

The Gathering Church
Sonia Banks - message 10/04/26

God's Message Revealed
Letters to the Bride
Week 1

John the Revelator
Our Testimony Matters
In The Spirit
Spirit of Truth – Will Guide You
Tree of Life
We Are Lampstands
Bride of Christ
Son of Man
God With Us
Don't Be Afraid

Sermon Outline: Christ Who Walks Among His Churches

Text: Revelation 1

Did you know:

The word "apocalyptic" actually means **an unveiling or revelation**, rather than being hidden from sight. The word comes from the ancient Greek word **apokálypsis**, which means "to lift the veil," "uncover," or "reveal". In other words, something hidden is being unveiled.

Matthew 27 clues us in:

⁵⁰ And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit.⁵¹ At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth shook, the rocks split ⁵² and the tombs broke open. The bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life.

That loud voice of Jesus (like a trumpet John would describe it) preceded an unveiling...of graves reopened as death was conquered; of Holy people gaining access to eternal life again, the dust of their past flesh reacclimated to their spirits. That tearing back then of the veil was apocalyptic—revelatory.

The uncovering had begun.

In original ancient religious texts like the Book of Revelation, that word apocalypse meant revealing spiritual truths or cosmic secrets, **not total destruction**.

Over time, people began associating these dramatic visions of the end-times with final doom, catastrophe, and "the end of the world". Because we understand the word apocalypse through a modern lens, we approach the Book of Revelation—not as God speaking to his people—but end-of-world destruction.

Ancient apocalyptic writings used highly dramatic, chaotic, and violent imagery to reveal ultimate truths, descriptions of the sky falling and stars crashing, massive plagues and famines, and the literal destruction of the current world order. General audiences stopped focusing on the revelation aspect (**the unveiling of a new, peaceful world**) and began focusing entirely on **the violent, world-ending catastrophes that preceded it**.

For the next few weeks, Pastor Dan and I will try to help you see **Revelation as a love letter from the Father, as a word of hope, and a call to faith.**

Commencement prayer:

Father, we come before You with open hearts and listening ears. As we enter the Book of Revelation, lift the veil from our understanding and help us see Jesus clearly—not through fear, confusion, or

speculation, but through faith, hope, and worship. Bless the reading, hearing, and receiving of Your Word today. Let the same Spirit who spoke to John on Patmos speak to us now. Show us the risen Christ walking among His churches, holding His people in His hand, speaking with authority, and calling us to faithfulness. May every word preached, point us back to Jesus, the First and the Last, the Living One who was dead and is alive forevermore. In His holy name, Amen.

About John the Apostle

First, let's talk about **John the Revelator**, the author of this final Book of the Bible—Revelation. John, the last remaining apostle, was the pastor of the Church of Ephesus, and regionally recognized as the last person who saw the risen Christ.

Jesus chose John to be in his inner circle as one of the Twelve Disciples, and he witnessed Jesus' glorification on the Mount of Transfiguration (Matt. 16:19); was the only disciple that was present when Christ was crucified, and when Christ told him to watch over Mary his mother, John cared for Mary until she died in 54 A.D.

In the book of Acts John helped Peter heal people, spread the Gospel and ended up in Ephesus where he was imprisoned for preaching the message of Christ. The story goes that John's opponents in Rome tried to boil him in oil, but God said "no" because there was more Revelation to be written. He was then sentenced and exiled to Patmos (Revelation 1:9), a small, rocky and barren area situated off the west coast of Turkey and the continent of Asia, as one of the many criminals of Rome who served out their prison terms working mines on the island. **In this harsh environment John began to have visions** that were written into the Book of Revelation of the Bible.

John indeed outlived the other disciples and was given this last vision to witness and testify, before he too died. The Book of Revelation is John's account of again seeing his Friend—God, the Messiah, Son of God, Lord of Heaven's Armies—who commissioned him to write and send a letter to seven of His churches as a direct message from the Father to his people.

Being a witness who testified to Jesus is how John ended the gospel of John:

*John 21:25 "This is **the disciple who testifies** to these things and who wrote them down. We know that his testimony is true."*

For six weeks this summer we heard the testimony of several members of our congregation, directly tied to what John wrote in the book of Revelation:

*Revelation 12:10-11 "For the accuser of our brothers and sisters, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down. **They triumphed over him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony;***

Indeed, our story, our witness, ***Our Testimony Matters!***

John is accredited to have later written John 1 through John 3 from Ephesus, and the Book of Revelation is his final testimony to Jesus. As you listen to the letters in the coming weeks, keep this in mind:

*Deut. 29:29 The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but **the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever**, that we may follow all the words of this law.*

How Revelation Begins

*Revelation 1:1-3 The revelation **from Jesus Christ, which God gave him**, is to show His servants what must soon take place. He made it known by sending His angel to **His servant John**, ² **who testifies** to everything he saw—that is, **the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ**.*

³ ***Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it, because the time is near.***

The letter to the churches embraces God's blessings, interlaced with corrections to prevent us from losing the blessing by being victorious (**blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it**), with the hope and promises of fruitfulness and abundance.

John opens his letter to the seven churches **with a blessing**:

Revelation 1:4-8 Grace and peace to you from him who is, and who was, and who is to come, and from the seven spirits before his throne, ⁵ and from I Christ, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth...

A Reminder:

⁵ *To Him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, ⁶ and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve His God and Father—to Him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen.*

Have Faith:

⁷ *"Look, He is coming with the clouds," and "every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him"; and all peoples on earth "will mourn because of Him." So shall it be! Amen.*

And in God's Name:

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

You are now fully equipped to handle all that happens next.

See the Glory of the Risen Christ — Revelation 1

*Revelation 1:9-11 "I, John, your brother and companion in the suffering and kingdom and patient endurance that are ours, and I was on the island of Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ. ¹⁰ **On the Lord's Day I was in the Spirit**, and I heard behind me **a loud voice like a trumpet**, ¹¹ which said: "Write on a scroll what you see and send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea."*

John is worshipping and meditating, attuned with God in his spirit. And he is letting you know it was a Sunday rather than a Jewish Sabbath. (Encourage here a study of the transition from Saturday Sabbath to Sundays.)

The phrase, "**In the Spirit**" is used deliberately by John for prophetic revelation through the power of God. The apostle Paul used it six times in his epistles, and John three times in Revelation. According to Jesus, David prophesied *in the Spirit* (Matthew 22:43); and Simeon prophesied in the Spirit when he saw the infant Messiah in the Mary's arms (Luke 2:27). Now the apostle John was "*in the Spirit*" as he penned Revelation.

Tie this to Jesus' promise:

*John 16:13 However, **when the Spirit of Truth comes**, He **Will Guide You** into all truth. For He will not speak on His own, but He will speak what He hears, and He will declare to you what is to come.*

Being “*in the Spirit*” represents a stunning oneness with the Eternal God! Humanity was created to image God, to reflect God, to be ‘at one’ with God, and that phrase, *in the Spirit* is the manifestation of Jesus’ High Priest Prayer that fateful night in Gethsemane:

John 17:21-26 “That they all may be one; as Thou Father are in Me, and I in Thee, that they also be on in Us...”

John then describes **hearing a loud voice like a trumpet**:

Revelation 1:10 I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet, ¹¹which said: “Write on a scroll what you see and send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea.”

John heard that “loud voice cry out on the cross”. John hears that same loud voice in his vision. **Later, we will all hear that loud voice at his Second Coming!**

Way back in Old Testament times a trumpet was used for several reasons: **calling** the assembly; **gathering** the congregation together at the door of the tabernacle of witness; **moving** the camps; going to **war**; **celebrations** and **sacrifices**.

Numbers 10:1-10: The Lord said to Moses: ²“Make two trumpets of hammered silver and use them for calling the community together and for having the camps set out. ³When both are sounded, the whole community is to assemble before you at the entrance to the tent of meeting. ⁴If only one is sounded, the leaders—the heads of the clans of Israel—are to assemble before you. ⁵When a trumpet blast is sounded, the blast will be the signal for setting out. ⁶To gather the assembly, blow the trumpets, ⁷but not with the signal for setting out. ⁸The sons of Aaron, the priests, are to blow the trumpets. ⁸This is to be a lasting ordinance for you and the generations to come. ⁹When you go into battle in your own land against an enemy who is oppressing you, sound a blast on the trumpets. Then you will be remembered by the Lord your God and rescued from your enemies. ¹⁰Also, at your times of rejoicing—your appointed festivals and New Moon feasts—you are to sound the trumpets over your burnt offerings and fellowship offerings, and they will be a memorial for you before your God. I am the Lord your God.”

As you continue deeper into Revelation, remember every time you hear the seven trumpet judgments, God’s is calling and alerting us that something big is coming.

A trumpet will also signal the pronouncement of Christ’s rule, and his imminent return:

Revelation 11:15 “The seventh angel sounded his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, which said: “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Messiah, and he will reign for ever and ever.”

1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever.”

That loud voice on the cross, and the dead saints who regained life, was merely a prelude to the fullness of what is to come. **That trumpet voice that John is describing is the voice of our victorious Lord!**

John’s vision doesn’t begin with beasts, judgments, or plagues, **but with Jesus**. The risen Christ is present with His people, **standing among the lampstands**, his appearance is a revelation in itself, acknowledging His holiness, authority, wisdom, power, and victory. **He is the First and the Last, the Living One who died and is alive forevermore.**

Revelation 1:12-16 "I turned around to see the voice that was speaking to me. And when I turned I saw seven golden lampstands, ¹³ and among the lampstands was someone like a son of man, dressed in a robe reaching down to his feet and with a golden sash around his chest. ¹⁴ The hair on his head was white like wool, as white as snow, and his eyes were like blazing fire. ¹⁵ His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of rushing waters. ¹⁶ In his right hand he held seven stars, and coming out of his mouth was a sharp, double-edged sword. His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance."

Christ is the fixed point for the church. The world may be unstable, but **Jesus stands among His lampstands [We Are Lampstands], guiding His people** with sovereign authority.

Understanding the clues

The Church is **the Bride of Christ**—representing the full body of Messianic communities. The seven golden lampstands is the Bride of Christ and is a reminder of Jesus' promise: **"I will never leave you or forsake you."** For we are the temple of the living God.

The lampstands should instantly remind us of the ancient Tabernacle with its lampstands as described in Exodus:

Exodus 40:24-25 "He placed the lampstand in the tent of meeting opposite the table on the south side of the tabernacle and set up the lamps before the Lord, as the Lord commanded him."

John realizes that he is in the Sanctuary of God, where there is complete holiness, light for wisdom, and the represented people of God stand before their Father and King. This should underscore the meaning of Jesus' name **Immanuel...God with us**.

The Seven Golden Lampstands (Menorah)

Jesus explains them in verse *Revelations 1:20*: **"The seven golden lampstands are the seven churches."** Seven churches are listed. But by now, you know that the **number seven means complete and perfect, which means all churches following Christ are lampstands.**

The purpose of a lampstand was preached by Jesus in his sermon on the mount:

Matt 5:14-16 "You are the light of the world...let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven."

When Messiah looks at his church – his bride – he sees our light. We are forged from pure gold. We have been purified by God's fire.

The Lamp symbolizes the close association of Christ (the center branch) and his people (the side branches). **While all the elements inside the tabernacle's tent of meeting were overlaid with gold, the lampstand alone was constructed of pure solid gold.** The golden lampstand represented the life, and light God gives to his people, and in Jewish tradition, the menorah (lampstand) is reminiscent of the **Tree of Life** from the Eden creation story.

Revelation 22 tells us that those with clean robes have the right to eat from it.

Thus, the Lampstand speaks of **eternal life with God** for his bride, made available to us all, only through the blood of the Messiah.

The stems of the lampstand were ornamented with buds, blossoms, and almonds, a typological reference to Jesus' promise that **"you will bear much fruit, if you remain in Me."**



The lampstand had a threefold purpose in the Holy Place:

1. To give light to the space in front:
Exodus 25:37 "Make seven lamps for the lampstand and mount them so as to give light to the space in front of it."
*Numbers 8:2-3 "seven lamps are to **cast their light forward**, in front of the lampstand."*
2. To shed its light on the table of shewbread:
Exodus 26:35. "You are to put the table (of shewbread) outside the curtain [of the Holy of Holies] and the lampstand opposite the table on the side of the Tabernacle toward the south; put the table on the north side" This is shedding light on the Word of God which is our spiritual food.
3. To shed its light before the LORD:
Exodus 40:25 "Then he lit the lamps before ADONAI, as ADONAI had ordered Moses.

The lampstand design originated from God and was specific and precise in its design, the shape reminiscent of a flowering Tree Of Life. All those thousands of years blindly following ritual and now... the meaning is revealed by the Designer Himself!

Messiah's description

John gives us a head-to-toe description of Jesus, painstakingly describing his dress, the hair on his head, the piercing, assessing quality of his eyes, feet, voice, right hand, mouth, and face. John's adoring, shocked, frightened eyes took it all in.

Someone like a Son of Man.

This descriptive term "Son of Man" appears 189 times in the Old and New Testaments. The prophet Ezekiel is responsible for almost half of those because that is the nickname that God gave to him. But Daniel created a shift. What once was either a generic term for humanity or a moniker for a prophet became a descriptive name for **One Person**.

Daniel 7:13-14 "In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a Son of Man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. ¹⁴ He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all nations and peoples of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed."

*Daniel 10:5 "I looked up and there before me was a man **dressed in linen, with a belt of fine gold from Uphaz around his waist**.*

We are left with no doubt from Daniel's descriptions that this Son of Man was given authority, glory, and sovereign power, where all nations and peoples of every language worshipped Him as God, with dominion over an indestructible Kingdom. Neither should we miss His role as the Great High Priest who intercedes for us.

Let's look more closely. From Eden's fall to Christ's ascension, humanity had lost its place before God's throne. We were created as God's image bearers, yet sin drove us from His presence. We glimpse this reality in several instances. When Moses' brother and sister attempt to execute a coup against him, the Lord called them to the Tent of Meeting, and said,

Numbers 12:6-8 “Listen to my words: “When there is a prophet among you, I, the Lord, reveal myself to them in visions, I speak to them in dreams. ⁷ But this is not true of my servant Moses; he is faithful in all my house. ⁸ With him I speak face to face, clearly and not in riddles; he sees the form of the Lord. Why then were you not afraid to speak against my servant Moses?”

Even Moses, who spoke with God face to face in a way unlike others, could not see the fullness of God’s glory and live. He was hidden in the cleft of the rock while God passed by. That moment reveals the tragedy of the Fall: humanity was made for God’s presence, yet could not endure His unveiled glory.

Two thousand years ago the Father sent the Son as a human, so that humans believing God would become God’s sons, with representation before the throne, in God’s presence. **The birth of the divine Son to humanity was the first deposit for our restoration. And the ascension of the One who is Son of God and Son of Man forever sealed that promised reality.**

It was no ordinary recount of Jesus’ bodily Ascension as a man. Humanity is now represented before the throne of God by the one known as the Son of Man. And it is no slight detail that when he rose from the dead he still bore the evidence of nails in his hands, with a wound in his side, and likely 39 scars on his back. He made Thomas touch, see, and believe that he was ours. He took all the evidence of all the hard things of man since our Fall. **The Father sent the Son to become human, so humanity could be restored as sons and daughters before Him. Christ’s birth began that restoration; His bodily ascension sealed it.**

Now humanity stands represented before God’s throne in Jesus—the Son of God and Son of Man. He carries the evidence of our wounds, and our redemption, into the presence of the Father. The One John sees in Revelation is not distant from us; He is **God With Us**, for us, and before the throne on our behalf. John anchors us from the outset that this vision.

Revelation 1:13 “Dressed in a robe reaching down to his feet and with a golden sash around his chest”
John wants us to know that his vision of Jesus includes his office as the Great High Priest who intercedes for us. God gave Moses specific, detailed instructions for the way the high priest Aaron and his sons were to dress when conducting their priestly duties:

*Exodus 28: 40 “Make sacred garments for your brother Aaron to give him dignity and honor. These are the garments they are to make: a breast piece, an ephod, a robe, a woven tunic, a turban **and a sash**. Have them use gold, and blue, purple and scarlet yarn, and fine linen.*

The image of Jesus: Revelation 1:14-16

The hair on his head was white like wool, as white as snow:

Daniel 7:9-10 it is “an Ancient of Days,” vision of God the Father, thus confirming Jesus’ identification with God.

His eyes like a fiery flame: is a depiction of Jesus’ divine power to search the hearts of men to the marrow and purify humanity like a fire refines gold.

His feet like burnished brass refined in a furnace: Brass is an ancient symbol of judgment, the furnace a symbol of wrath, purification, and refinement.

And his voice like the sound of rushing waters: Isaiah 42:13 associates a loud voice with that of a warrior shouting aloud as a mighty man against his enemies: “*The Lord will march out like a champion, like a warrior he will stir up his zeal; with a shout he will raise the battle cry and will triumph over his enemies.*”

In his right hand he held seven stars, and coming out of his mouth was a sharp, double-edged sword: Revelations 1:16 The seven stars (angels) can be interpreted as heavenly angels, earthly messengers/ministers, and in Greek the use of *angelos* usually denotes heavenly beings. The fact that Jesus is holding the stars in His right hand tells us we are His and are protected by Him.

*John 10:27-30 My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; **no one will snatch them out of my hand.** My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; **no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand.** I and the Father are one."*

His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance: Revelation 1:16 God's blessing via the Aaronic prayer in Numbers 6:24-26 unforgettably says: *"The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you; the Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace.*

That blessing is God's promise that we would see his face and receive grace (mercy) and peace. John in his vision is clearly stating, ***"I saw Jesus standing there."***

Revelation 1:17 When I saw him, I fell down at His feet like a dead man. He placed His right hand upon me and said, "Don't be afraid! I am the First and the Last, ¹⁸ the Living One. I was dead but look! — I am alive forever and ever! And I hold the keys to Hell and Death.

Jesus tells us that he is the *First and Last*; the Living One; no longer dead but *alive forever and ever*; and I hold the keys to Death and Hell.

This is a divine assurance that none of us should ever forget. John always gives us important details that we can often overlook. John specifies that **Messiah placed his right hand on him.**

Right Hand of God

When Scripture uses the image of **God's right hand**, it is meant to be a picture of the pinnacle of strength, dominion, and power. In passages that specifies God's right hand, **strength is a key focus.**

*Ephesians 1:19-21 "And what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us, the ones believing according to the working of **His mighty strength** ²⁰ which He worked in Christ in raising Him from the dead, and **He seated Him at His right hand in the heavenlies,** ²¹ far above **all principality and authority and power and dominion**, and every name being named, not only in this world, but also in the coming age."*

Favor, Lovingkindness, Refuge, Upholding, Salvation, and Strength:

*Psalms 18:35 "You have also given me the shield of Your salvation, **and Your right hand upholds me**; and Your gentleness makes me great."*

Victory over enemies:

Psalms 110:1 "The LORD says to my LORD: 'Sit at My right hand until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet.'"

Fearless:

Isaiah 41:13 "For I am the Lord your God who takes hold of your right hand and says to you, Do not fear; I will help you.

When Messiah placed his right hand on John, that touch said it all. **Don't Be Afraid**. I AM the Lord. All authority is mine... *And I hold the keys to Hell and Death. I will help you.* Let's get down to business.

Revelation 1:19 "So write down what you see, both what is now (the Church), and what will happen afterwards (Israel's tribulation).

All this relates to what we will learn from the letters that follow. John's details in Revelation Ch1 are critical to appreciating the message of the seven letters that follow. Revelation Ch1 greets the people of God, tells us about Jesus presence, faithfulness, power, authority, priestly intercession for us, and his divine power to see the hearts of men and judge rightly. It is a letter of reassurance. **Christ** is not absent, but He is walking among His people.

In the weeks to come

In His messages to Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, and Thyatira, Jesus will show that He knows the true condition of His people, **introducing himself** with a name particular to the congregation and what they are facing.

He commends what is faithful,
confronts what is sinful,
and **strengthens** those who suffer.
He **exhorts** towards faithfulness,
judges what has gone wrong, and every letter ends with the same **call**:
Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

The messages to Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea will reveal **three urgent spiritual conditions**:

Dead reputation,
Faith tests,
and Dangerous self-sufficiency,

Christ calls Sardis to **wake up**,
Philadelphia to **hold fast**,
and Laodicea to **repent** and open the door to **renewed fellowship**.

Benediction

Now may the grace and peace of Him who is, who was, and who is to come rest upon you.
May Jesus Christ, the Faithful Witness, the Firstborn from the dead, and the Ruler of the kings of the earth strengthen your heart and steady your steps.
May the One who loves you, who freed you by His blood, and who made you a kingdom and priests keep His right hand upon you and say again, "Do not be afraid." Go in the confidence that Christ walks among His churches, holds His people securely, speaks with authority, and lives forevermore.
To Him be glory and power forever and ever.
Amen.