
THE REVELATION OF JESUS

Part 1 of The Seven

Pastor Mark Driscoll | Rev. 1:1–8 | April 15, 2012

[Music] ♪ Oh, who's that writing? ♪ ♪ John the Revelator ♪ ♪ Who's that writing? ♪ ♪ John the Revelator ♪ ♪ Oh, who's that writing? ♪ ♪ John the Revelator ♪ ♪ A book of the seven seals ♪ ♪ Tell me, what's John writing? ♪ ♪ Ask the Revelator ♪ ♪ What's John writing? ♪ ♪ Ask the Revelator ♪ ♪ Tell me, what's John writing? ♪ ♪ Ask the Revelator ♪ ♪ A book of the seven seals ♪ ♪

Revelation 1:1–8

¹ The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show to his servants the things that must soon take place. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John, ² who bore witness to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw. ³ Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear, and who keep what is written in it, for the time is near.

⁴ John to the seven churches that are in Asia:

Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven spirits who are before his throne, ⁵ and from Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth.

To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood ⁶ and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. ⁷ Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him, and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him. Even so. Amen.

⁸ "I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty."

JOHN WAS JESUS' BEST FRIEND

You ever burned yourself? Do you remember that? The first time I really burned myself, I was a little kid. My parents knew I would eat all the candy, so they put it up on a top shelf above the stove. So, I climbed up on top of the counter, and then I took a step on the stove to get the candy out of the top, burned my foot horrendously. Immediately just blew up like a puffer fish. I had no idea what had happened to my foot, and it was filled with water. You had that? And I didn't know what had happened. I was just a kid. I didn't know burning could be so bad. Have you had that experience?

Now, imagine that on your whole body. There's a guy in the Bible named John, and he was a friend of Jesus, and they couldn't get him to stop talking about Jesus, and so they tried to kill him by boiling him alive, and he didn't die. So they exiled him out to an island called Patmos. And in that place, Jesus came down and met with him. We're going to get into that, as we begin our series, the Seven, where we look at the seven churches of Revelation, and we look at the Revelation of Jesus Christ in Revelation 1–3.

But I want you to see John as a man who endured horrendous pain and suffering. He likely bears the scars on his body from this suffering for Jesus. And it's important for you and me to get to know John. He was Jesus' friend. I want him to become your friend, because he's the author of Revelation. As, over the course of the next few months, we look at Revelation 1–3 and the historical events that happened in the first century, John's the author. John's the one that Jesus is speaking to. John is the one that Jesus is speaking through.

I didn't even know this until this week, but John was possibly, if not probably, Jesus' cousin. I didn't know that they were related. And it was a relationship through John's mother. And so as we get to know John, I want you to know, first of all, that John's family were Jesus' faithful friends. And we learn that not only was John's family faithful to Jesus, John himself was faithful to Jesus.

So, you see multiple generations of this family loving, serving, giving financially, serving faithfully to the cause of Jesus. And isn't that what you and I want for our families? Right? That the parents would love and serve Jesus, give generously, that the kids would love and serve and give generously to Jesus. It gives us this great hope that it can actually be a multigenerational ministry family.

Where we see Jesus calling John into ministry is actually on the shores of the Sea of Galilee, which is in the region where Jesus grew up, and there we find that John was at work with his dad. His dad had this fishing business, and Jesus comes up, and John is mending the nets and fixing the boat, and he's at work with his dad, and he did something that was really unexpected in that day, culturally, because in that day a business would be handed from one generation to the next. So, if your dad was a farmer, you'd inherit the land and be a farmer. If your dad was a fisherman, you'd inherit the fleet and become a fisherman, and that was your financial security. That was your family legacy, and that was how you would take care of your children and

grandchildren.

And so John is at work with his dad at the family business, and Jesus comes along and invites him to leave the family business, to take a job that pays nothing, to follow around his homeless cousin, who claims to be God. And John takes him up on the offer. He walked away from it all to walk with Jesus, and then his whole life changed.

When Jesus was preaching, and teaching, and healing, and casting out demons, John was there, because, in addition to the twelve disciples, there was an inner circle of senior leaders, and this is how it works in all organizations, including Mars Hill. There will be leaders, and then there will be leaders of leaders, and senior leaders, and the senior leaders for Jesus were Peter, James, and John. They were three men, who had privileged access to Jesus.

So, they were there, for example, when Jesus raises Jairus' daughter from death. The other disciples weren't there for that. When Jesus went up onto a mountain, and he was transfigured, shown in glory, and Moses and Elijah come down for a lunch meeting—a pretty fantastic day, however you look at it—they come down to meet with Jesus, and Peter, James, and John are there. The other disciples are not. When it comes time to prepare the Last Supper, John is one who is sent ahead to prepare it. In addition, in the Garden of Gethsemane, where Jesus is in anguish and sweating drops of blood, as he prepares for his execution via crucifixion, he invites closer to him three men to pray for him: Peter, James, and John. Peter, James, and John.

So, John is one of the closest people in the history of the world to Jesus, and I would say he was Jesus' best friend, because one of the gospels says that he was, quote, "The one whom Jesus loved." Jesus really loved John. You look at it like a big brother and kind of like a little brother. My belief is that their relationship was something like that.

John was the youngest of the disciples. I don't know how old he was when he started following Jesus. We know Jesus was around thirty when he called John into ministry. John was probably, I'm speculating, in his twenties, probably a young man. And he left everything and walked away from his opportunities to walk with Jesus into whatever Jesus had for him.

And if you want to know something about John, there's really one scene of his life that I think is most interesting. When Jesus is being crucified, who is there at the foot of his cross? John. And who's standing next to John? Mary, Jesus' mother. And so John is standing next to Mary, and Jesus looks at Mary, and he looks at John, and he tells John what? Do you remember? "Take care of my mom. Take care of my mom." Friends, that tells us everything we need to know about John, amen? You know that Jesus trusts John more than anyone, when from the cross he assigns him to look after his own grieving mother.

John is Jesus' best friend. John is the one that Jesus loved. John is the one that Jesus trusted. And when Jesus died, John was there. And when Jesus rose from death, the first people to arrive at the empty tomb were women, and one of those was John's mother. She was so devout. She so loved Jesus.

And then the word came back to the men, "Hey, the tomb is empty. Maybe Jesus is alive." So, Peter and John, who worked closely together for the rest of their life, until Peter is crucified upside down, they run together to the tomb, and the Bible records that John got there first. I'm guessing not only younger, also maybe slimmer. I just see Peter as thick. I don't know why. I just see Peter as thick.

So John gets there first, and the tomb is empty, and the stone is rolled away, and John respectfully waits for Peter, and then Peter is the first one to walk in, and he sees the empty tomb, and John sees Jesus risen from death, and John sees Jesus ascend into heaven, and John continues to testify about Jesus. "He did miracles. He cast out demons. He healed the sick. He gave sight to the blind. He gave food to the hungry. He said he was God. He died for our sins. He rose. He's our Savior. He's ascended into heaven." They couldn't get John to stop talking about Jesus.

FOR JOHN, IT'S ALL ABOUT JESUS

And he was faithful. John's an amazing man! John has what I like to call a boring testimony. "I met Jesus, and for eighty years, I served him." That's John's testimony. "Well, tell us about when you failed, or when you denied, or when you were impetuous." There's no evidence that John was like that. I'm not saying he was perfect, but I'm saying he was steady. He was absolutely rock-solid dependable. You know, he was that way for maybe eighty years. He saw all of the other apostles murdered. He saw Peter crucified upside down. I mean, he's the guy who would be preaching the funeral of the other Christian leaders.

He goes on to write books of the Bible. First, Second, and Third John are letters that he wrote. The Gospel of John is a whole biography about Jesus that he wrote, and Revelation, where we will be for the next few months. He wrote that, as well. He contributes much to our New Testament, and it's, for John, always about Jesus. It's all about Jesus for John. That's all he's ever talking about.

When John was an old man, he oversaw a network of seven churches. So, multi-site is nothing new; multiple locations with one writer, preacher, author is nothing new. Yeah, I know, John's way better than me. I apologize. But that's how it was organized in that day. John oversaw seven churches in what is now modern-day Turkey, and he has these seven letters he's going to deliver on behalf of Jesus to them.

As an old man, maybe one hundred years of age when he's writing Revelation, around that time, history outside of the Bible records that they would bring John in to talk to the church. Can you imagine that? Imagine Billy Graham with more years, having hung out with Jesus personally. That's amazing.

And so they would bring John in, and he would talk to all the new Christians, the second, third, fourth, fifth generation, right, the folks that they didn't see Jesus risen from death. He had already gone to heaven by the time they were born. They'd bring John in, and everybody would gather in, and the church would be packed. And John was so old and feeble, pushing one hundred years of age, that they would bring him in, carry him in, and they

would sit him down up front, and he would just talk about his friend, Jesus.

Can you imagine that? Can you imagine him saying things like, “Now, this one day I was with Jesus.” Wow. “And he was a good friend to me, and we had lunch together.” “Wow.” “And then we had lunch with Moses and Elijah.” “Wow. I’ve gotta put this on my Twitter feed. This is amazing stuff right here.”

John would always talk about God as a Father and Jesus as our big brother, and he takes away our sins, so we can be the family of God. And this is really his heart. As you read 1, 2, and 3 John, he keeps talking like an old grandpa to a bunch of grandkids. And he would say the same thing over and over and over, as he would talk to the churches and to the new Christians. He would say, “You are the children of God. Love one another.” That’s what John always said. Feeble and old, sitting in a chair in front of the church. “Love one another. Jesus loves you. Love one another.”

EXILED TO PATMOS

Like I said, they couldn’t silence him. They tried to get him to stop talking about Jesus. They couldn’t. So, they boiled him alive. How much do you have to hate somebody to boil them? They really hated John, because he loved Jesus. And because he didn’t die, they exiled him off to Patmos, and Patmos is a rugged area. It’s basically a rock in the middle of the ocean, and it’s about six miles by ten miles. In a modern-day motorized boat, it takes a few hours of traveling and throwing up to get there. It’s a rough ride. In John’s day, I don’t know how long it would’ve taken on a sailing ship, but this was a hard place to get to.

Now, I’ll show you it in just a moment. Here’s one of the cool things. I’m so blessed to live in the day of video, because I get to do show-and-tell with you all, and take you all around the world and let you see things. So, let me show some of the footage to you. And this is Patmos.

First of all, it’s basically a rock in the middle of open sea. As you can tell, it doesn’t have high vegetation. That’s because it has no protection. The winds are fierce. Storms can come up on the sea very suddenly. As you can tell, it’s a very harsh, rocky, rugged terrain. And this is where they exiled John, thinking, “If we put him on this rock, then he’ll stop writing, preaching, teaching, planting churches. We’ll get him away from ministry.”

As I said, it’s a lengthy journey across the sea to get there. And as one who’s made that journey, it can be very rough seas.

So, at the top of one of the high points on the island of Patmos is an ancient cave that history and tradition tell us is where John physically was when Jesus showed up to meet with him. And it’s been turned into a tourist destination, and they have put in icons and paintings that show John and Jesus showing up to meet with him, and John writing down the book of the Bible called Revelation. History and tradition say that this is actually where John prayed up against the wall, as an old man, pushing one hundred years of age, holding himself up.

So, he was in this very dark, lonely, cold, isolated place, and none other than Jesus Christ, his good friend, came down from heaven to meet with John, to speak to John, to encourage John, and to reveal to him the entirety of the book of Revelation. It’s amazing. I’ve been there, and I can tell you that it’s an actual place, and that everything that is recorded actually occurred.

If you can imagine being John, you love Jesus, you miss Jesus, you’re in exile. You’re alone. Your body is hurting. You are elderly and lonely, and you can’t be with your church on Sunday. And Jesus shows up, and he reveals himself to you, and he speaks to you. That is the story of John. That is the story of Revelation. It’s amazing, isn’t it? It’s amazing.

Now, some of you would hear the story of John, and you would say, “Man, I wish I could be like that.” By the grace of God, through the power of the Holy Spirit, you can. You may not have been faithful consistently up to this point, but the same Holy Spirit that empowered the life of Jesus and empowered the life of John is very glad to empower your life, so you could be faithful for as many days, years, decades that God would give you.

John’s story is not one just to be admired, but to be imitated, that we could love Jesus, we could serve Jesus, we could follow Jesus, that God could use us to make Jesus known and to see churches planted, just as he did his friend, John. And John loved Jesus, and Jesus loved John, and Jesus loves you, and Jesus loves us, and Jesus is inviting us today to, together, love him and serve him like John did. So, don’t just take John’s life as an amazing example. Take it as an imitable example. Amen?

REVELATION IS ALL ABOUT JESUS CHRIST

And that being said, now we get to open Revelation, and the first three chapters are about things that happened in and around the first century. The rest of the book, chapters 4 through 22, I believe, are primarily about future events. So, in our time together, in “The Seven” series, we’re just going to look at the first-century issues in Revelation 1:1–3.

So, here it goes. “The revelation of Jesus Christ” is how it begins, because, ultimately, Revelation is all about Jesus Christ. Here’s how it starts, Revelation 1:1, “The Revelation of,” who? “Jesus Christ.”

How many of you have not read Revelation, because it just seems spooky? Or all the people who say they understand it, they’re weird. Amen? Or how many of you have read it, or you started reading it, and it just freaked you out? You’re sleeping with a helmet on, one eye open, and the light’s on. You’re like, “That is a scary book. The beast, the false prophet, the antichrist, blood flowing. You know, I’m scared.”

Here’s what Revelation is about. Here’s who Revelation is about: Jesus Christ. And what happens is sometimes people go to Revelation, they read right through the early words, and then they get into all the imagery. Here’s why Revelation is sometimes hard to understand. John had a vision. It’s like watching a movie. And he saw the future, and he’s trying to write it down. It’s all true, but it’s not as easily understood as other parts of the Bible.

The key to understanding Revelation, the key to understanding any book of the Bible is that it's all about Jesus. Right? And so as you're studying, reading Revelation, keep asking the question, "Who is Jesus? What does it teach me about Jesus? Where is Jesus in this book?" And our conviction is that the whole Bible is about Jesus, that everything is about Jesus, and that each particular book of the Bible ultimately points to Jesus, because it's all the revelation of Jesus Christ.

And by "revelation," it means something that was unknown is now made known. It's God revealing himself to us. It's God talking to us and showing us who he is. And God does this through history, showing up in places, working with people, like John. So, if you're here, and you wonder what is the difference between Christianity and other religions, well, this is the big one. We believe that everything that needs to be known about God has been made known in Jesus Christ, and that we don't believe in speculation. We believe in revelation. We don't believe that we can know God apart from Jesus, but in Jesus we know everything that we need to know about God.

And so it's the revelation of Jesus Christ, "which God gave him to show his servants the things that must soon take place." So, this book of the Bible, like all books of the Bible, is ultimately for those who are servants of Jesus Christ. Let me ask you. Are you a servant of Jesus Christ? Some of you say, "I believe in Jesus." Good. John believed in Jesus as his friend and Lord. We want you to believe in Jesus as your friend and Lord, but you need to serve. Jesus himself came not to be served, but to serve. And to be a Christian is to be served by Jesus and to be a servant of Jesus.

One of the great problems in Western Christianity is this: It's about consumption, and the church gets treated in a way that really is selfish and not servant minded. So people will come in and say, "I want these services. I want these people to do these things for me." And Christianity really is to be about God's people serving—not just being served, but serving.

So, I would ask you, what are your spiritual gifts? What are your natural talents? What are the things that God is compelling, and calling, and gifting, and enabling you to do? What has the Holy Spirit already given you a burden for, or who has the Holy Spirit given you a burden for? Serve.

And sometimes what happens is we become very self-centered, and very selfish minded, and we can walk into the church and say, "You all need to serve me." And Jesus would say, "All need to serve one another." And sometimes when we start serving others, our problems really find their perspective. They're not as big as we thought. What we thought were really our needs were really just our wants.

As we serve others, we start to appreciate Jesus more, because he serves us, and we start to have a growing heart of compassion, and love, and empathy for others, and we realize that God doesn't just love me, but that God loves us. And I would invite you, I would invite you to not only be a believer in Jesus, but a servant of Jesus.

For those of you who are serving Jesus faithfully—Community Group leaders, Redemption Group leaders, deacons, elders, however, whoever you are serving—let me just say thank you, and let me say that the promise here is that the Scriptures don't make any sense unless you're a servant, because the Scriptures are written to those who, what? Who are servants—to help them be encouraged in their serving, to help them see Jesus as a servant, to motivate their service. And if you're not serving or won't serve, ultimately, the Scriptures are, for you, not going to be fully understood or appreciated.

And so he goes on: "to show his servants the things that must soon take place. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant, John." So, an angel showed up to talk to John. Now, in our day, there is a growing interest in angels, and angels are spirit beings. They're not equal to God. They're not eternal. They're made by God. They came into existence at a point in time. They don't share God's attributes. They're not all knowing, all present, and all powerful. They're limited, created spirit beings.

That being said, some are good, some are evil. All were made good, but some chose evil. We call them demons. They've rebelled against God. They want the glory that is only due to the Lord. And so you've got to be careful.

And this is where spirituality is ultimately very dangerous. John tells us elsewhere in 1 John, he says, "Don't believe every spirit, but test the spirits, because not all spirits come serving the Lord." Some of you have been lied to. You've been lied to. You've been told to be spiritual is a good thing. It's not good to be spiritual. It's good to be filled with the Holy Spirit. It's good to love Jesus, but it's not good to be spiritual.

But those who are angels, those who are holy, those who do serve the Lord, they have two primary ministries, as they did for John. Number one, they're messengers; number two, they're ministers. So, they will sometimes deliver a message like an ambassador. They will deliver a word from the Lord, and they're doing that here for John.

And sometimes they're ministers. They'll show up and serve. Hebrews says sometimes we entertain angels, and we didn't even know it, because they show up looking like people. How many of you, looking back on your life, you say, "Yeah, that person was a total gift from the Lord, and now they're gone." Maybe it was an angel that God sent to minister to you in a season.

Angels are ministers and messengers, and one is sent to John to reveal to him the message of Revelation from Jesus. This is all miraculous and supernatural. This is something that God does to tell us things that we otherwise could simply not know.

JOHN WAS AN EYEWITNESS

And he goes on to say, "He made it known by sending his angels to his servant John, who bore witness to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw."

Now here's something amazing about John. He was an eyewitness. See, when you and I, when it comes to Jesus, we have to rely on testimony from

someone. Some of you, you'll read books, you'll listen to philosophers, or you'll examine other religions, and you'll become confused, and you'll say, "Well, I don't know if I trust the Bible. I don't know if I trust the witnesses. I've read some other people, and I'm not sure who to trust." Trust the people who were there. Trust the eyewitnesses.

Now, again, I would submit to you, perhaps no one is more trustworthy than John. If he was Jesus' cousin, they grew up together. He was one of Jesus' disciples. So, of the twelve human beings on earth, he had the closest access. In addition, he was one of the inner circle of three, so he had privileged access, and he was the one that Jesus loved, the guy that Jesus picked as his best friend. He followed Jesus at great personal financial cost. He did so without any risk of reward. He simply did what was right.

Furthermore, he was there for the life, death, burial, resurrection, ascension of Jesus, and he lived the rest of his life being hated and persecuted. He suffered. He had nothing to gain. He was just telling the truth. Everyone that he loved got murdered. He has no motivation for enduring as he did and persevering as he did, other than it's just the truth. Here's who Jesus is. Here's what Jesus has done.

He says this, as well, in 1 John, one of the letters that he writes, he begins 1 John 1:1 talking about Jesus, and he says, number one, it's, quote, "what we have heard." Number two, "We have seen with our own eyes." That's a quote. And number three, here's another quote, "We have touched with our hands."

Here's what John's saying: "When I'm talking about Jesus, when I'm telling you, 'Here's what he said,' it's because I heard it with my own ears. When I'm telling you what Jesus did, it's because I saw it with my own eyes! And did he really live? Did he really die? Did he really rise? Yes! I hugged him and embraced him with my own hands." There's no one more trustworthy, more credible than Jesus' friend, John. Amen?

So, when you get those moments of doubt, or you're confused, or your faith is a bit shaken, go back to John. He was there. You've got to trust somebody. Trust him. And what a godly man; what a humble man. I mean, there's no hint of scandal in his life. He's not greedy. He's not immoral. He's not impure. He's not selfish. He's a man who suffers, loves, gives, serves, and even if he's boiled and exiled, he's still talking about Jesus with a smile on his face, and he's saying, "Love one another like Jesus loves us." What a guy! I've been hanging out with John for weeks. I want him to become your friend. I see why Jesus picked him as his best friend. I want him to be a friend to you, as well.

And so he tells us this is a testimony even to all that he saw. And then he says there's a blessing—as if this isn't enough. There's a blessing. Number one, for "the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy." Yay! I'm blessed today, right? What am I doing? I'm reading it. I'm blessed to read it to you. I know I'm blessed. I feel I'm blessed to read it to you.

We read it aloud because faith comes by hearing the Word of God, the Scriptures say. So, it's good to be under preaching and teaching. It's good to listen to the Bible on your way to work, or during your workout, or commute, or whatever the case may be, to just hear the Word of God. If you read it to your kids, you're blessed! If you read it to your Community Group, you're blessed! If you're in Community Group, you open it up and say, "Let me read something from the Scriptures," you're blessed.

How many of you have felt that blessing, sharing the Scriptures with others? Someone comes to you with a question, say, "Well, let me open the Scriptures, and let me read it to you." Immediately, the Holy Spirit confirms in the believer the blessing. "Wow! I now get to be a messenger for the Lord! I get to do what the angels do. I get to tell the truth, and I get to share the love of God." So, thank you for letting me be blessed today.

In addition, there's a blessing for "those who hear." And hearing is not just listening, but it's listening attentively. It's listening carefully. For me, it's an act of worship to present the Word of God to you. For you, it's an act of worship to receive the Word of God for you. You get that? You are worshipping God now and will be blessed if you're listening, paying attention.

This is where I want you to bring your Bible. This is where I want you to take notes. This is where I want you to bring a journal. This is where I want you to write it down on your phone. Whatever your method is, I don't care. But be an attentive listener. Be listening for those things that the Holy Spirit would say. "That one's for you. Write that one down. Think about that. Pray about that. Memorize that verse. Spend time with me. We need to talk about that. That's for them. Go share it. Share the Word of God with them. Bring the truth to them. Pray for them. Serve them."

In every way, bring the Word of God into your life and through your life to others. And those who hear it, they're blessed. They're blessed. The Word of God is a blessing. The Word of God is a source of life. That's what we believe at Mars Hill.

So, you're blessed if you get to read it aloud, you're blessed if you get to hear it, and we'll all be blessed if we obey it. It says, "And who keep what is written, for the time is near." And this is obedience; otherwise, the Word of God becomes information, not transformation.

And for some of you, it becomes a way to win arguments with other people, or a way to judge other people, or some of you have a religious view and say, "Yes, I read the Word of God, and I make note of all the things that other people need to hear." We use the Word of God first for ourselves and then for others; first for our own sin and then for theirs; first for our own maturity and humility, and then for theirs.

And you're blessed if you speak the Word of God; you're blessed if you listen to the Word of God; and we can all be blessed if we obey the Word of God. If we do what the Scriptures say—Jesus' brother says it this way: "Do not merely listen to the Word and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says."

JESUS LOVES THE CHURCH

And what happens here is much of the obedience is in relation to the church. So, what happens is John's alone on the Lord's Day, a Sunday, the day of Jesus' resurrection. He's alone in this cave, in all likelihood, up on the mountain of Patmos. He's a very elderly man. And Jesus shows up.

And here's what Jesus doesn't talk about. "John, how are you feeling? John, what can I do for you? How can I encourage you? What's it like to be boiled?" That's not the conversation. Because, see, here's what we do. We reduce Jesus down to our therapist. And if he does show up, it's just to talk about me and my feelings, and my hurts, and my wants, and my needs, and the spanking of my inner child, and my father issues, and, you know, how hard this life is, and how depressed I am, and he needs to sit there and listen to me and nod, and smile, and take notes, and give a prescription so that my whole life can get better. That's not who Jesus is!

Don't let the American version of Jesus reduce him down to sympathetic therapist, that he allows you to be the center of your world, and he shows up to glorify you, to take away all your problems and to give you all your rewards. That comes at the end of the age, not in this life.

John is suffering, and John is hurting, and do you know what John didn't get from Jesus? A bunch of statements of ways that he could make his life better. What Jesus immediately did is he redirected his whole focus to the church, to the church, to the church, to the church.

Friends, this, I'm telling you, this is where it's at. It's about knowing who Jesus is—Lord, God, Savior, King, Christ, risen, ruling, reigning, coming again—and then keeping your eyes on the church. Who needs to meet Jesus? Who's hurting? Who's suffering? Who could we help? Who could we serve? Where could we grow? How could we mature?

And what God does then is he gives this series of seven letters to and through John, and they are about seven churches. It'd be like our multi-site, multi-campus, multi-church network of churches. "This one's doing good. This one's doing bad. This one's suffering. Help them. These guys are greedy. Tell them to give generously. These guys are all theologically, doctrinally correct, but they're jerks! Tell them to be nice to people."

Jesus is looking at all the churches, and he says, "John, I need you to look at the churches. I need you to pay attention to the churches. I need you to serve the churches, teach the churches, rebuke the churches." 'Cause here's the truth, friends. If you love Jesus, you have to love the church! 'Cause Christ gave himself for the church!

And what can happen is sometimes we think it's just me and Jesus. It's not. The majority of the books of the Bible are written to churches, not individuals. So, the application is often for the church, not just for the individual. There are individual applications, but it's us together, and we even teach our kids, falsely, "Jesus loves," who? "Me. This I know." We should sing, "Jesus loves us. This we know." Jesus does love you, but he loves us.

And the goal is not that you would just know Jesus, and love Jesus, and enjoy Jesus, but that you would love what Jesus loves, that you would do what Jesus does, that you would go where Jesus is, that you would give for what Jesus gave his life to: the church.

I am just sick, tired, frustrated with people saying negative things about Christian churches, browbeating, criticizing, standing back, holier-than-thou-ism. Jesus loves the church! We love the church! We know the church isn't perfect. The seven letters to the seven churches show the ways that they need to change, and repent, and learn, and grow, but there's a heart in John that says, "And I'm here to help." It's not the heart of a critic who stands back to find fault. It's the heart of a servant who jumps in to make better.

This is what God wants for you. This is what God wants for us in this particular sermon series and this section of the Bible: to have a heart for Jesus and the church, to love Jesus and the church, to serve Jesus by serving the church, by being the church. And this is exactly what is revealed to John.

And let me say this. Whatever you're struggling or suffering with, I don't want to in any way diminish it or downplay it, but it is not equal to what John was enduring, amen? A hundred-year-old man, boiled alive, in a cave, all alone. Whatever your week looked like, his was worse. Amen?

REVELATION IS ALL ABOUT JESUS' CHURCH

So, number one, Revelation the book is all about Jesus Christ. Number two, Revelation is all about Jesus' church. And so we'll just unpack it. Revelation 1:4-8. So, to John, through "John to the seven churches that are in Asia." So, it's this network of churches, like we've got a network of churches. It's to this network of churches.

"Grace to you and peace." Let's just start there. Grace. God is good to us. Amen? God is so good to Mars Hill Church, it's crazy, nutty, freaky, ridiculous. Okay? Here's Mars Hill Church: An angry twenty-something guy, who's never been a member of a church, has no formal theological education, decides to get a bunch of people committed to anarchy together for a small Bible study in the least-churched city, in the least-churched region in the United States of America, trying to reach the least-churched person, a twenty-something college-educated guy, educated beyond his intelligence, who's still single, because he hates responsibility. And, oh, by the way, he won't give, because he's broke.

Okay, so that's the plan. Okay? And then boom, fifteen thousand people. It's crazy, nutty, freaky, ridiculous. It doesn't make any sense. Mars Hill Church is a joke in the "Wow, Lord, that's hilarious" kind of way. We don't deserve to exist.

I'll travel around. People will say, "What's the secret? What's the secret?" Here's the secret. Jesus is alive. He's nice. That's the secret. That's the secret. Everything we've ever accomplished is solely, totally, fully, thoroughly, from beginning to end, by the grace of God.

Mars Hill, I want your heart to be for Jesus. I want your heart to be for the church, and it will be, if you know that the grace of God is not just on you, and it's not just on me, but the grace of God is on us. He's doing something I don't understand, but it's pretty fantastic. He's being gracious. He's pouring out grace. We're a blessed people.

This is where I want you to love this church. I want you to serve this church. And it's not just enough to say, "Well, it's me and Jesus." No, friends, it's

us and Jesus, and grace is on us, and there's peace. And so don't hear this as a guilt. Don't think God's going to punish you, or God's angry with you, or God hates you. If you're a Christian, and you're in Christ, God loves you. God cares for you. God is not done with you. God is not forcing you, he's inviting you to be on mission with him, to see lives get changed, to see people get saved, to see churches get planted. That's what got John up every day to supper for eighty years of his life. It's the only thing that'll keep you motivated and keep you from being frustrated is to love Jesus and serve the church.

Jesus has peace with us, through the cross, and he has grace for us. And, Mars Hill, there's still grace to be had. There are still people to reach, leaders to raise up. There are churches to plant. There is work to be done, and this is a herald call from God saying everybody is welcome! And there's grace for you, as well.

He goes on to say, "Grace to you and peace from him—" Now he's going to talk about Jesus again. You know, here's John: "Something, Jesus, something, Jesus, something, Jesus." He's always talking about two things: something and Jesus. "Grace, Jesus, peace, Jesus, church, Jesus, Bible, Jesus."

It's all about Jesus for John, and Jesus is the one "who is, who was, and is to come." This is a statement of deity. He was before heaven and earth! He is living today, ruling and reigning, risen from death, and in heaven as King, Lord, God, Savior, and Christ. And he will come again. This is our Jesus, who was, and is, and is to come—

"... from the seven spirits who are before his throne." Angels are worshiping Jesus right now. And when you and I sing, we raise our voice. We raise our hands! It's a form of prayer. It's a form of surrender, saying, "Jesus, you're worthy, and we want to join the angels doing that for which we were made, because it is glorious to you, it is good for others, and it makes us glad."

"And from Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead." He says that Jesus is the pattern of the resurrection of the church. You need to know this. We're all going to die, and we will not rise individually. We will rise corporately. We'll rise collectively. We'll rise as the church. There will be a day when you die, when your funeral is held, and your family sheds their tears and says their goodbyes, and there will be a day that Jesus Christ calls us together from our graves, risen from death, no sin, no sickness, no suffering, to be together forever with him, like him.

And this is how it says it in Daniel 12:1-2, that the multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth, they will arise! Friends, we're going to rise together. We could still get together as Mars Hill Church in the heavenly kingdom of God. You'll still see your friends in Community Group forever. They'll be perfected. So will you. It'll be much better than it is right now. Right now it's sinners just learning how to be sanctified. Okay? But, ultimately, you need to know that we're going to be together forever, so we need to get along right now and practice for then. Amen?

And so the story continues. "The ruler of the kings of the earth"—love this! This is big King Jesus. All kings, all kingdoms, all rulers, they will all give an account to him. You know, your parent, your spouse, your employer, your critic, they're not Jesus. They're not in ultimate authority. They will give an account to him, as you will give an account to him.

The truth is we should all live for that day, that day, when we sit or stand before Jesus, and we give an account to him. And whatever he calls it, that's what it is, because he is what? He is the ruler of the kings of the earth. It doesn't matter what someone's title or position might be. Ultimately, they are under Jesus and give an account to him. That includes you and me.

"To him who," what? This big Jesus, he what? He "loves us"! Not just me, not just you, but us! Jesus loves the church! Friends, this is why I want to give my whole life to the church! I could speak, I could travel, I could write, I could take a nap. There are other things to do! I'm not opposed to a drink with an umbrella and a hammock. Like, I've prayed about it, and I'm open to it, but—

Jesus loves the church! Jesus gave himself for the church, and he loves who? Us. Mars Hill, we are a loved people. You are a loved people. Does he love you individually? Yes. But does he love us collectively? Yes. I want you to love what Jesus loves. Love your church. And if Mars Hill is not your church, or you're visiting, or listening in, love a church and give yourself to what Jesus gave himself to.

Your treasure follows your heart. You could follow this with your giving, your finances, your prayers, your service. They will follow your heart. We don't just want your time or your money. We want your heart for Jesus and the church, and everything else will follow, because he loves us! That's awesome!

There's nothing better than being loved by Jesus. He makes enemies friends. He takes those who are far away, he brings them near. He takes those who are dirty, and he makes them clean. He takes those who are guilty, and he makes them righteous. We're loved! We are absolutely loved by Jesus.

And he goes on to say, "and has freed us from our sins by his blood." How do we know that Jesus loves us? Look to the cross. He suffered, died, shed his blood in our place for our sins. "God demonstrates his love for us in this: while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." Jesus says, "No greater love has anyone than this: they lay down their life for their friend." The Bible says that it's not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and he sent his only son, Jesus, to be the propitiation for our sin.

If you doubt, disbelieve, or disregard the love of Jesus, look to the cross, and you will know you're loved! You are loved by God himself, and he takes away your sin. You are forgiven. You are not who you were. You are someone new, and you're becoming increasingly more like him.

He's not sick of you. He's not done with you. He's not frustrated with you. He's not given up on you. He's not overwhelmed by you. He loves you, and he has a calling, and a mission, and a purpose on us, as a people. He determines when and where you're born. He has you here to be on mission

with him.

And you may have come here thinking about someone or something else, and that was probably John's experience on that day, and Jesus is revealed in glory, and that changes the heart and redirects the course of life to be on mission with him together as the church, because we are a kingdom of priests! That's crazy talk! That's crazy talk!

'Cause in the Old Testament, if you were a Jew, who were the priests? Holy guys, went to school, knew Hebrew, memorized the Pentateuch. These guys are holy, righteous, devout nerds. That's who they were. And you had to go through a lengthy process to be a priest. You had to qualify. And then there were rankings, and these were the guys who get to do the holy stuff.

And what he says is, in Christ, as Christians, all of God's people, you're all priests, all priests! That means you're in full-time ministry. When you go to work, you're going to work for Jesus, representing the kingdom of God. When you go love, serve, give, care, you're going as an ambassador of the King of kings. You are in full-time ministry. You're a kingdom of priests. When you're home raising your kids, you're doing so as a priest—someone who belongs to God and represents his kingdom and serves his cause.

Everything we do is meaningful. Everything we do is sacred. Everything we do is worshipful. Everything we do is missional. Everything we do is ministry. All of life for Jesus is the work of a priest in a sacred place doing a divine task. That's you. Don't look at what you do as something less than full-time ministry. Some of us get paid; some of us don't. All of us who belong to Jesus are on mission, in ministry with him as servants. How's it going?

JESUS IS GOD

He goes on. "To him be," what? "Glory!" It's about Jesus. It's all about Jesus. It's about Jesus in the family. It's about Jesus in the church. It's about Jesus in the home. It's about Jesus in the workplace. It's about people seeing Jesus, people knowing Jesus, people meeting Jesus.

"Glory and dominion forever and ever"—it never ends. We'll never stop celebrating him, and he'll never stop ruling over all. And it says, "Amen," which means, "That's what I want! Yes, Lord, be it so!"

"Behold, he is coming with the clouds." Jesus is coming back! We don't know when, but we know it's a fact, because all the other prophecies of Scripture have been fulfilled, and we're waiting for this one to be fulfilled as well.

"Jesus is coming back on the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him, and all the tribes of the earth will wail on account of him." Friends, when Jesus comes back, you will see the scars of crucifixion on his body. He was eternally, spiritually God, and then he added to his nature, his essence, humanity. So, in addition to his divinity, he assumed humanity, that the spiritual God took on a human body to associate with us, to relate to us, to live without sin, to die for our sin, to rise as the pattern of our resurrection, and he now lives forever in a glorified, resurrected body.

And when you see Jesus—and the Bible says you'll see him face-to-face as a friend—and he goes to embrace you, you will see the price he paid for your sins. You will see the marks of crucifixion on his hands and on his body, and you will know how much God loves you. And every time you see Jesus, you will remember the price that he paid for the forgiveness of sin and the gift of eternal life.

"All the tribes of the earth will wail on account of him. Even so. Amen." Here's Jesus. Here's how this section ends. Jesus is God, Jesus is God, Jesus is God, Jesus is God, Jesus is God! He says, Jesus says, "I am." Well, that's the God who spoke to Moses through the burning bush in Exodus 3:14. He's having a conversation with a bush, and the bush says, "Go take down the entire Egyptian empire." And Moses says, "Well, who should I say sent me? Because if I say the bush, I don't think it's going to have the punch I was anticipating." "Thus saith the bush!" You know, so, "Really?" Okay, so— So, God says through the bush, "Tell them I AM has sent you." So that's a title of deity. Jesus is God.

"The Alpha," that's the beginning, that Jesus is without beginning, that he is the one who creates all that is. He's the beginning of everything.

"And the Omega." He's the end of it all, too. Everything is created by Jesus, and everything ultimately will give an account to Jesus.

So, "I AM," that's a statement of God. "Alpha," that's a statement of God. "Omega," that's a statement of God; Alpha and Omega being "beginning" and "end" in Greek. Says who? "The Lord God." Who's Jesus? The Lord God! John knows that his friend, Jesus, is also his Lord God.

"Who is." He's risen from death! Jesus is alive right now. "Who was." He was around before the foundations of the earth. He is the uncaused cause. He's the beginning of all things. He's the Creator God. "And is to come." He's not dead. He's alive. He's coming again.

Not only that, just in case you missed it, he's what? He's Almighty! Jesus is God! And then John says it this way. He says it regarding the throne. Let me read it to you. "Grace and peace from him who is, who was, who is to come, from the seven spirits who were before his throne."

All of this imagery, it culminates, and it explodes in my favorite piece of furniture in the whole Bible, the throne, the throne. When you think of throne, who do you think of? What do you think of? King, Judge, Ruler. If you walk into a room, and there's one big throne with somebody on it, you just assume that guy is in charge, right? When you see the throne, you know that somebody regal, and royal, and respected is there.

Well, this imagery of the throne, it's throughout the New Testament, but three-quarters of the time that it appears, it appears in Revelation. The throne of Jesus Christ appears no less than forty-five times in Revelation. And who's seated on the throne, Mars Hill? Who's seated on the throne? Jesus is seated on the throne. He's King! He's Lord! He's God! It's all about Jesus!

And the angels are worshiping him, and all of the nations are worshiping him, and all of the beasts of the field, and the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea, they're worshiping him, and all the martyrs are worshiping him, and the twelve tribes of Israel are worshiping him, and the twelve disciples and all of their followers, they're worshiping him, and the church is all of God's people, together, around the throne of Jesus.

And what that means is this. The center of human history, the center of theology is not you! It's not me! It's him! It's all about Jesus! He is high! He is exalted! He is lifted up! This is the same Jesus in glory, and I need you to not see Jesus in his humility, but in his glory!

Sometimes when we think of Jesus—humble, poor, broke, marginalized Galilean peasant. That was his incarnation. Now he's in his moment of exaltation. He's not in humility. He's in glory! He's not suffering. He's reigning. He's not hearing, "Crucify him." He is hearing, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty."

Seven hundred years before Jesus was even born of Mary on the earth, Isaiah had this magnificent vision, much like John's vision in Revelation, and he says that, "I saw heaven open, and I saw the Lord high and exalted, seated on a throne. And the train of his robe filled the temple, and the angels gathered around him, and they cried out, singing, 'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty. Heaven and earth are full of his glory.'"

In John 12:41, our author of Revelation says, "Isaiah saw Jesus and spoke of his glory." John saw Jesus and spoke of his glory. You and I, through the pages of Scripture and the illumination of the Holy Spirit, we get to see Jesus and speak of his glory.

And so that's what we're going to do today, right now. I want you to in your mind imagine the throne of Jesus, heaven opened up, him being worshiped. And as we sing, as we rejoice, he is being glorified, and we are being satisfied. As we take our offering, we are saying, "Jesus, for your cause. Jesus, for your kingdom. Jesus, for your church." As we take Communion, we're saying, "Jesus, it's your body, it's your blood. I'm loved. We're loved. Thank you that we get to be the church together forever. Amen!" That's what we want. Let me pray.

PRAYER

Lord Jesus, right now, we confess you are high and exalted. You are seated on a throne. You are ruling and reigning. You are the Alpha and the Omega. You are the beginning and the end. You are the one who has shed your blood to purchase the church. Jesus, we acknowledge that John walked away from what looked like everything; but in comparison to you, it was nothing. Lord Jesus, we ask that you would visit us, as you visited John. We ask right now, Holy Spirit, that you would come to reveal to us Jesus. For those who are not Christian, I pray, Holy Spirit, you would give them new birth and life, to love Jesus. Jesus, I ask for those who have been observers, that they would turn into servers. God, I pray for us, as a church, that not only would we look to you, but that we would look to the church, that we not only look out for ourselves, but we look out for each other. God, we acknowledge we are a blessed people. We are a graced people. We deserve hell. Everything we have is a gift, and I thank you for the gift of Mars Hill Church. I thank you that I am blessed to read the Word of God. I thank you that there is a blessing for those who hear and obey the Word of God. And, Jesus, as we come now, we ask that you would receive our praise, that you would receive our repentance, that you would receive our tithes and offerings, and that you would receive our church as your people, and that you would continue to pour out grace on us, so that you would get glory and that we would have joy, because this is what we were made for, and it's all about Jesus, in whose name we pray, amen.

Note: This sermon transcript has been edited for readability.