power. You ought to be able to look at the Church and almost be blinded. You ought to be able to see the true Church and be struck like Paul on the road to Damascus with the glory of Jesus Christ. Jesus put it this way, "Let your light so what, shine. Then they see your good works and glorify your Father who's in Heaven.

He evangelizes through His church. Sometimes we wonder how there's always some guys in the dark corner somewhere, trying to figure out a better way to evangelize. But the Lord does His work

through His Church. Evangelism is His passion too. And purity is His passion, and victory, and fellowship, and truth. That's all His passion, just like it's ours. You say, "Well, that's the case, I fell greatly relieved." You should, to one degree, but not relieved of your responsibilities. Somebody's going to say, "Well, if this is true, He's going to build His Church, why can't we just let Him do it?" We can cut our effort to a quarter effort, enjoy ourselves a little more.

Let me tell you something. I can't do that. There are three reasons why I can't do that, at least. Reason number one, because I love the Lord enough, I trust to feel His heart. It's not that I'm like this and I'm trying to convince Him to follow my agenda. It's that He's like this, and I'm just reflecting that. That's how you can tell a faithful pastor. It's not that I have figured out what the Church needs, and I'm trying to sell Him on it. It's like He already is doing it and He just wants somebody who will be the faithful instrument. And I hope I love Him enough to volunteer.

Secondly, I'm overwhelmed that the privilege and I would just as soon enjoy the reward as to have Him set me aside and have to use somebody else. And thirdly, I'm afraid if I'm not faithful, He might hurt me. I hope I have a healthy fear of God. You see, if you look at a man in a ministry, and you can see if he has the heart of Christ for the Church, can't you? To see, compared to this, we're concerned with the saint's fellowship of Christ being full and rich. We're concerned with the saints having the help they need in their temptations and their trials, and to have victory. We're burdened that they know the truth and believe the truth. We want them holy and pure. We want them to be led by godly people and we want them to have an impact on the world for evangelism. As much as we want that, Jesus wants it more, and the only reason we want it is because we caught His heart. That's all. It's not that we sold Him on our agenda, it's not that I have to pray, Oh, Lord, please, please make Your Church holy. It's Lord, I know You want Your Church to be Holy, please, somehow, use me. That's all.

He's already empowering, interceding, purging, teaching, commanding, controlling, evangelizing through His Church. The only question is, are we going to be the ones He can use? Well, verse 17, "This is too much. When I saw Him, I fell at His feet as a dead man." Huh. Let me tell you something, folks. If God really showed up in Toronto, nobody would be laughing. Nobody. Don't kid yourself. When God comes down, it's not funny. It's frightening. Why did John fall over like a dead man? Inadequacy. Hmm. This is beyond me. Wait a minute, you started this deal out in verse 11. Right, I've got the wrong guy, this is way beyond me. He was in total - he fell over, just like Ezekiel fell over, just like Isaiah fell over, just like Paul fell over. Just like the disciples fell over when they saw the transfigured Christ, they fell over like dead men. It's just too far beyond you, it's too traumatizing.

Verse 17, "And He laid His right hand on him." A familiar touch for John. "Don't be afraid. I'm first and the last and the living one and I was dead and behold, I'm alive forevermore." What does he mean by that? He means you don't have to worry about your sins, John. You don't have to worry about your inadequacy. I already died for that, and He already rose again. And I have the keys of death to Hell, which means I'm the only one who can bring about death and Hades, so you have nothing to worry about. I'm on your side. There's no one else to fear and you don't need to fear me. I already died. I already rose. Your sins are dealt with. I'm the only one who controls death, and the future grave, and I'm on your side, John. It's okay.

John was overwhelmed, like, how can I be used for such an enterprise? This thing is way beyond me. The Lord says, it's okay. I've covered your sin. You're the man I want. And then I love this verse 19, "Right. Get up, dust off your robe, pick up that pen, and do what I told you." That's the idea. And

this is just the kind of person God uses. Someone who's totally overwhelmed at the majesty of the plan and totally underwhelmed with their own ability. And you just fall over like a dead man and say, "You've got to be kidding." And the Lord says, "Dust yourself off. Don't be afraid, pick up your pen, and get back to work." That's encouraging, isn't it? The work's going to be done, it's only a question of who he's going to use. It's traumatizing to see the greatness of the exalted Christ, I admit. It's tremendously assuring to realize we have nothing to fear, and then to face the duty, to do what He asked us to do. Easy for me to say, "You're going to go to church. Why should I worry about it?" He says, "Do it." This is a command. And what a privilege and what an honor, and what a responsibility for which, believe me, we shall be rewarded eternally, by His mercy.

Father, thank you this morning for your Word, and for this amazing picture, vision. The likes of which does not exist elsewhere in Scripture for what it shows us. Oh, God, we thank you for the truth that Christ is building His Church. It's all going to happen. And thank you for the amazing reality that as frightening as it is to come near and put our hand to something that Christ is doing without terror striking us. Yet you've called us and said, "Dust yourself off and do your duty. Don't worry about your sin. I've covered it." Father, thank you that you can use every one of us in the building of Your Church, for Your glory in Christ's name. Amen.

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