



A MESSAGE TO SEVEN CHURCHES

Part 2 of The Seven

Pastor Mark Driscoll | Revelation 1:9-20 | April 22, 2012

Revelation 1:9–20

⁹ I, John, your brother and partner in the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance that are in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. ¹⁰ I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet ¹¹ saying, "Write what you see in a book and send it to the seven churches, to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamum and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea."

¹² Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking to me, and on turning I saw seven golden lampstands, ¹³ and in the midst of the lampstands one like a son of man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash around his chest. ¹⁴ The hairs of his head were white, like white wool, like snow. His eyes were like a flame of fire, ¹⁵ his feet were like burnished bronze, refined in a furnace, and his voice was like the roar of many waters. ¹⁶ In his right hand he held seven stars, from his mouth came a sharp two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining in full strength.

¹⁷ When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. But he laid his right hand on me, saying, "Fear not, I am the first and the last, ¹⁸ and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades. ¹⁹ Write therefore the things that you have seen, those that are and those that are to take place after this. ²⁰ As for the mystery of the seven stars that you saw in my right hand, and the seven golden lampstands, the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches."

INTRODUCTION

How often do you pray? Second question, who do you pray for most of the time? And be honest. Is it usually yourself, your hurts, your wants, your longings, your needs? How often do you pray for us, for your church, for all of God's people together that are on mission here at Mars Hill?

One of the things that's interesting, as we get into The Seven, is that the entire storyline of Revelation is about Jesus Christ. That's why it opens up, "The revelation of Jesus Christ." As soon as we look to Jesus, he reorients our gaze back to his church. And so it's about loving Jesus and loving the church, and it's written by a man named John, who models for us simultaneous love for Jesus and the church.

John's life is one of the most amazing that's ever been lived. He met Jesus when he was a young man, perhaps in his twenties. He was with Jesus as one of the twelve disciples. He was there for all of the healings, and miracles, and casting out of demons, and walking on water. He was there for all of Jesus' life and ministry. He saw Jesus die on a cross. He saw Jesus risen from death. He saw Jesus ascend back into heaven.

He went on to write Revelation, and 1, 2, and 3 John, and the Gospel of John. He saw all of the other disciples murdered, martyred, put to death. He outlived them all. He lived to be, according to church history, maybe one hundred years of age, when he's writing the book of Revelation.

You've got to see him as an old man who's been through a lot. They tried to kill him, but he didn't die. Church history tells us that they boiled him alive in oil, and that didn't take his life, so they exiled him to a little island called Patmos, off of modern-day Turkey. It's rugged hill country, rough, rocky, exposed terrain. It was the equivalent of Alcatraz in their day.

There John finds himself on a Sunday, the Lord's day, and he is praying for the church. His heart is for the church. The church that he oversees, it's actually a multi-site church of seven churches, meeting in and around Ephesus, Turkey, spread thirty to forty miles apart, one church that's meeting in multiple locations under the leadership of John, the senior leader.

He can't be with his people on Sunday, and he misses them. He loves them. He doesn't know if he'll ever see them again. And so he has church all by himself, and he spends time praying for the church. And none other than Jesus Christ shows up. I mean, what a day. Can you imagine that? You're having your devotionals. You close your eyes. "Lord Jesus—" And you hear, "What?" You open your eyes. There he is. Right? I've never had that experience. If you do, please call me immediately. Wherever you're at, I will come and join you.

Amazing moment where Jesus came down from heaven to have a meeting with John to talk about the seven churches and to give an update as to how Jesus perceived that they were doing.

A MESSAGE TO SEVEN CHURCHES

So if you'll turn with me in your Bibles or find with me on your app, Revelation 1:9–20, as we continue our series, The Seven, we'll look at a message to seven churches. We're going to read it all and then pull out a few big ideas.

"I, John," there's our author, "your brother and partner in the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance that are in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet saying, 'Write what you see in a book and send it to the seven churches, to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamum and Thyatira and Sardis and Philadelphia and Laodicea.'"

We're going to take you there in the ensuing weeks to see those places. I've been to Turkey three times in the last few years, visited these archaeological sites and brought the film crew with me. So, you're going to see it all, starting next week.

"Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking to me, and on turning I saw seven golden lampstands, and in the midst of the lampstands one like a son of man, clothed with a long robe—" awesome Jedi-esque—"and with a gold sash around his chest. The hairs of his head were white, like white wool, like snow. His eyes were like a flame of fire, his feet were like burnished bronze, refined in a furnace, and his voice was like the roar of many waters." This guy's in charge.

"In his right hand he held seven stars, from his mouth came a sharp two-edged—" epic, fantastic, awesome—"sword." Let your sons play with swords. It's biblical. They're like Jesus. "And his face was like the sun shining in full strength. When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. But he laid his right hand on me—" Can you see this? "Saying, 'Fear not, I am the first and the last, and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades. Write therefore the things that you have seen, those that are and those that are to take place after this.'"

Revelation addresses immediate issues in the first century and then leaps into the future around the second coming of Jesus. And so the first three chapters are about things that transpired in the first century, and then the rest is about the future.

"As for the mystery of the seven stars that you saw in my right hand, and the seven golden lampstands, the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches."

DO PERSEVERE IN JESUS

Four big ideas we want to pull out of Revelation 1:9–20. Number one, do persevere in Jesus. That's exactly what he says, that we will have, quote, "tribulation," and that we should persevere. And he uses that language very importantly: "in Jesus." For those who are in Jesus, the context of this life is tribulation. It is opposition. It is suffering, because I don't know if you know this, we're not in the kingdom of God yet.

Today, you're going to get in your car and leave here, and you're not driving to heaven. Right? We're not there yet. We're in the time between the times, where Jesus is victorious, but the new heaven, new earth, new Jerusalem have not yet been brought to bear. Jesus has not yet returned. His throne is not yet on the earth. The dead have not been raised. Things are not yet done.

And this requires perseverance, something that very few of us know very little about, if anything at all. We are an absolutely self-absorbed, narcissistic, consumer culture of immediate gratification, and it manifests itself in all kinds of addictions, and compulsions, and debts. Christianity requires perseverance, but we persevere in Jesus, he says. Jesus persevered for us, through suffering, opposition, strife, death, and Jesus takes up residence in us through the presence and power of the Holy Spirit, and then the life of Jesus is made possible through the Christian, by the power of the Holy Spirit.

When we persevere, we don't persevere for Jesus. We persevere like Jesus. We persevere with Jesus. We persevere in Jesus. We persevere by the power and the presence of the person of Jesus. And here's how John says it—and he's a guy who's been persevering a long time, at this point in his life, maybe seventy or eighty years, as a Christian, hated. He is now exiled, sent away, and he continues to persevere. He doesn't doubt God. He doesn't disbelieve God. He does not disown God. He does not disregard God.

Instead, here is what he says. Revelation 1:9, he says, "I, John, your brother." The first thing he tells us is that he is their brother. And this is amazing language, because two things are simultaneously and continuously true of Christian leaders. They are over the people as leaders, and they are alongside of the people as brothers or sisters.

When the Bible uses this language, it's showing that John—and John—you've gotta get this—he is the most authoritative, spiritual human being on the earth. He's writing books of the Bible. He was friends with Jesus, eyewitness to the resurrection, the one that Jesus loved, Jesus' best friend. He is Billy Graham, plus the pope, times a bajillion. That's his spiritual authority. There is nobody in the same category as John. And he looks at the church and the brand-new Christians, and he says he is our and their brother.

This is amazing language. Because, see, in Christianity, God is our Father, and that we, through sin, have made ourselves separated from and enemies of and orphans regarding God, and that Jesus Christ comes as our big brother. He lives the life we've not lived. He lives without sin. He dies the death we should die, the death for sin. He rises for the victory we've not earned to give the gift we cannot afford: forgiveness, eternal life, and salvation. And that means, through our big brother, Jesus, we are adopted into the family of God.

The Bible uses that nomenclature and language, talking about the household of God. And then God is our Father, and Jesus is our big brother, and that makes other Christians brothers and sisters. John says he's our brother. He says he's our "brother and partner in the tribulation."

So, he suffers along with God's people. Tribulation here is about those hard, difficult, painful times in life, and John here is suffering physically. Church

history tells us, as I've noted, that he was perhaps boiled alive in oil, though he did not die. He's suffering financially. He's been stripped from his home and all of his possessions, and he's in exile, according to tradition, in a rocky cave on a hill. He's suffering emotionally. He can't be with the church and the people that he loves, and he's worried about them. He's suffering, as well, spiritually, because he can't use the gifts that God has given him to love the people that God has entrusted to him. He's all by himself. This man is suffering in every conceivable, possible way. He calls it tribulation.

Again, there has been a false gospel preached in American Christianity that if you come to Jesus, he'll take all your problems away, and he'll make your life heavenly while on earth. That's not true. In Jesus, to use John's language, our life is not tribulation-free, but it's tribulation-proof, and we can endure whatever tribulation, opposition, suffering, comes to us, through relationship with Jesus and his people in community together, together.

So he goes on to say, "I, John, your brother and partner in the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance that are in Jesus." There's the key. Our endurance is in Jesus. Our patience is in Jesus. Our new perspective is in Jesus. Our new power to endure the hard seasons of this life is in Jesus. Our identity is in Jesus and amongst God's people.

So, perseverance is with Jesus and his people. That's why the whole structure of Revelation 1, 2, and 3 is about Jesus and his people, that we are to persevere individually in Jesus and persevere collectively as Jesus' people. And he says that there will be tribulation until the kingdom. You and I need to know that it doesn't matter who we elect. It doesn't matter how many wars we fight, how many dollars we spend, how many initiatives we back. Until Jesus returns, and the dead are raised, and those who have sinned are judged, and Satan and demons are bound, and hell is occupied, and the new heavens, earth, and Jerusalem are glorified, until that day, there will be trouble. There will be trial. There will be tribulation.

So, dear friend, don't let it shock you; but, instead, let it compel you to persevere, to hang in there. Who do you want to be in fifty, sixty, seventy, eighty years? And John serves for us as an amazing example of one who persevered sixty, seventy, perhaps eighty years in Jesus, like Jesus, for Jesus, because of Jesus. And even though he had hard days, he was waiting for the one day when he would see Jesus face to face and hear, "Well done, good and faithful servant."

DO WORSHIP JESUS

So, number one, do persevere in Jesus. Number two, do worship Jesus. John is worshipping Jesus. That's where we find him in Revelation 1. He says in verse 10, "I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day." And so this is a Sunday. God's people had historically celebrated and observed the Sabbath on Saturday. That was the Jewish precedent and pattern from creation. And then following the resurrection of Jesus on a Sunday, Christians stopped worshipping on Saturday, started worshipping on Sunday. Because of the resurrection of Jesus, everything was new. Everything was new.

We can worship any time, any place, any day. The Bible is clear on this. You could have church at 3:00 a.m. under a tree on a Tuesday. That's fine. It's weird, but fine. It's not a problem. But Christians tend to gather primarily on the Lord's day, Sunday, to remember the day of Jesus' resurrection. And it's an act of worship to literally just get out of bed and to go be with God's people, just as Jesus got out of his grave to go be with God's people. It's an act of resurrection testimony to get up, and to go forth, and to be with God's people. And so it's a Sunday and he can't be with the church.

Let me say this. As a pastor, this is devastating to have a church or churches, in his case and ours, filled with people that you really love, and you care for, and you're concerned about, and you don't know how they're doing, and you can't be there. For him, it was because he was in exile. He could've been there days, weeks, months, years. He didn't know how long he might be there. All he knew was he had people that he loved, and he couldn't teach the Bible to them. He couldn't preach Jesus to them. He couldn't minister to them and care for them. And so what he does is he doesn't question God. He worships God.

And he says, "I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day." Now, "in the Spirit" means he is filled with the Holy Spirit. We don't know exactly what he's doing. Maybe he's reading Scripture. Maybe he's praying. Maybe he's journaling. Maybe he's singing. Maybe he's praying in tongues. We don't know. We can infer or assume that perhaps he was doing all of those things.

And this is private worship. We do have public worship, where we get together as God's people. And the Bible says in Hebrews not to forsake the gathering together, that we should worship Jesus collectively and spur one another on to faith, and good deeds, and hope, and courage. But also we need to have private worship. John has experienced both. Many, many days he has spent leading God's people in worship on Sundays. Yet, on this day, when he cannot be with them, he worships privately, and we should have both.

Your life and mine, for those of us who are Christians, should be two rhythms: public worship, private worship. We open the Bible on Sunday, but that should not be the only day of the week that you open the Word of God. We sing on Sunday, but that should not be the only day of the week that you sing to God. We pray together, but that should not be the only day of the week that you talk to the Lord. Private worship, being filled with the Holy Spirit, having those moments privately, personally, passionately with Jesus is very important.

And let me say this. The example of John is he started worshipping before Jesus showed up. This is an important distinction, because for many of us, when we're suffering, we're in trial and tribulation, we think, "Why should I worship Jesus? It doesn't seem like he's here. Why should I worship Jesus? This is a very difficult day. If I feel that he shows up, if the Holy Spirit feels near and dear to me, then I will worship him." John begins in faith. He begins by believing that Jesus knows what is happening, and Jesus cares about his suffering, and so he is filled with the Holy Spirit, and he worships Jesus, and he prays for the church. And then Jesus comes to him.

Let me submit this to you. If and when you are suffering, don't wait to feel like you're filled with the Holy Spirit. Don't wait to seem that Jesus has showed up for you to worship. Start worshipping in faith and see if the Holy Spirit doesn't show up and fill you, and Jesus is not in some regard

revealed to you. It may not be a physical manifestation, as John had, but the presence, and the power, and the person of Jesus loves to meet with those who are hurting and suffering.

In the providence of God, I had this experience this week, and I was reading these things where it says, "I was filled with the Spirit." And then he says in verse 17, "And I fell at his feet as though dead." I mean, you've got to see this. This is a man who's pushing one hundred years of age, and he's down literally on his face before the Lord Jesus. This is an act of worship. This is an act of adoration. This is an act of surrender. This is what a servant does in the presence of a king. This is what a soldier does in the presence of a conquering commander.

John, this elderly man, who has suffered much and his body bears beating scars, and perhaps boiling wounds, he's on his face before Jesus. It's all an act of worship. And let me submit to you that sometimes your body demonstrates, it reveals your heart. It's not a sin to raise our voices. It's not a sin to raise our hands. It's not a sin to pray while standing. In fact, all of those things were the preponderance of the ways that the Hebrews worshiped God, but sometimes it's good to get down on our knees and down on our face, and to demonstrate physically what we believe theologically, and that is that Jesus rules over all, including me.

Friends, when you're hurting, and when you're struggling, and when you're dying, you have to worship it through. You have to worship it out. You have to invite the Holy Spirit to fill you so that, through the power of the Spirit, you can grieve, and mourn, and pray, and lament, and groan, and talk to God. It doesn't mean that all things will be okay, but it means that you will not be alone. That's the story of John.

Let me say this. I don't think I've taught this well in my fifteen years as your pastor. I think this has been a shortsightedness and a lack in my instruction, and I ask you forgiveness for that. I think, for me, I tend to be tough. I'm, you know, head down, chin up, hands up, feet forward. I'm built for war. I don't mind conflict. I don't enjoy it, but I can endure it. And I think, sometimes, I've given some of you the impression that, well, when times get tough, just be tough and march forward.

And sometimes that is, in fact, needed, but sometimes it's okay to lose it. Sometimes it's okay to grieve. Sometimes it's all right to mourn. Sometimes it's just fine to emotionally break. And I think that's the moment that John is having on the Lord's day. He's worried about his churches. He's exiled. All the other disciples are dead. It's down to him, and he can't even get out of the cave to go be with God's people. And that's a hard, hard reality.

In the providence of God, as I was preparing this sermon, I had one of those moments where I got to use this Scripture and apply it to a particular situation. As I was studying and praying, I literally stopped. I was like, "Okay, Holy Spirit, please fill me. Please allow my studies to be an act of worship to you." So, I'm singing and I'm praying as I prepare my sermon, asking the Holy Spirit to fill me with love and joy and insight.

And I got a text, as I was doing that, from a friend of mine. He's a pastor, somebody I've known for many years, love very dearly, and love his family. Now, I'm a daddy of a fourteen-year-old daughter. He texted me, and he said, "Please pray for me and pray for us. We just found out my teenage daughter was raped." And I read that, and I just broke. I couldn't stop weeping. I was weeping uncontrollably. I just lost it. At that moment, as I was asking the Holy Spirit to fill me, and to let me worship Jesus, and to understand what it was like for John, I was devastated at that same moment.

So, I texted my friend back. I said, "I can't stop crying. I'm praying for you. I'm praying for your daughter. We've got *Rid of My Disgrace*, and Justin and Lindsey Holcomb, and Redemption Groups, and we'll do anything to serve you. We love your family, but I just can't stop crying." And he texted me back, and he said, basically, "Oh, great, now I started crying. I've not cried in months, and now I'm crying."

And I texted him back, because he was in a situation where he couldn't talk at the moment. I said, "Well, what's wrong with losing it?" He said, "Well, I need to be strong for my family." And I texted him back. I said, "Maybe not." I said, "It's okay to grieve. It's okay to weep. It's okay to wonder. It's okay to break." I said, "And I think you're trying to be strong to keep yourself from going into an emotional place that Jesus is waiting to meet with you." So, as long as you try and be tough and persevere for Jesus, you can't let him be tough and persevere for you. So, I texted him back. "Lose it, grieve, mourn, break. Invite your family to do the same. And I believe Jesus is waiting to meet with you in the emotional place that you don't want to go."

Jesus himself has been in that place in the Garden of Gethsemane. He has been so anxiety-stricken that he shed blood in distress, that Jesus is a God who has endured tribulation. He has suffered. He did face the worst, and he is glad to meet with us in those moments. And it doesn't mean that what has happened is his will, but that he can meet with you and use it for his glory and your good.

So in the power of the Holy Spirit, I would encourage some of you to not just tough it out. And I believe that John's experience in that moment, being filled with the Spirit, was one of brokenness, humility, concern, and grief. And who shows up to meet with him? Jesus. When you find yourself in the midst of tribulation, ask the Holy Spirit to fill you, and start worshiping Jesus, persevering by the grace of God. And here's what I'm telling you. The Holy Spirit will fill you, and one way or another Jesus will come and meet with you, and that's the good news of the story of John. Amen?

DO SERVE JESUS' CHURCH

Number one, do persevere in Jesus. Number two, do worship Jesus. Number three, do serve Jesus' church. Now, what's interesting is John is in a hard season of tribulation. Jesus shows up, and they don't talk about John. This is amazing. I would've thought Jesus would've showed up, "John, how's it going? How are you feeling? I know I left a long time ago. You've sort of been on your own to some degree. Here's some ointment for the boiling." Anything.

And here's what happens. Jesus shows up in all of his glory. Do you know what we need sometimes in the midst of our suffering? We don't need Jesus to show up and make it all about us. We need Jesus to show up and reveal to us who he is. "Oh, he's Lord, King, God, Savior, Christ. This life is

as close to hell as I'll ever be, and heaven awaits me. And this is not the kingdom of God, and this is how they treated my King, and one day I'm going to be done with this life, and I'm going to be with him. And if I get a revelation of him, that inspires me to persevere until I see him face to face."

Jesus shows up in all of his glory, not this humble, marginalized, Galilean peasant, but he is in glory, sovereign authority. That's how John sees his best friend, Jesus. And you and I need to see Jesus as best friend alongside of us, and conquering, ruling, reigning King over all of us. He gets a big picture of Jesus. For some of us, our picture of Jesus is far too small. We only see him during his incarnation, not his exaltation. We see him in Galilee, not in heaven. We see him in a manger, not on a throne. You need to see Jesus as he is right now.

Immediately then Jesus repositions John's concern toward the churches. This is amazing, because what we've done in particularly Western Christianity, we've made it about me, not about us; and Jesus is turned into this divine therapist, to where whatever you're struggling with, or feeling, or hurting from, Jesus comes to sit down and to meet with you, and that Jesus wants you to be the center of your life, and he wants you to be all you can be, and do all you can do, and have all you can have, and that church exists to glorify you, and Jesus exists to glorify you, that you could shine forth in all the glory that is you! And it's all false gospel.

The truth is it's about Jesus. It's all about Jesus. And as we get a right understanding of Jesus, it helps to reposition our affections and our focus not just for ourselves but for others in the church. We realize other people are suffering, too. Other people are hurting. Other people are experiencing trial and tribulation. And though I am struggling and suffering, maybe in community with them, as brothers and sisters, we could mutually encourage one another, and pray for one another, and support one another, and help one another. And maybe it's not all about me. Maybe it's all about Jesus, and maybe what I'm going through is not so isolated that I have no need of the church, but I have every need for the church and the people of God.

Here's how John says it. He says in Revelation 1:11, he speaks of the seven churches: Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, Laodicea. These are churches along a postal route, beginning from Ephesus, which was a trade port city—we'll show it to you in the coming months and weeks. We'll show you all of these places.

But John has a lot that he's hurting from. Amen? Jesus says, "Do you know how the churches are doing?" Well, let me ask you. Do you know how our churches are doing? Do you know how Mars Hill Ballard, Bellevue, Orange County, U-District, Federal Way, Olympia—a bunch of places, right? There are fourteen of them. But do you know how they're doing? Do you pay attention to them? Do you follow information for them? Do you pray for them? Do you have concern and regard for them?

And that's the model that Jesus gives John. It's one church, seven locations, as we are one church, fourteen locations. Jesus doesn't show up and make it all about John. Jesus shows up, reveals himself, says, "John, you think you're hurting? Look at these seven churches. Let's not overlook all these other people that I love."

So the dual trajectory of Revelation is Jesus and the church, Jesus and the church, Jesus and the church. And those who only love and serve the church, they're prone toward liberalism: "Let's just love people, and feed them, and care for them." What about King Jesus? Others that are all about King Jesus, it's all about worshiping, and suffering, and studying to the glory of God, but they're not really concerned about the church. How is the church doing? How are people in the church doing? Are people meeting Jesus? Are lives getting changed? Are we making budget? Are things okay or not? And it's about both loving Jesus and loving what Jesus loves, serving Jesus by serving where Jesus serves. So, do serve the church.

I love this analogy in Revelation 1:20. It talks about, quote, "The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches." Now, when you come to Revelation, you're going to get all of this profound imagery, and sometimes people will speculate what it means. Here, God serves us very kindly by saying there are seven lampstands. So, you think of like an ancient lampstand with candles on it that shines forth light, in the days before electricity.

And he says, "Well, those are the seven churches," and this is what the church is to be like. Jesus is the what? He's the light of the world. And the metaphor is that the world is filled with darkness, and sin, and evil, and death, and Jesus comes to bring truth, and love, and mercy, and healing, and life, and he is light. Jesus is light in the midst of darkness, and the church is supposed to be that place from which the light of Jesus goes out. So, we are to be like a lamp, Jesus says elsewhere.

So, the most important thing at Mars Hill Church is not Mars Hill Church. Our goal is not to do things, or say things, or serve in particular ways, that people would say, "That's an amazing church." But rather they would say, "He's an amazing God." Because it's all about Jesus.

See, I love Mars Hill Church, but it's not the most important thing. Jesus is always the most important thing. So, even if we do good works, or we serve, or we love the city, or we care for the poor, or seek justice, or help the victims—praise God, we should do all of that. It should never be because I'm a good person or because we're a good people, but because he's a good God. Amen? It's always back to Jesus, always back to Jesus.

And so in that way, the light that is supposed to come out of the church—the love, the grace, the mercy, the compassion, the justice—it is not originating from us. It is reflecting from us. That's what it means to be made in the image of God, to be reflectors, mirrors. Jesus is love, so we love. Jesus is generous, so we're generous. Jesus is just, so we're just. Jesus is compassionate, so we're compassionate.

But the light that reflects from us individually and collectively does not originate in us. It originates in Jesus, and it reflects through us. And if praise should come back, ultimately, it needs not reside with us, but it should extend to him. "Oh, you appreciate that? Tell Jesus, 'Thank you,' because it's from him. Whatever you've received good from us, individually or collectively, it's ultimately from him."

He says, as well, that not only are the churches like lampstands, but that each church has an angel or angels that are ministering to it. Angels are

mentioned some sixty times in the book of Revelation. Angels are created beings. They're immaterial, non-physical spirit beings, and they're created as messengers and ministers. They're sent by Jesus to serve the church with their words and their works.

And here's the truth. Mars Hill Church is protected by angels. We don't know their names. We don't talk to them. We don't pray to them. We don't know who these angels are. It's just sort of a footnote. It's like you go to your kids' play at the school, and there's a lot going on, and there's the third tree to the left. It's there, but it's not the star of the show. Those are the angels. They're off to the side. They're all about worshipping and enjoying and obeying God, and it's all about God, not about the angels.

So, we're not supposed to worship angels, or pursue angels, or talk to angels, or figure out our angels or where to forward the e-mail for all the angelic issues in the church. Instead, we just honor and love Jesus, but we acknowledge and accept the fact that there is a spiritual realm around the church. It's where Ephesians 6 says, "Our war is not against flesh and blood, but powers, principalities, and spirits." There really is a Satan. There really are demons. We really do believe this. They really do hate God. They really do hate us. They really do oppose God. They really do oppose us.

And there are angelic beings working against demonic forces to protect our church and every Christian church from heresy, false teaching, unnecessary division, amoral, immoral conduct, those kinds of ways that Satan baits our hook, and wants us to bite and reel us in toward death. We believe this at Mars Hill. We believe in the supernatural. We don't fully understand it, but we fully embrace it.

What's amazing is that the church is typified as seven golden lampstands, and Jesus is said to walk where? Among them. Do you know where Jesus is? The church. See, we're not pantheists or panentheists. We don't go out into the woods and say, "Well, I'm going to find the cosmic, karmic energy in the river or the tree, and I'm going to connect with it, so that I would know God." We believe that God made the world and that it reveals something of him. Psalm 19:1, "The heavens declare the glory of God." We see something about God in creation, but we don't primarily learn about Jesus from creation. We don't find him primarily all alone trying to connect to karmic energy and created things.

We also don't believe, like many Eastern religions, that there is a spark of God within us and that through such things as meditation or yoga, going into ourselves, there we will find God. That's why we don't believe in things like prayer labyrinths, where you start on the outside, and you walk into yourself, and the goal is to arrive as an individual person closing in on himself or herself to find God.

No, if you want to learn more about Jesus, don't go out to creation or into yourself. Be with God's people, because Jesus is in the church. That's what it's saying. You want to learn more about Jesus? Get plugged into the church. And we live in this day where it's faddish and fashionable to criticize the church, to oppose the church, to leave the church, to use the church for whatever mission, or political cause, or social justice ministry, or secondary ministry opportunity.

Such things may not be bad, but Christ loves the church. Christ died for the church. Christ's plan for the world is the church! It's the church! And when Jesus shows up, he's talking about the church! He's not talking about anything else, but everything focused on the health, well-being, multiplication, provision for the church. I need your heart opened up not just for our church, but for all churches that know, and love, and serve Jesus.

The difference between a critic and a servant is this: they see the same problem, and they respond differently. You could show up in the church and say, "There's a problem." And a critic will say, "Therefore I'm going to criticize that, mock that, malign that, make fun of that." And a servant comes along and says, "I'm going to fix that."

You're going to read with me in the ensuing weeks about seven churches, some of which are awesome, some of which are awful. There are horrible churches in here, too. And what God is calling John to do is not to be a critic of those churches, but to be a servant of those churches.

Friends, I'll be honest with you. Mars Hill has problems, starting with me and proceeding from there. Okay? But, ultimately, if you have the heart of a critic, you will find some reason to oppose, or reject, or leave Mars Hill. If you come with the heart of a servant, you will see that same need as a calling from Jesus for you to get involved and make a difference.

And that's what families do, right? That's what families do. You don't show up and yell at your mom and cuss out your brother. Maybe you do. You have a bad family. I'm just telling you. Instead, what you do is you say, "Okay, well, the family's got problems. I need to serve to help this be a better family." So it is with the family of God. So it is with the family of God.

UPDATE ON MARS HILL CHURCH

So, here's what John does: receives from Jesus a report on the seven churches, and then that becomes articulated through these seven letters to those seven churches. So, what I'm going to start doing is once a month I'm going to give you an update. How's Mars Hill doing? That's exactly what's going on here. And then once a month, as well, the lead pastor at each of our locations will get up and tell you how that particular local church doing.

So, briefly, let me give you a bit of an update on how things are going at Mars Hill. We're going to learn how things are going at the seven churches of Revelation. Here's how things are going at Mars Hill Church.

First of all, we have a lot to praise God for. If the guys would show me the next slide, I'll share it with you. Here are evidences of God's grace. Easter this year, we had 19,634 people, our highest attendance ever! Praise God, right? That's good news. Some of our locations were over capacity. The fire marshal said, "Nobody else can come in." There were certain places we couldn't actually allow everyone into the building. So, we may have had 20,000 people if the fire marshal would've gone out for a cup of coffee. So, that's a good day for us.

Some of you say, "Oh, it's all about the numbers." Yep! The number of people getting their sins forgiven, getting their lives changed by Jesus, going to

heaven instead of hell, we would like that number to go up. We're all for that number going up, because it's not just numbers. It's numbers of people who meet Jesus. That we are excited about.

We had 424 baptisms. Many people met Jesus. That's awesome. We praise God for that. We had 41 services at 14 locations across 4 states, all because Jesus is alive. Jesus forgives sin. Jesus is God, ruling, reigning, living, just like John saw him. That's how we see him. That's why we have hope. That's why we believe there's a great future for us, not because we're wonderful, but because he's alive, and he loves the church, and Jesus promised, "I will build the church," and we believe what Jesus says.

Next one, as well, some things to be in prayer for. In this report that John delivers from Jesus to the seven churches, there are things they need to work on and pray for, and he actually gives them prayer requests to each of the churches. Let me give you some for us. Right now Mars Hill Orange County, Everett, Federal Way, Downtown Seattle, and Olympia all need new buildings.

Mars Hill Orange County is meeting in a club. Their children's ministry is like in another zip code, and we just are losing our lease, and we're going to be kicked out, and we've got a problem. And so we're going to be homeless like Jesus here very shortly at Mars Hill Orange County. They started on January 15. They started with 800 people. Only 2 percent of churches in America are 800, so we rejoice in all that God is doing, but they need a home. Mars Hill Everett has outgrown its kids' space and needs a new place. Mars Hill Federal Way, people sitting on the floor, can't even get in the building, need more seats. Mars Hill Downtown has five services. Everybody is packed in. We can't get any more people in there, so they need more seats. And Mars Hill Olympia needs a new location, particularly for families, as well.

So, here's what I'm asking. Pray. Pray individually. Pray with your family. Pray with your Community Group. Just be praying for the church. Pay attention to the website. Pay attention to what's going on and be looking for things to make note of that you can be in prayer for. We'd really appreciate that, and it will open your heart toward what God is doing at all of our churches.

Lastly, I'll give you a financial update, because where your treasure is, that's where your heart is. If you take all the adults that attend Mars Hill Church and give, any amount, like a buck or more, it's only about 41 percent. And so if I was going to say anything, that number needs to increase.

The average weekly giving per adult is just under \$33. The number of giving households—because there are a lot of husbands and wives, not just singles—is just under 5,000; and our average weekly attendance has been as low as 12-something thousand on a holiday, as many as 15,000 on a non-Easter Sunday, an average of more than 13,000.

Let me say that's a massive increase. In the recent few months, Mars Hill has been up anywhere from 3,000 to 5,000 people over the same Sunday last year. So, if you think about it, this is like a woman with two kids getting pregnant with five more. Right? As soon as those kids are born, everything is going to change. The car is too small. The fridge isn't big enough. They're going to need more playpens. The diapers are not sufficient. That's where we're at, at Mars Hill Church.

We had this great series of new births, people meeting Jesus, lots of new Christians, lots of new people. Praise God. But they're not all yet mature. They're not all yet giving. They're not all yet plugged into community. So, here's what we need. We need those of you who are Christians, and mature, and have been with us for a while to be faithful, generous givers, to help the ministry of Jesus go forward.

Here's how you can do that practically. You can give during the service, like my son Gideon does. He is a very faithful, generous giver. He's in kindergarten. He recently gave \$14.64. He dropped it all in the offering basket, and it sounded like he won a slot machine. So, you can do that. You can give in cash, check, credit. You can sign up for recurring automated withdrawals, like you would for other expenses. You can give by mail. There's an envelope in your seat. You can send that in with a check. You also can go on to MarsHill.com/Give and give via credit card or debit card. That's how I tend to give for our family. If you have questions about how to give stock and other items, email Giving@MarsHill.com.

Immediately some of you will say, "Oh, it's all about the money." No, but it is all about the giving. Christianity is about giving. And I don't just want your money, and Jesus doesn't just want your money, but Jesus does want you to learn to be a giver, because he loves you. See, the story of Christianity is that God so loved us, he gave his only begotten son, Jesus Christ. Jesus gave us his life, his death, his burial, his resurrection. Jesus gives us his righteousness. Jesus gives us salvation. Jesus gives us the Holy Spirit. Jesus gives us spiritual gifts. Jesus gives us the Word of God. Jesus gives us one another, the church.

And if you want to be a good spouse, you've got to give yourself to your husband or wife. You want to be a good parent? You've got to give yourself to your children. You want to be a good neighbor? You need to give yourself to your neighbors. You want to be a good missionary? You've got to give yourself to your city. You want to be a good church member? You've got to give yourself to your church.

In a day of selfishness and consumption, we want to be givers, not takers, because Christianity is about giving. And it's not just about getting money out of your account. It's about you learning to give yourself to Jesus and the people that he's calling you to give yourself to. As you do, you'll be a better Christian, a better spouse, a better friend, a better neighbor, a better parent, a better missionary for the glory of Jesus, the good of others, and your own joy.

Yeah, it is about being a giver. It is about being a giver, and the world's filled with givers and takers, and those who belong to Jesus have been given much, so that they can give much, and that's exactly where Jesus is taking John and the seven churches, saying, "John, I know you're struggling. I know you're hurting. I know it's a tough season, but pay attention to the churches and give yourself to them."

Then the letters go out to the seven churches, and Jesus says, "Here's where you're at, and here's what you're needing. Pray for this, give for that,

serve in this way, mature in these areas,” because Jesus does love, not just us individually, but he loves us, the church, collectively.

FEAR NOT, JESUS IS WITH YOU

Now, some of you aren't going to do this. You're going to say, "I'm not serving, I'm not worshipping, I'm not persevering, I'm not giving," because you're afraid, because you're afraid, because you have fears. Let me ask you some questions, because the last point is, "Fear not, for Jesus is with you, and he's with us."

Let me ask you this question. Who are you afraid of? See, Jesus compels us toward this amazing vision for life individually and collectively, and then some of us would resist that or go halfheartedly toward it, because we're afraid, quite frankly.

Who are you afraid of? Who are you afraid of? "I don't want to upset them. I don't want to have conflict with them. I don't want to disappoint them." If you fear them, you can't simultaneously fear Jesus, respect, and honor, and obey.

What do you fear? What are you afraid of? Are you afraid of conflict? Are you afraid of what you perceive to be failure? Are you afraid of poverty or suffering? Are you afraid of criticism or opposition? Are you afraid of death?

How do you respond to fear? The doctors tell us, usually, it's fight, flight, or fright. Some of you are like, "Yeah, I'm afraid, so I'm going to fight and win!" Others of you, "I'm scared, and gonna run, avoid all potential conflict or failure." Others of you, it's fright. You're just panicked. You don't know what to do. You're just stuck.

Fear in the mind leads to stress in the body. It's why the number one category of prescription medication in the US is antidepressants. People are anxious. They're stressed out. This is where you start getting the nervous eye twitch, the canker sore. This is where you can't sleep. This is where you start having heart problems or stomach problems. This is where you start self-medicating with caffeine, junk food, energy drinks, gambling, sex, alcohol, whatever it might be.

How's it going? Who are you afraid of? What are you afraid of? How are you responding? What are you doing? What happens inevitably is that men manifest this externally with anger. Women manifest it internally with depression. If you have fear, it leads to depression. If you're afraid of anyone or anything other than Jesus, you're going to be depressed. For men, we get angry; for women, they get sad.

I need you to know that fear is not something to be embraced. It's not something to be, "Well, of course, I'm afraid. This could happen, this could happen. They could react in this way. I could suffer these losses. It would all be very difficult." Fear is not to be accepted. Fear is not to be accommodated. Fear is not to be explained. Fear is a sin to be repented of. Fear of anything or anyone, other than God, is a sin to be repented of, because the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.

Number one: Fear is an attempt at sovereignty. "I see and know all, and I'm freaked out." You don't see and know all.

Number two: Fear is vision without God. "I see the future. God's not in it. God's not for me. God's not going to help me."

Number three: Fear turns us into false prophets. "Oh, I've seen the future, and it's horrendous."

And number four: Fear preaches a false gospel. "Oh, there's a hell out there: I'll be single, I'll be broke, I'll be sick, I'll be suffering, I'll be struggling, all the things that John is enduring. So, there's that hell, that functional, false, fearful hell, and then to get out of it, I need a false, functional savior. So, I need to hold onto my money. I need to control my life. I need to remove myself from community. I need to rebel against authority. I need to sin. I need to self-medicate. I need to self-justify. I need to turn Jesus into a therapist, so I can be glorified. And then I can live in this view of heaven before the resurrection, that I have in my imagination."

And it's all a false gospel. Heaven is out there. It's the kingdom of God. It's the resurrection of the dead. Between here and then is tribulation. And if you have a false view of hell and a false savior, you'll end up saying and doing things whereby you're worshipping someone or something to be your functional, false savior, deliverer, to make your future better, which just means you're trying to be God! You're trying to control the future, bless yourself, and create a heaven of comfort, convenience, that has no place for Christ, and it's fear.

So, what do you think the number one command is in the whole Bible? "Fear not!" Roughly 150 times, it says, "Fear not." And Jesus shows up to John. What do you think Jesus tells John? I'll read it to you in this book. Chapter 1, verse 17, Jesus says to John, "Fear not."

You can hear that in one of two ways. You can hear that as an angry command. So, God's like furrowed brow, pointy finger. "Fear not!" That doesn't really help, right? "Like, I was scared, and now you're mad at me. Now I'm more scared. That did not help." It's like your kid gets up at night. They had a bad dream. "What happened?" "I had a nightmare." "Fear not!" "Oh, now I've gotta go get new underwear. That didn't help anything!" Okay? You can hear it as an angry command, or you can hear it as a loving invitation, because here's what Jesus does. He shows up, he puts a hand on John's shoulder, and he says, "Fear not."

And now, I've looked at it. I've gone from Genesis to Revelation. I've gone through every occasion I can find, the roughly 150 times in the Bible that God says, "Fear not," and almost invariably, every single time that God says, "Fear not," he says something else that's really important, and it changes it from an angry command to a loving invitation. He says, "Fear not, for I am with you. I'm with you." It's like a friend coming along and saying, "Don't be scared. I'm going to go through this with you. I'm right here." That's what he does with John. He shows up, puts a hand on him.

Let me share with you some of these occasions in Scripture. I'll give you a baker's dozen. Adam in Genesis 3 says, "I was afraid." And then what? God comes near. God comes to be with him in his fear.

Abraham in Genesis 15:1, God says, "Do not be afraid Abraham [or Abram] I am your shield." "I'm here to protect you."

We read of Isaac in Genesis 26:24. God says, "I am the God of your father Abraham. Do not be afraid, for I am with you."

God says to Jacob in Genesis 28:15, "I am with you."

Moses was afraid in Exodus 33:14, and God says, quote, "My presence will go with you."

Elijah is on a battlefield, a time to fear. God says to him in 2 Kings 1:15, "Do not be afraid."

David says it well and legendary, Psalm 23:4, "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear not, for thou art with me."

King Jehoshaphat on the eve of war in 2 Chronicles 20:17, we read, "Do not be afraid. Do not be discouraged. Go out to face them tomorrow, and the Lord will be with you."

Isaiah 41:14, "Do not be afraid," God says, "you worm Jacob." Any of you realize that a worm is not really a warrior kind of created thing? A worm doesn't defend itself. "Do not be afraid, you worm Jacob, little Israel. Do not fear, for I myself will help you."

Jeremiah 1:8, Jeremiah has got a hard life as a prophet. God says, "Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you."

Daniel 10:12, "Do not be afraid, Daniel. I have come."

Haggai 2:4-5, God says it three times. "Be strong! Be strong! Be strong, for I am with you, declares the Lord Almighty."

Do not fear. What's holding you back from obeying Jesus? All of these things—persevering in Jesus, worshiping Jesus, serving Jesus' church—under whatever is holding you back, it is fear, and God comes to you and says, "Do not fear. I'm with you." And he models that, coming to put a hand on his friend, John.

And Jesus' final words in Matthew 28:20, he says, "I am with you always to the very end of the age." Don't be afraid. Persevere in Jesus. Worship Jesus. Serve Jesus' church. Give to Jesus' church. Do not be afraid. You say, "Why? Because it's all going to be fine?" I didn't say that. "Because it'll all get better?" I'm not promising that. Because Jesus is with you. And in that way, our life is not tribulation-free, but it is tribulation-proof.

"WELL, THEN I WANT TO GO . . ."

I'll close with an illustration. I grew up in South Seattle, next to the airport. Our family was poor. My dad worked hard. And every day, the planes would fly over our house and rattle all the windows on our house. And I remember, as a little boy, just sitting there, thinking, "Wow, I wonder where they're going."

One time, too, I took our pitching machine, and I tried to shoot them down, but that's a whole different story. I totally did. I was like, "I'm going to get an airplane." I don't know what I would've done with it, but I remember as a little boy watching all the planes fly.

And I was wondering, "Man, I wonder where they're going. I bet you there's a huge world out there, and there's a lot of things to go see." So, I would get on my bike, and I would ride miles to the library, and I would check out magazines and books, as a little boy, and I'm trying to see the world. "What's out there? What are the people like? What are they doing?" I was just so curious about the world.

The first time I remember getting on an airplane, I think I was a teenager. I didn't travel much in my whole life until I got into ministry and then started getting some invitations. And then I started getting invitations to go international and to preach, which was amazing. And so I got to bring my family on various occasions with me, which is a great joy to me, to take my kids to go see the world that I've never seen.

And one of our first trips as a family was to Scotland, Edinburgh and Glasgow, Scotland. We were the O'Driscolls. We were Irish and some Scottish in us, and I thought, "This is going to be amazing!" I'm going to go preach, and we were invited by a really wonderful pastor to have dinner with his family at the old William Wallace estate with their home built around the old William Wallace fireplace. Awesome.

And I was going to get to go to Saint Giles' Church, where John Knox preached, and I was going to learn about John Knox. He was such a man. He was opposed and hated so much, he had so much to be afraid of. The story is that there were one-handed swords and two-handed swords, and he was such a burly dude, he could fight with a two-handed sword with one hand. That's a pastor. So, he would carry a Bible in one hand and a two-handed sword in the other on his way to church. I mean, there was war around his church. We were going to go visit there and where the Scots Confession was written by the covenanters and go to the palace.

And I'm so excited. And I'm selling it to my kids. "We're gonna see castles, and history, and you're going to learn about sword-fighting." And the one kid I thought would be most fired up was my youngest son, Gideon. He was maybe two years old at the time. And every time I'd talk about it, he'd be like, "I don't want to go." "What? You're going to learn about pastors with weapons! Like, your whole world is going to come together." I mean, this is the kid who walks around just covered in swords. I thought this would be amazing. "No, I don't want to go."

And so I'd sell it more. "No, you don't understand. We're going to see this. It's going to be amazing." "No, I don't want to go. I don't want to go."

He'd get really stern about it. "No, I said no!" "What the—you're two." And I couldn't figure out why Gideon didn't want to go on this amazing, but difficult and a little bit dangerous, journey. And I just couldn't figure it out.

So, one day, we were having this conversation, and I got down, and I looked him right in the eye. I was like, "Okay, Giddy, we're going to Scotland." He's like, "I don't want to go!" He started getting really emotional. He was afraid. I said, "Giddy, Daddy is so excited to take you to Scotland." He goes, "You're going?" I said, "Yeah, I'm going." He's like, "Will you be there the whole time?" I was like, "Yeah, I'll be there the whole time." "So, you've got it all figured out?" I was like, "Yeah, I've got it all figured out." He was like, "Well, then I want to go to Scotland." Yeah.

Friends, that's your life. Do not be afraid. Jesus is with you. Jesus is with us. He knows what's going to happen. He knows where he's taking you. He's got it all under control. He'll never leave you nor forsake you. Amen?

At this point, we're going to give you an opportunity to respond. If you're not a Christian, this is where you give your sin and your life to Jesus. It is about giving. Christianity starts with giving your life to Jesus.

We're going to ask the financial stewards to come forward at this point, and we're going to give our tithes and offerings, so that Mars Hill will be a great lampstand from which a lot of light for Jesus goes forth, a lot of light of Jesus goes forth.

We're going to take Communion. As we take Communion, remember the broken body, symbolized in the bread, and the shed blood of Jesus, symbolized in the wine. And as we partake, we're reminding ourselves Jesus is with me. Jesus is with us.

Here's one of the reasons I'm always so excited about Mars Hill. I get to see what God is doing. That's why Jesus shows up, shows John what's happening in the churches, so John will be really excited. I now have the great honor, as we collect our offering, to show you some things that have been going on at Mars Hill lately. So, here's what Jesus has been doing.

[Video of Easter baptisms]

[Music] ♪ Oh, great is our God ♪ ♪ So we should worship greatly ♪ ♪ No song is too loud ♪ ♪ No orchestra too stately ♪ ♪ To hail the majesty of our King ♪ ♪ So lift your voices loud as we sing ♪ ♪ Oh, great is our God ♪ ♪ So let our songs be endless ♪ ♪ So awesome his ways ♪ ♪ How could we comprehend them ♪ ♪ So we will make it known to our kids ♪ ♪ And we will sing about ♪ ♪ The gracious gifts you give ♪ ♪ We will sing your praise ♪ ♪ And pour forth your fame ♪ ♪ We will bless your name ♪ ♪ Let everyone give thanks ♪ ♪ Because our God is great ♪ ♪ Oh, great is our God ♪ ♪ And we cannot contain it ♪ ♪ We sing from our souls ♪ ♪ Affected by his greatness ♪ ♪ His mercy covers all that he's made ♪ ♪ Showing his glory and his grace ♪ ♪ We will sing your praise ♪ ♪ And pour forth your fame ♪ ♪ We will bless your name ♪ ♪ Let everyone give thanks ♪ ♪ Because our God is great ♪ ♪ We will sing your praise ♪ ♪ And pour forth your fame ♪ ♪ We will bless your name ♪ ♪ Let everyone give thanks ♪ ♪ Because our God is great ♪ ♪ We will sing your praise ♪ ♪ And pour forth your fame ♪ ♪ We will bless your name ♪ ♪ Let everyone give thanks ♪ ♪ Because our God is great ♪ ♪

Note: This sermon transcript has been edited for readability.