

The Risen Lord Among His Lampstands

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[0 : 00] Good morning. It's good to be with you guys to worship. If you would please turn your Bibles to Revelation chapter 1. And if you don't have a Bible, please raise your hand and we'd love to give you a copy that you can have and you can use.

Just began this series in the book of Revelation two weeks ago. We're in Revelation 1 verses 9 to 20 this morning.

Let me pray for the reading and preaching of God's word. Heavenly Father, we ask you this morning to reveal your son Jesus Christ to us in all his glory.

So that we know him and worship him as he really is.

Rather than the way we imagine him to be. Lord, we don't want to reduce Jesus to our small categories.

[1 : 20] We want our vision of our risen Lord Jesus to be enlarged this morning. So we plead with you, Father. By your spirit, speak to us.

From your word, address us. Humble us and exalt the name of your son Jesus. In his precious name we pray.

Amen. If you're able, please stand for the reading of God's word. This is the way we honor God as he addresses us from the scriptures. Let me read from Revelation chapter 1 verses 9 to 20.

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.

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 Samyra and to Pergamum and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea.

[2 : 43] 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.

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. 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.

[3 : 52] 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. This is God's holy and authoritative word. You may be seated. If you try to picture Jesus or imagine Jesus, what comes to your mind?

I know maybe some of you picture actor Jim, what's his name, Jim Caviezel from The Passion of the Christ. I know there's a lot of Chosen fans in our church.

Maybe some of you guys think of Jonathan Rumi from The Chosen series. Or maybe you think of the famous painting by the 20th century American artist Warner Salmon, The Head of Christ.

While their portrayals of Jesus might be well-meaning and perhaps even pious, they can never come close to depicting the real Jesus.

[5 : 05] Because Jesus is the image of the invisible God. And it's not a coincidence that no portrait of Jesus has been passed down to us from the first century.

Not one person in this whole world knows exactly what Jesus looked like because Jesus passed down to us his word, not his picture.

But what if God himself, in his infallible word, were to give us a picture of Jesus? Not as an exact representation of Jesus, but as a symbolic revelation of what he is like.

His character, his attributes, his power. That picture would be worth meditating on. Thinking about over and over in our minds.

And that's exactly what we have here in Revelation 1, 9 to 20. God revealed this glorious vision of Jesus to John and he instructed John to write it down for us, for the church.

[6 : 11] To remind us that we need not fear in the midst of tribulation, because Christ is the resurrected Lord who reigns over the church. That's the main point of this passage.

And we're going to first talk about our situation that John paints, and then about our Lord, and finally what our response should be because of that. In verses 9 to 11, John describes his situation and the situation of the seven churches that he is writing to.

He says in verse 9, Before he gets into the tribulations, John describes himself as a brother of the Christians to whom he is writing.

This conveys the incredible reality that we as Christians are those who have been united by faith to Jesus Christ, God's only son, his only begotten son.

And through that relationship union with Jesus, we have been adopted as God's children, his sons and daughters. And it's because of that, because we have God in common as our heavenly father, that we are now brothers and sisters in the family of God.

[7 : 25] So this is John's way of identifying with the believers to whom he is writing. He could have introduced himself as the apostle John, because he is an apostle. He's one of the 12 apostles.

But instead, he puts himself on the same level playing field and introduces himself as John, your brother. This is John's way of saying to believers, I am one of you.

I am with you. Because we refer to each other as brothers and sisters so often, as Christians, sometimes we don't grapple with the significant reality that that is.

Do you remember what Jesus said in Mark 3.35, whoever does the will of God, he is my brother and sister. Romans 8.29 says that Christians have been predestined to be conformed to the image of God's son, Jesus, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.

Hebrews 2.11 says that Jesus is not ashamed to call us his brothers and sisters. So do you realize then what a stunning reality is that when we refer to one another as brothers and sisters in Christ, we are saying that the Lord God Almighty is our Father, and we're saying that Jesus Christ, the resurrected Lord, whose name is above every name, is our brother.

[8 : 49] We're declaring that we are heirs of God in fellow heirs with Christ, that all of God's heavenly inheritance is ours because we are God's adopted children, and that we will reign forever in God's kingdom as co-heirs with Christ.

That's why John continues in saying that I am your partner in the kingdom that is in Jesus. The kingdom of God belongs to us because we're brothers and sisters in Christ.

We're royal heirs. We're in the same family bound together by the blood of Christ. It's of utmost importance always to remember this, but especially when there's suffering, tribulation, and persecution, spiritual warfare that seek to divide us.

We need to remember that we are a family and that we are in this together. Our enemy is working around the clock to make us forget this reality, but we must not forget this reality.

In addition to identifying himself as a brother, John himself identifies as a partner partners by definition share in some kind of endeavor together. They're fellow partakers in a common mission or common thing.

[10 : 09] So what is it that we are partners in? We already talked about the kingdom, which is a glorious reality, but there are two other things on this list that we might not think of as so glorious. He says we are partners in the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance that are in Jesus.

These three things are wrapped up together. You can't separate them. You get the tribulation along with the kingdom, along with the patient endurance that those two things require.

It's because Jesus went through tribulation with patient endurance and it's because Jesus' glorification to the right hand of the Father came through his death on the cross, through his own tribulation.

That's why we also must share in that glory through death and suffering. Jesus lays out the pattern right here in Revelation 118. I died and behold, I am alive forevermore.

It's only those who die to themselves, renounce their sins and renounce their pride and turn to Christ. Those are the only ones who can live forever and enjoy the resurrection life that God has won for us in Christ.

[11:19] That's why Jesus says to his followers in John 16, 33, in the world, you will have tribulation. But take heart, I have overcome the world.

Tribulation is just a, it's just a fancy word for acute distress or suffering, a severe trial. Many of you are going through different kinds of tribulations.

As you fight sin in your life, as you battle our spiritual enemies in your life, as you face those who oppose God and persecute God's people, you face the tribulation.

But the tribulation that we face is normal. We need to remember that that's a part of what God has promised that we will have to experience because it's only through patient endurance that we can attain that glory.

Times of peace and prosperity for the Christians are the exception, not the norm. I've shared some of these statistics with you from previous years of Open Door USA about the suffering of Christians throughout the world.

[12:25] This organization publishes the World Watch List every year, which lists 50 countries where the persecution against Christians is most severe. And according to their 2023 report, more than 360 million Christians today live in places where they experience high, very high, or extremely high levels of persecution.

And that number has been going up every single year that I've been following this watch list. That's one in seven Christians in the world. Over the last year, 5,621 Christians were murdered for their faith.

2,110 church buildings were attacked, destroyed. 4,542 Christians were detained. That means on average, 15 or 16 Christians are killed for their faith every single day.

This day, 15 or 16 Christians will die for their faith somewhere in the world. That's the reality that many of the members of the body of Christ live in.

And most of them don't make the news. For many Christians around the world, the cost of being a disciple of Jesus Christ is very, very high. And even though there is an overt persecution of Christians in our society today because we do not live as citizens of earth, but rather as citizens of heaven, and because we operate with a very different set of purposes and priorities than the people of this world, sometimes we are looked at as a strange and a regressive and even ridiculous bunch.

[14:09] Jesus said this in John 15 that because the world hated him that it will also hate us because we are not of the world.

If we belong to the world, they would love us. But because we don't and because they don't understand, there is hatred from the world.

I am hoping that this is a helpful adjustment of the perspective that some of us Christians can have. God does not promise us a life free of suffering.

He never promised that once you come to faith in him that your life will be smooth sailing. Rather, he promises us tribulation and commands us to patiently endure.

John himself was enduring this. We could see that because he says that he was on the island of Patmos on account of the word of God and testimony of Jesus. This repeats what he said earlier in verse 2.

[15:08] Patmos was a Greek island on the Aegean Sea where the Romans back then used as a destination for political exiles, so political criminals. So John is there in exile because he faithfully bore witness to Jesus, because he proclaimed the word of God and the testimony of Jesus, because he proclaimed that Jesus is king, that he is the Messiah and refused to bow down to the emperor cult because he refused to worship the pagan gods of the Romans.

They saw him as an enemy, as an insidious influence in their society and they exiled him to this island. And John's telling the Christians not to lose heart as a fellow sufferer for the sake of the gospel.

I, John, am your partner in the tribulation and the patient endurance. We are suffering together. You're not alone. We are in this together, so don't lose heart.

Keep on persevering and keep on bearing witness to Jesus no matter what. And having introduced himself and having identified with his hearers, John then relays the vision that he received from the Lord and he describes how he came to that vision.

He says in verse 10, I was in the spirit on the Lord's day. That's referring to a prophetic vision. He's being carried along by the spirit. That's how people receive prophecy, as it says, 2 Peter 1.21.

[16:35] And he is, so even though John's writing this letter, he is reporting revelation from God, something that God has revealed to him in the vision. This happened on the Lord's day, which is Sunday, the first day of the week, the day that our Lord Jesus was raised from the dead.

And that's why Christians for thousands of years have worshipped together on the Lord's day, on Sunday. And he says in verses 10 to 11, 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 to Thyatira and Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea.

So this prophetic vision, he's relaying, he is serving as a messenger of this. And here in verse 11, we see the seven churches that are listed. They are the recipients of this circular letter.

That's what most people think Revelation was, that it was a circular letter intended to circulate in multiple locations. So he would have gone likely in this order of the churches that are listed. He would have traveled from one location to the other to relay this message that God had given to John.

So this is listed in kind of geographic order of the path that a messenger from Patmos would have taken. These, it's not, it's not, we're not told here why these seven churches are specified that we're more than these seven churches in Asia Minor.

[17:57] And there are also even other prominent churches in Asia Minor like Galatia, the church in Galatia that Paul wrote to, the letter to the Galatians. So then why did John choose these seven churches?

We don't know for sure, but it's possible that these seven churches formed a natural focal point of creation for the churches scattered throughout that geographic region. And remember that also number seven, as Ed mentioned last week and as I said two weeks ago, is symbolically significant throughout the book of Revelation.

Because seven days is what God took to create, to complete all of creation. It's used symbolically throughout scripture and especially in the book of Revelation to represent completeness.

So while these seven churches are specifically named and God does address the specific circumstances of these churches, they are also representative of the whole church, all of God's people.

So the situation that this Revelation addresses is a persecuted church in the midst of tribulation that must patiently endure and that's what John is writing to.

[19:02] That's the circumstance. And now having seen our situation as described in verses 9 to 11, let's look at our Lord. His description in verses 12 to 16. After hearing the loud voice like a trumpet, John turns to see where the voice is coming from and he sees, it says, on turning, 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. For those of you who are with us through our sermon series recently in the book of Exodus, this should immediately make the light bulbs go off.

Seeing some light bulbs go off here. Because a golden lampstand with seven lamps, no less, right, was one of the furnishings within the tabernacle of God.

The golden lampstand occupied a holy place, the dwelling place of God, along with the bread of the presence and it represented the presence of God, God's gracious presence among his people.

Light and fire are really appropriate symbols for God and used throughout Scripture because God is described as the consuming fire. Like fire, the Lord God sanctifies.

[20:19] He burns up the dross, leaving the precious ore. He purifies. He consumes the wicked in judgment, but he purifies his people. 1 John 1, 5 says that God is light and in him is no darkness at all.

The light, the seven lights that are on the lampstand represent the fullness of God's holy presence and is connected to the seven spirits that we saw earlier mentioned in Revelation 1, 4.

That doesn't mean that there are seven spirits of God. Rather, it represents the completeness of the one spirit of God as Ed was talking about last week. There's no blood or imperfection or darkness in God at all because he is the light, the consuming fire.

And the golden lampstand also signifies the fact that God sees. Just as the physical light enables our eyes to see, it's the spiritual light, the light of God that enables us to see spiritual realities.

The golden lampstand of the tabernacle was designed to look like an almond tree and we know from Jeremiah 1, 11 to 12 that an almond tree is a symbol of the Lord's watching because the word watching is very similar which is the word almond in Hebrew.

[21 : 33] And so then the seven lamps of this almond tree, right, of the lamp convey unmistakably that the Lord is watching. There's nothing hidden from God. The deepest recesses of our hearts are open to God.

The hidden sins of sinners are exposed before God. God sees everything. The Israelites were to bring pure, beaten olive oil regularly to make sure that the light never goes out and it was the job of the Aaron and his sons, the priests, to keep the light going, the lamp burning at all times.

It was never to go out because it represented God's presence with his people and God never goes on vacation. He never leaves, right? When you walk around East Cambridge at night and then you see light inside the houses, that's how you know there is someone home.

Someone is there and you look to the tabernacle, the Israelites look to the tabernacle and see the light of God burning the lampstand. They say, God is here. He's with us. He goes with us.

We're told plainly in verse 20 that the seven golden lampstands stand for the seven churches and the light and fire that lampstands are meant to hold represent the watchful presence of God, his spirit.

[22 : 49] This is confirmed by Zechariah 4, which this passage is also alluding to. There an angel shows Zechariah a vision of a golden lampstand and this one's like a super lampstand.

It's got seven lamps and each of the lamp has seven lips or spouts. So it's like a seven times seven. This is like a super menorah. And in that vision, he sees two olive trees by it on either side, which supplies the oil to this lampstand.

And then when asked to explain the meaning of this, the angel says to Zechariah, not by might nor by power, but by my spirit says the Lord, meaning that it represents the spirit of God, the presence of God among his people, the lampstands, the light of God.

And it says specifically in Zechariah 4.10 that these seven, the seven lights on the lampstand are the eyes of the Lord which range through the whole earth.

So once again, it represents the same thing, the watchful presence of the living God, the spirit of God, the God who gives light and life to his people, the lampstands.

[23 : 53] And this is a fulfillment of the Zechariah's prophecy, of Zechariah's prophecy because in the Old Testament times in Zechariah, the lampstand represented Israel, God's people, the Jews.

But now in the New Testament, in the New Covenant, the lampstand represents all of God's people. Hence the seven lampstands represent the fullness that includes not only the Jews but also the Gentiles.

And also in Zechariah 4, there were the two olive trees that supplies the oil. And most people interpret that to mean to stand for Joshua, the high priest, and Zerubbabel, the governor, who is from the royal line of David, basically a king.

And those two were at the time leading Israel and helping to lay again the foundation of Jerusalem and the temple that were destroyed. And so they're supplying the oil.

But instead of having two people tending to the lampstand, in John's vision, there's only one. One like a son of man. Clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash around his chest.

[24 : 59] This is a vision of Jesus because Jesus in himself combines both of those offices as high priest and king. And that's why it says he's clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash.

The Greek word that's translated here as long robe only occurs once right here in the New Testament. But if you search the Greek translation of the Old Testament, it occurs five times in the book of Exodus alone.

And every single time it refers to the robe of the ifid that the priest wears. So it's a priestly robe. And the golden sash is a symbol of royalty and represents Jesus' kingly office.

And as many of you already know, the phrase son of man is Jesus' favorite phrase, the favorite title that Jesus takes upon himself throughout the Gospels because it's an explicit allusion to Daniel 7

and Daniel 10 where one like a son of man approaches the engine of days and receives everlasting dominion and glory and kingdom so that all peoples and nations and languages worship him and serve him.

It's a description of the messianic king who has God's authority, divine, eternal authority. And that's who Jesus is. He's better. He fulfills Zerubbabel and Joshua the high priest.

[26 : 13] He is the great high priest and he is the ultimate king in the line of David. And so he fulfills this prophecy in Zechariah 4 and he is the one who is now tending to God's people, the lamp of God, to make sure that the lamp does not go out, that it continues to burn.

This picture of the seven golden lampstands with the son of man behind it, in the midst of it, teaches us several important things. First, it teaches that we, the church of God, we're the lampstands.

But God, the spirit of God, is the light or the fire. Jesus is the light of the world and it says in verse 16, his face is like the sun shining in full strength.

We as the church, God's people, are merely the receptacles of the light. We are not the light itself. We are only the light of the world insofar as we are reflecting the light of Christ.

So then we should be careful not to make ourselves the center of attention or center of our ministry, of everything that we do, our lives.

[27 : 24] It's not about who has the platform or who gets to talk in front of a crowd. It's not about who gets the credit or who gets the acclaim because it's not about us.

We exist to glorify God, not ourselves. We exist to make much of God, not ourselves. We exist to tell people about God and not about ourselves.

The church of all places should not be a place where people are jostling for the spotlight. Rather, we shine the spotlight on Christ because He is the light.

He is the consuming fire. We're not the main show. We're just the setting for the light of God. And secondly, Jesus, it tells us, this picture tells us that Jesus is with us and that He is watching over us.

This glorious and risen Lord that we're going to see in a second, even as He sits and reigns at the right hand of the Father, His church and His people are not out of sight and out of mind.

[28 : 33] In the midst of the lampstands, He says, there's one like a Son of Man. Jesus is not far off. He's in our very midst as our high priest and king.

And He's carefully and diligently tending to the lamp so that the fire of God, the Spirit of God does not go out in that lamp. And as I mentioned, this applies to all the churches.

The seven churches are representative and that means it applies to us too. This small, humble, lowly church in Cambridge, Massachusetts, the Son of God and the Son of Man who has all authority in heaven and on earth is in our midst.

And He is tending to us and caring for us to make sure that that light of God does not go out. That's an amazing promise.

So remember this, brothers and sisters, as you mortify your sins, as you battle against the evil one, as you endure through persecution, this is the grounds for our patient endurance through the tribulation.

[29 : 42] And this is what undergirds John's message or Jesus' message to the seven churches in chapters 2 and 3, telling Him to conquer, telling Him to endure, telling Him to be faithful unto death.

How can they do that? Because Jesus is among us. And He says, you are not alone. I am with you. So stand firm. Persevere till the end.

And our strength and hope grow so much as we see the further descriptions of Jesus. I love this description of Jesus in these few verses. Verse 14 tells us that the hairs of His head were white, like white wool, like snow.

White hair is a sign of what? Age, old age, right? In our culture, old age is not looked at as a good thing, but in many cultures, actually, it's looked at as a very good thing because it signifies wisdom. Gray hair is not something to be ashamed of because it signifies long life. And you can testify to the faithfulness of God. And through that experience, you gain wisdom.

[31 : 04] Daniel 7, 9, this is an allusion to Daniel 7, 9, which describes God Almighty, the Ancient of Days. It says that His clothing was white as snow and the hair of His head like pure wool, just like here with Jesus.

John's trying to tell us that Jesus is the Ancient of Days. He's the second person of the Trinity. He is the word that was there from the beginning. He is wise.

This reminds me of Gandalf from The Lord of the Rings. Gandalf is ancient. According to Tolkien Geeks geeking out on Reddit, Gandalf is about 55,000 years old by the end of the series, the book of The Lord of the Rings.

And so he's ancient and he's equally wise. He's as ancient as he's wise. And he fights, right, as you guys know, I think it's in the two towers.

He fights against Balrog of Morgoth and he gives his life to save his friends. And then after he dies, he's given life again. He resurrects. And then when he's raised, he's no longer Gandalf the Grey, but he is Gandalf the White with greater power, greater wisdom, and greater authority.

[32 : 21] And he's supposed to go and supplant the corrupted leader of the White Council, the head of the Order of the Wizards, Saruman, because Gandalf has surpassed him.

He's now Gandalf the White. I love Gandalf all throughout the series. There's an amazing, amazing scene in the two towers when during the Battle of the Helm's Deep and they're losing. And I'm sorry if this is like, you gotta read the books if you haven't read it.

And they're losing and then as the sun rises, Gandalf appears on the horizon, a white rider, they call him.

And they said, there suddenly upon a ridge appeared a rider clad in white, shining in the rising sun. Behold, a white rider, cried Aragorn. Gandalf is come again.

Can you imagine that? And then the tide turns. Can you just imagine being in that battle? You're losing. You're losing hope and then you see that. Like what strength that brings to your heart and what hope that breathes into your heart and you see someone so wise, so ancient, who's seen it all and done it all come.

[33 : 41] If that's the case with Gandalf, how much more to have Jesus on our side? the Ancient of Days himself who's there before the beginning of time, who knows all things.

You just behold him and you see his wisdom. He knows and sees all things. Amazing.

Verses 14 to 15 also tells us that 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 is an allusion to Daniel's vision of the Son of Man in Daniel 10 verse 6. His body was like barrel, his face like the appearance of lightning, his eyes were like flaming torches, his arms and legs like the gleam of burnished bronze and the sound of his words like the sound of a multitude. What does it mean that his eyes were like a flame of fire? Fire is often a symbol of judgment and discernment. It separates the drowse from the oars.

[34 : 48] Proverbs 28 says this, a king who sits on the throne of judgment winnows all evil with his eyes. I think that gets close to the intended meaning of this description. Jesus is a righteous judge, an omniscient judge who perceives and sees all things.

Nobody can put one over him and nothing can get past his all discerning eyes. He sees everything. There's no ambush and no trick that an enemy can play that can overcome him.

There's no sinner who can hide from his all-knowing perception. He sees right through people who are clean on the outside but impure on the inside.

That's Jesus. His feet were like burnished bronze refined in a furnace it says in verse 15. So refined polished bronze is glossy and it gleams, it shines.

so that symbolizes Jesus' purity but also it shows Jesus' power and authority because bronze is the hardest of the precious metals that were commonly used in the ancient world.

[35 : 54] Gold, silver, and bronze. Bronze is the hardest of them all. With feet like burnished bronze Jesus crushes his foes underneath his feet. No enemy can resist him.

it just crumbles underneath. He's the victorious conqueror. And his voice was like the roar of many waters. It's amazing.

Try imagining that. This is an allusion to Ezekiel 43.2 which describes the sound of the coming of the Lord like the sound of many waters. Ezekiel 1.24 tells us what the sound of many waters is like. It tells us that I heard the sound of their wings like the sound of many waters like the sound of the Almighty a sound of tumult like the sound of an army. So imagine the sound of a mighty host tens of thousands hundreds of thousands in the army marching together the rumbling the roar listen to that sound of his voice.

So imagine like the lush and full surround sound of the ocean waves when you're at the beach. or imagine the roaring flow of a large waterfall like the Niagara Falls.

[37 : 10] I think the closest human voice comes to that is probably the voice of Tim Storms. You guys know about him? I didn't know about him until this weekend. He holds the Guinness world record for both the lowest note ever produced by a human being and the widest vocal range.

He has a vocal range of ten octaves to give you a glimpse of that. Mariah Carey sings five octaves. That's crazy. And normal human beings like you and me only sing two or three octaves.

They say that and this is like real they measure it with scientific equipment. His lowest note is so low that human beings can't hear it. Only elephants can hear it. Isn't that crazy? I'm not and he's actually a Christian and you can find YouTube videos of him singing some hymns and it's remarkable.

And you can look that up later and not now. And he literally sounds like a full bass choir section all by himself. And you're like listening to this and if you have good headphones you could feel the vibration like an earthquake like the rumbling loud sound.

And that's only the voice of one human being. Can you imagine the sound of the almighty? How powerful is the Lord God?

[38 : 31] Imagine that sound. The immensity of it. The authority of it. Jesus is not a puny deity. He's infinite and almighty.

Verse 16 tells us that in his right hand he held the seven stars. In case you're wondering what the seven stars are John tells us exactly in verse 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. In chapters 2 and 3 Jesus addresses the seven churches and he addresses the seven churches by addressing the angels of the seven churches which shows that these angels are heavenly representatives of the churches that are on earth.

Some people think that these angels refer to human representatives maybe the lead pastors of these churches because the word angel simply means messenger in the Greek. However, in Revelation the word angel in all the subsequent visions exclusively refers to a heavenly being an actual angel as we think of it.

So I think it's highly unlikely that this is referring to a human messenger and this idea that there is a heavenly angelic representative of people is not uncommon throughout scripture.

[39 : 55] In Matthew 18.10 Jesus says of the children see that you do not despise one of these little ones for I tell you that in heaven their angels always see the face of my father who is in heaven.

These children are precious disciples of Christ are precious why? Because they have heavenly representatives angels before the presence of God. we see a similar thing in Daniel 10 20-21 and Daniel 12 verse 1 they speak of the nations throughout the world also having angelic representatives assigned to them.

So then these angels are heavenly beings that represent before God's throne the church is on earth. This is an amazing statement about the significance of the church. Here on earth the visible church is imperfect.

there's wheat and there's weeds mixed in together but however imperfect we may be the church is a heavenly reality. And even our small local church has an angel representing us before the very throne of God.

This is why the book of Revelation is punctuated by visions of heavenly worship of the Lamb of God because they are a heavenly counterpart to what we are doing here on earth.

[41 : 16] This is why the corporate worship of the church is so important. What we do here together is not just for here and now. It rings out through eternity.

It rings out in heaven. And in his right hand it says Jesus holds the seven stars. Not only is Jesus Lord over the seven churches represented by the seven lampstands he is also Lord over our heavenly angelic counterparts.

He holds the seven stars in his hand. When you hold something in your hand when something is in your hand it shows your power over it. Your authority over it. So it shows Jesus' sovereignty over human history and over all of God's people.

We are in the hands of the resurrected Lord Jesus and let this be a comfort to you that he is in full control of your faith. No matter what disappointments and setbacks have happened to you in your life no matter how much suffering you are enduring right now no matter how much you despair of

even life itself you are in the hands of the resurrected Lord Jesus.

And as Jesus said in John 10:27 to 28 my sheep hear my voice and I know them and they follow me I give them eternal life and they will never perish and no one will ever snatch them out of my hand.

[42:45] That's what that represents. No one can ever snatch you out of the hand of the sovereign Lord Jesus who holds the seven stars in his right hand.

Verse 16 continues to describe this glorious Christ. From his mouth came a sharp two-edged sword. This is an allusion to Isaiah 11:4. The rod from his mouth he judges the wicked. Ephesians 6:17 speaks of the word of God as the sword of the spirit. And Hebrews 4:12 famously says this 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 narrow and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

Jesus' weapon is the two-edged sword of the word of God. Scriptures. It is not sharp in the sense that it cuts people down or brings them down rather it's sharp in the sense that it cuts to the heart. It's not merely an earthly weapon that can cut flesh and blood. It's a spiritual weapon that can cut the soul and the spirit. That can cut through the weeds and discern the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

[43:58] It's a sword that can slay spiritual enemies that can slay the devil. It's a sword that can cut open sin and expose it. It's a sword with which Jesus will strike down the nations who oppose him as it says in Revelation 19:15.

And lastly verse 16 describes Jesus' face. His face was like the sun shining in full strength.

this reveals that Jesus is the radiance of the glory of God. Jesus is the only sovereign king of kings and lord of lords who alone has immortality and who dwells in unapproachable light.

Jesus revealed this divine glory briefly at the transfiguration in Matthew 17:2 and it described his transfiguration this way. His face shone like the sun.

We can't even stare at him directly. That's how gloriously bright he is. Pure, holy. This is the cosmic picture of the risen Jesus.

[45:10] Isn't it amazing? I think it's such a beautiful description. And it's that glorious picture that provides the basis for the main command of this passage in verses 17-18.

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. So this should be our response. Fear not. This is once again an allusion to Daniel 10.

After Daniel sees the vision of the son of man, he loses all strength and he falls into a deep sleep. And Jesus, son of man, has to touch him, his right hand, and strengthen him and to get him up. And he tells him, fear not, peace be with you, be strong and of good courage. But why is Jesus telling John to fear not? To fear not what? I don't think Jesus is primarily referring to fearing him.

[46:14] And I think we can tell that from the context because Jesus goes on to say, 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.

If John was afraid of Jesus and he was trying to reassure him, I don't think I would tell him this because I think this makes him more scary. But the threefold formula, I am the first and the last and the living one mirrors verses 4 and 8, him who is and who was and who is to come.

Or I am the alpha and omega, the beginning and the end, who is and who was and is to come, the almighty. Jesus is here unmistakably identifying himself with the ancient of days, the living God, eternal God who has no beginning and no end.

Jesus rules over the past, the present, and the future and John's supposed to write of this reign of Christ and that's why the commission in verse 19 also is threefold. Write there for things that you have seen, those that are and those that are to take place after this.

So John's a witness to Christ's reign in the past, present, and future. And it's on that basis, Jesus seems like, Jesus is telling us not to fear because he has risen from the dead and he has the keys to death and Hades.

[47:31] Jesus is saying this because he knows the situation that John and the churches are in. They're facing tribulation, they're facing persecution, they need to patiently endure, they have many good reasons to be afraid for being a Christian.

And that's why Jesus is saying fear not because I have defeated death, I am risen from the dead and I have the keys to death and Hades.

This is Jesus' way of saying what he said earlier in his earthly life, Matthew 10, 28, do not fear those who can kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.

Jesus is saying I've got the keys to death so don't fear death. Don't fear what man can do to you. Think about it this way, you don't get the keys to the house until you actually pay for it and you close it.

You close on the house. They won't give you the keys until you own it. Before you get the key you have to be courteous to the current residents in the house, you have to observe their curfew, you visit at a good reasonable hour and you can only go with permission.

[48 : 42] but once you have the key, you can go in and out as you please because you own it. Jesus is saying I own death.

So why are you afraid of it? Why fear those who can kill the body but cannot kill the soul? Jesus can unlock that whenever he wants. We can be persecuted and we can give our life for Jesus and become martyrs this day and he will raise us with him and give us eternal resurrection life when he returns.

So fear not. I mentioned to you the report from Open Door USA at the beginning and the report from this year included a testimony from Pastor Marcos.

He was a pastor leading a church in Adamawa state in northern Nigeria when Boko Haram attacked. Villages were ransacked and church buildings were burned and many Christian men and women were killed.

[50 : 03] And he says this that at the time in the immediate aftermath he says my own spiritual life was greatly shaken because I was so afraid. But still the word of God kept reminding me that for anyone who puts their trust in God he will not forsake them.

Initially after the violence had subsided the people of his church were slow to come back because they were afraid and so but he patiently ministered to them one by one exhorting them to renew their faith in God and eventually they all returned and this is what Pastor Markos had to say.

The persecution quote has become like a fertilizer for the gospel. Our church had only 200 members before Boko Haram came but now we have 300 to 400 members.

We do not pray that God will take away the hardship but that God should give us the grace to be able to stand. Since our master Jesus went through this suffering we also who have become his followers will go through it.

but in the end we will be victorious. We need not fear in the midst of tribulation because Christ is the resurrected Lord who reigns over the church.

[51 : 23] Let's pray together. yes fathers it is so easy for us to just only pray that you remove the tribulation.

You take away the suffering in our lives. But Lord you said to us that in this world we will have tribulation.

tribulation and we pray now in accordance with this word that you'll give us the strength and the courage the faith to stand to stand firm to endure patiently to conquer by being faithful unto death so that we might be living pictures of you our Lord Jesus Christ who died for our sins and was raised from the dead and now lives forevermore.

Our trust is in you Lord. And in your holy name we pray. Amen.