

Vision of the Son of Man (Part 2)

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[0 : 00] Turn in your Bibles to Revelation chapter 1.

! I want to finish these out and then move on to the church in Ephesus.

I want to spend the entire time, the entire evening, if we can, at least one evening per church. So we're going to close out chapter 1 with Vision of the Son of Man, part 2.

And again, for context's sake, I want to read the entire chapter, but the focus of our time tonight will be verses 16 through 20. All right.

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 and with a golden sash around his chest.

[1 : 43] The hairs of his head were white like 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.

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. 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 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. Ask 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. So we're going to dive right in. The first thing we see here in verse 16 is that John sees the Lord caring for and protecting his church.

[2 : 54] John sees the Lord caring for and protecting his church. Caring and protecting. Not only does the Lord dwell, as we talked about last week, amidst his church, and speak with authority over his church, but he also exercises sovereign control over his church.

In verse 20, John receives from Jesus what the symbolism of the seven stars, what they are, what they represent. In verse 20, as we just read, Jesus says, As for the mystery of the seven stars that you saw in my right hand, the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches.

Now there's been some confusion and debate amongst scholars as to who these angels might be.

The word in the Greek is *angeloi*, from *angelos*, which literally means messenger.

That's what that word means. This word is used in Scripture to both describe angelic messengers who delivered messages from God to his people.

Mary and Joseph, you remember? They received a messenger from God, an angel with a message for them. It's also used, though, in Scripture to describe human beings who deliver messages as well.

[4 : 25] So was Jesus speaking about angels, angelic messengers, or right here, is he talking about human messengers?

Well, to answer that question, I think that we have to think through the implications of each interpretation. Jesus had a message for seven churches that are in Asia Minor.

Each message, as we'll see, begins with this, to the angel of the church in Ephesus, Laodicea, whatever it is, right. So, if angelic messengers are in view, that would mean that Jesus was giving John a message that he was then to relay to an angelic being, and that doesn't seem to be the best fit for the context that we're looking at.

Additionally, angels are nowhere in Scripture given authority over the church. That's not their role or their function.

They are described in Hebrews 1.14 as ministering servants, not leaders. So then, taking all of that into consideration, the best fit would be to interpret this, I think, as a word applying to human messengers.

[5 : 47] who most likely would have been the pastors of those churches, the leaders of those churches. And so, these pastors, these leaders, Jesus says, are in his right hand.

They're in his grip. I like that. And when I think of that, it makes me think of a child holding their parent's hand.

A parent will reach down, and they'll grab their child's hand. They'll grip it, and they do so, typically, to express care and concern for that child.

They want to be able to protect them from danger. If something was to come and hit them, like when we're crossing roads, we're looking for cars, or whatever, we're holding our kid's hand, or we're in a large crowd, we don't want to lose them, we don't want them to fall and get trampled on, right?

So, we're holding their hand because we care for them and because we want to protect them, too. Also, when a child is scared, when a child is afraid, oftentimes, when it holds its mother or father's hand, it gives reassurance to the child that they are with someone, or they are in the grip of someone who is stronger than they are and who is able to watch over and to protect them.

[7 : 13] And that brings comfort to me. I hope that it brings comfort to you as well. The Lord has, and He still does, call faithful men to shepherd His flocks.

However, false teachers infiltrate His church, and their teachings are destructive to the church and to its mission. So, John's vision continues in Revelation 1.16 with an illustration of how the Lord protects His church.

And He says, there from His mouth came a sharp two-edged sword. Now, this image is difficult to imagine, as I talked about last week, about the coloring pages that we give to our kids during Sunday school and children's church and trying to, you know, think about trying to draw this picture to have them color it.

Many of our kids would probably be leaving or looking for their mother's and father's hands, right? For that, oh, I saw something scary. I don't know what's going on here. It would seem very uncomfortable, too, because this is hard for us to imagine.

It would seem very uncomfortable to us to think about having a sword in your mouth. And so, when we read this, we tend to overthink it without considering what the imagery is meant to symbolize.

[8 : 27] This is a sword. It's not a pocket knife. It's not a dagger. This would be a broad sword, a large sword. And what it symbolizes is that it's the sword of God's truth.

So now we have to ask, well, who does this sword, who is it being wielded against? Later on in Revelation, we'll see that God will wield it against the ungodly.

In Revelation 19, 15, he says, from his mouth came a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron.

He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God and the Almighty. And then in chapter 19, verse 21, it says, and the rest were slain by the sword that came from his mouth, who was sitting on the horse, and all the birds were gorged with their flesh.

But here, the Lord is wielding the sword in judgment against his enemies, against threats who are within his church.

[9 : 34] To the church in Pergamum, a church that was overrun with heresy and false teachers, Jesus warns there in chapter 2, verse 16, therefore repent, if not I will come to you soon, and war against them with the sword of my mouth.

Jesus uses the sword of his mouth to prune away any threats to the purity of his church. Back when the Marriage Equality Act was passed by the Supreme Court, I preached a sermon that next week in my old church about what the Bible says about homosexuality.

And after that sermon, a long-time member of the church handed me a note on his way out the door, and in the note, basically what he said is that that's the last sermon on homosexuality being a sin that I ever want to hear, that I will ever hear.

He said that. He didn't appreciate what I had to say, and you know, I'm condensing it in a short version. But the thing is, what I had to say wasn't my opinion, and they weren't my words.

This is what God's Word was saying. It's what was being preached. And so unfortunately, he never came back until I left.

[11 : 02] He came back for a little while, I heard. But then the interim pastor said something again that was not to his liking. Again, it was something that wasn't original with the speaker, with the preacher.

It was coming from the Word of God. And I'll tell you that those moments aren't fun to deal with. Even when you know that what you're preaching is not your opinion, it's still not fun whenever you preach the truth to see how unfortunately some people react to the truth.

And so soon after that happened, people began asking me and others, you know, where is he? Where's his wife? Where's his family? And eventually, you know how it works in a church, people eventually found out what happened.

And I'll tell you, as difficult as those moments are, in a way, they are also very good moments for the church. Because it reminds everybody in the church that when it comes to God's Word, we do not compromise when it comes to this.

Amen. So this is what we preach, and if the preacher isn't preaching this, then the preacher shouldn't be preaching for much longer, right? We know that this is God's Word, this has authority, this is what we're turning to, this is our source of truth.

[12 : 28] And so we will be uncompromising with any of those who want to change it and make it say something else that makes them feel more comfortable. Matthew 12, 30, Jesus talks about this.

He says, whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters. Like a broad sword, God's Word penetrates deep down into the heart and soul of a person.

When it's preached rightly and correctly, it will produce strong reactions, both for it and strong reactions against it. Hebrews 4, 12, for the Word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

Nothing else has the ability to do that. This is then the Lord's weapon of choice against false teachers and those who believe false teachings. He wields it against them in order to protect His church.

As we move into the messages that are given to the seven churches, we'll see that that's exactly what the Lord is doing. Second, we see John sees a reflection of the Lord's glory.

[13 : 45] He sees a reflection of the Lord's glory. That's the second half of verse 16. John gives us one final detail about our Lord's appearance, and he says, His face was like the sun shining in full strength.

The light that John saw radiating from Jesus' face was brilliant, pure. It was the glory of God. This bright, brilliant, holy light is called in Scripture the Shekinah.

This word doesn't appear in the Bible just as the Trinity, that word does not appear in the Bible, but the concept, just like the Trinity, is clearly in the Bible.

Jewish rabbis coined the phrase, which literally means, He caused to dwell. That's what that word means. He caused to dwell in order to signify in those texts that the presence of God was dwelling there in some way or form on the earth.

The Shekinah was first evident when the Israelites set out from Succoth in their escape from Egypt. There the Lord appeared to them in a cloud pillar in the day and a fiery pillar by night.

[15 : 06] Exodus 13, 20-22 says, And they moved on from Succoth and encamped at Etham on the edge of the wilderness. And the Lord went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to lead them along the way, and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, and that they might travel by day and by night.

The pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night did not depart from before the people. Then, in the New Testament, in Colossians 2-9, it tells us there that the dwelling place for God's glory is in Jesus Christ.

There it says, For in Him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily. This being the case, Jesus told Philip in John 14-6, Anyone who has seen Me has seen the Father.

So in Christ, we see the visible manifestation of God Himself in the second person of the Trinity. How do we know what God is like?

Look at Jesus. Though Christ's glory was veiled by His flesh, He was nevertheless the presence of God on the earth. And just as the divine presence that Shekinah glory dwelled in the relatively plain, by comparison, tent called the tabernacle before the temple in Jerusalem was built, so did the presence dwell in the relatively plain looking flesh of Jesus.

[16:44] The only physical description that we have of Jesus comes from Isaiah. In Isaiah 53-2, listen to this, He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to Him, nothing in His appearance that we should desire Him.

But on the Mount of Transfiguration, the veil was briefly lifted, and Peter and James and John beheld the glory of the Son of God radiating out from Him through His clothing and He became white and holy and pure.

He was holy and pure, but they saw it with their own eyes and they fell to the ground. Remember? And they were trembling at what they saw. When believers get to heaven, we will see both the Son and the Father in all their glory.

And the Shekinah will no longer be veiled. There will be no need for the sun or the moon to produce light for us because in Revelation 21-23 it says, And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it for the glory of God gives it light and its lamp is the Lamb.

The glory of God and the person of Jesus Christ is to then also shine forth through His church. as we talked about last week when the seven golden lampstands.

[18:08] So the people of God are to reflect God's glory to the world. 2 Corinthians 4-6 For God who said, Let light shine out of darkness, He has shown in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

So our vision statement for our church, which you all have memorized by now, and nobody giggles because, okay, engaging, engage, enlighten, encourage, and equip.

We engage so that we can enlighten. When we do these projects that we have planned, when we will later this year go out and worship at Sunfest, this needs to be at the forefront of our minds when we're out serving.

Through the transformed lives of His people, the Lord is making the gospel attractive to the unrepentant world. He is drawing men, He is drawing children and women to Himself through the godly character of His church.

Christ established this pattern in Matthew 5-16. He says, in the same way, let your light shine before others so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

[19:34] And so when we go out and we do these things, this is exactly what we are shooting for. Not that people would say, hey, that church, that's really neat that they decided to do all those things, right? Sure, that'd be nice if they said that, but ultimately what we are after when we do engage, when we do our various missions, projects, and works.

When we gather together as a church in the morning, in the evening, on Wednesdays, our objective is to glorify our Father who is in heaven and let our light shine brightly so that people will see our good works and give glory to Him.

God builds His church by redeeming sinners and He uses redeemed sinners and their transformed lives to reflect His glory by which then He draws sinners to Himself.

The church should radiate light to the world, but when it doesn't, as we'll see as the case for many of these seven churches, the Lord will soon address that problem and He will purify it.

third, we see that John hears an uplifting statement. Verses 17 through 19. John sees this vision.

[21:03] We've talked about what all of these different things that he sees symbolize and he falls down to the ground as though dead but then he says he laid his right hand on me saying, fear not, I am the first and the last, the living one.

I died and behold, I am alive forevermore and I have the keys of death and Hades right there for the things that are about to take place after this.

So I know we talked about it a little bit last Sunday but it's worth repeating again that John's response to this vision of Christ and of his work in the church is to collapse at his feet as if he was dead.

And we see this in every other instance in scripture where somebody sees a vision of God or they encounter an angel.

When the angel of the Lord appeared and announced the birth of Samson, Manoah said to his wife, we shall surely die for we have seen God. Judges 13, 22.

[22:12] When Isaiah saw a vision of the Lord in his heavenly dwelling, he cried, woe is me for I am ruined because I am a man of unclean lips and I live among a people of unclean lips for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts.

After an angel appeared to Daniel, Daniel said in Daniel 10, 8, my natural color turned to a deathly pallor and I retained no strength. At the sight of the bright light from heaven on the road to Damascus, Saul of Tarsus and his traveling companions collapsed to the ground.

As already mentioned, John along with Peter and James, they fell to the ground at the sound of God's voice during Christ's transfiguration.

And one day, the unrepentant world will realize the terror of God's judgment. Revelation 6, 16 through 17.

They will call out to the mountains and to the rocks, fall on us and hide us from the presence of him who sits on the throne and from the laugh of the lamb for the great day of their wrath has come and who is able to stand.

[23 : 34] So we see a pattern here, don't we? But unfortunately, there have been many, many books written by people living today who have claimed to have experienced a heavenly vision themselves.

However, in the ones that I've read or heard of, none of them match the description given in Scripture. However, though that's the case, it hasn't stopped millions, millions of people from buying their books and these books have sold for millions of dollars.

I mean, not individually but collectively, they have made their publishers millions upon millions of dollars. There's a lot of money to be made in our world by claiming to have experienced visions of heaven and hell.

I want to read to you about one of those books called The Boy Who Came Back from Heaven. You ever heard of that book?

And there are others, okay? So this is from the Washington Post and I want to read to you just an excerpt of what that article had to say. On November 14, 2004, a six-year-old boy ironically named Alex Malarkey drove home with his father Kevin in rural Ohio.

[25 : 11] A left turn nearly took his life. As Kevin turned the car, it collided with another vehicle and the boy's skull became completely detached from his spinal cord. But Alex did not die, miraculously.

And that's the central fact behind a long-running controversy that has now led to a lawsuit. Two months after the crash, Alex emerged from the coma as a quadriplegic.

The injured boy also began telling family and friends about traveling to Heaven and meeting Jesus and Satan. In July 2010, Kevin and Alex Malarkey penned an account of the boy's religious experience called The Boy Who Came Back from Heaven.

The book was published by Tyndale House, a publisher of Christian books. It went on to reportedly move more than one million copies and spent months on the New York Times bestseller list.

The book was part of a bumper crop of similarly geared narratives, tales of near-death experiences and brushes with the Almighty published by religious imprints.

[26 : 23] Then it all fell apart in January 2015. Alex, now paralyzed from the neck down, admitted that he had fabricated the story. This is what he said.

I did not die. I did not go to Heaven. I said I went to Heaven because I thought it would get me attention. The admission created a firestorm within the worlds of evangelical faith and Christian publishing.

The controversy was revived this week when Alex, now 20 years old and living off Social Security, filed a lawsuit against Tyndale House in Illinois, DuPage County, where the publisher is located.

The complaint alleges Kevin Malarkey was the main actor behind the fabrication. Kevin Malarkey concocted a story and this is their words, I think it's from the article again, concocted a story that during the time Alex was in a coma, he had gone to Heaven, communicated with God the Father, Jesus, angels, and the devil, and then returned.

The complaint says Kevin Malarkey sold the concocted story allegedly about Alex's life and what Alex allegedly experienced to one of the largest Christian publishers in the country.

[27 : 35] And there are many other books like it that have since come out as being false and the ones that have not been proven false, well, they either, that information will come out but you can rest assured if it doesn't match what God's word says, it's not a true account of any of these visions.

But again, unfortunately, many people buy these books. And so that encourages people to write these books.

And I'll tell you to the side here that Lifeway is getting ready to close down a lot of stores and unfortunately, I think for them, part of the problem where they went wrong is in selling a lot of these

books.

And they're big money makers for Lifeway and for other publishers. And I love Christian books, obviously, and it's unfortunate that that has happened and I know there's other things that go along with that.

Things have changed. People buy books differently than they did before. But even I think when it came out that this was a book in whose experience Alex had come out and said, hey, it didn't happen that they were still continuing to sell it even after they knew that.

[28 : 49] So John, seeing the resurrected, glorified Christ, crumbles to the ground in fear. Now, don't get any ideas and say, well, Pastor Mike says that these books sell like a lot and all I've got to do is make one up that matches the Bible and we'll make millions of dollars.

It was March 24th and we just had a Bible study in Revelation and I went to my car and I saw an angel and I fell to the ground as though dead.

So now believe the rest of it, right? Don't do that. Not that any of you would. So when John sees this, he falls to the ground as if dead and then, I love this part too, Jesus places his right hand on John and he comforts him and he tells him, fear not, which literally in the Greek what he's saying is stop being afraid.

Now, we could wonder here when we read that, well, we could think, well, of course, John wouldn't have any reason to be afraid.

He knew Jesus. He was a disciple of Jesus. He was an apostle. He was inspired by the Holy Spirit to pen Scripture. His response, I think, suggests that Jesus is not some soft, cuddly, Santa Claus type figure when he sees him.

[30 : 20] John is standing in the presence of divinity. He is in the presence of the Holy One who is completely without sin.

And though he knows Jesus in the presence of divine holiness, he became more acutely aware of his own sinfulness and unworthiness, just as all of these other examples that were given.

And so the natural response to a sinful man when they encounter the holiness of God is to collapse as though dead. The rest of Jesus' statement is powerful and it would have reminded John of the very words that the Holy Spirit had him record in the gospel that bears his own name.

Jesus said, I am the first and the last and the living one. I died and behold I am alive forevermore. I have the keys of death and Hades.

John says something similar to this in the opening of his gospel. John chapter 1 verses 1 through 5. In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God. First and the last.

[31 : 40] The Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him and without him was not anything made that was made. In him was life and the life was the light of men.

The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it. Jesus begins his uplifting statement by once again claiming to himself the covenant name of God.

I am Yahweh. I am. Exodus 3 13 through 15. When we first hear this name Moses encounters God in the burning bush and he says if I come to the people of Israel and say to them the God of your fathers has sent me to you and they ask me what is his name what shall I say to them?

God said to Moses I am who I am and he said say this to the people of Israel I am has sent you.

God also said to Moses say this to the people of Israel the Lord the God of your fathers the God of Abraham the God of Isaac the God of Jacob has sent me to you this is my name forever and thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations.

[32 : 54] In ancient Hebrew the language that the Old Testament was originally written in it does not contain any written vowels in the early copies even though as they read they would pronounce the vowels they just somehow knew that they were in there.

It wasn't until the medieval period that the vowels were added in which I can tell you when you are taking seminary you appreciate that they put the vowels in later on but it doesn't make it that much easier to read or to write.

So in Hebrew Yahweh appears as four letters Yod-Heh Vav-Heh and you will see that Y-H-W-H that transliteration Yod-Heh Vav-Heh and that is called the tetragrammaton which means consisting of four letters.

It is unclear what the original pronunciation of the word was due to the long standing Jewish prohibition on speaking God's name aloud.

Instead a variety of pseudonyms are used such as Adonai which means Lord Elohim which means Mighty One or Supreme One but the four letters of the tetragrammaton form the root meaning to be to be.

[34 : 19] The name tells us many important things about God's identity. In the first place it indicates that the Lord does not change. He is immutable.

He is eternal. His existence exists within Himself. Our existence doesn't. You think about that? All of our existence is depending upon the one who is self-existent and He does not change.

We change from day to day. You are not the same person tonight that you were this morning but you may not realize it you are a lot older. You are hours older.

Not a lot but you are hours older. I shared this in the prison because it happened again to me this week. We don't realize how much we change and there are some of us who hate change but change for creatures who are bound by time is inevitable.

Right? And so I have pictures in my office I shared this at the prison some of you know I have pictures in my office of Danny and I our wedding pictures and it used to be because I started as a ministry when I was in my mid-twenties which was soon after I got married and even in my into my late twenties early thirties and even as recently as the past couple years people would come into my office and they'd see those pictures and they'd say you guys look the same you guys look the same but something has changed because within the past couple years people look at those pictures and what I hear is wow you guys look so young which you guys think you're 36 you're young and I understand you know compared to some of you that is and I thank God for that right but I'm starting to hear that more and it's like you know what and I look at those pictures and things things have changed as a matter of fact we we change

[36 : 29] God never changes and we should take so much joy in the fact that God never changes because if God does change then we're in a lot of trouble but he does not change yesterday he says I am today he says I am and tomorrow and forevermore he will say and remain I am he does not grow he does not progress in knowledge or in holiness he cannot gain and lose his perfection he cannot become more perfect or less perfect he is perfection he is the one in whom there is no shadow of change as James says in chapter 1 verse 17 this is again very good news for Christians we should rejoice in this truth because people are fickle aren't they I am sure that like me you know someone who you used to like but now we can be honest don't raise any hands or look at anybody but now you can't stand that person or you don't like to be around that person as much as you used to because people are fickle and there may be people like that for you they used to really like you but now they don't like you so much then we see this with Jesus one moment they're crying out

Hosanna laying down palm branches in their coats and they're ushering him into the temple ready to coronate him as king and then the next moment many of these very same people are lending their voice to the mob shouting crucify him crucify him we change God does not and God's unchangeableness is comforting human nature cannot be relied upon but God can he always can be however unstable we may feel however unstable our situation may seem to be and no matter how fickle our friends may prove to be when we feel like we need them the most and they're just not there God never changes God changes not I like that think what think about what would happen to us if he did man he could change that means he could break his promises that means that God's a liar that means he's no longer perfect or holy we'd be in a whole lot of trouble

A.W. Pink said this and I'm going to close with this quote we'll end a little early he said his purpose is fixed his will is stable his word is sure here then is the rock on which we may fix our feet while the mighty torrent is sweeping away everything around us the permanence of God's character guarantees the fulfillment of his promise and he quotes Isaiah 54 10 for the mountains shall depart and the hills be removed but my kindness shall not depart from thee neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed saith the Lord that have mercy on thee and so I think it's wonderful that here before Jesus delivers these messages to these seven churches he uplifts his apostle with this powerful statement I am the unchanging one the beginning and the end I am the resurrection and the life you have nothing to be afraid of you belong to me
I don't change Thank you.