

## Keep Your Head Up Death's Enemy Is On Your Side

A Sermon on Revelation 1:4-18  
Year C - Easter 2  
3 - April - 2016

JJ<sup>1</sup>

In the month of March, a man I know lost both of his parents in very tragic ways. At first, his mother's death appeared to be a suicide. She was a faithful Christian woman, who just that day was speaking of future service in the church. Speaking of the future is something rather uncommon of those contemplating suicide. While she had her struggles, suicide didn't really fit. Things did not add up and quickly the focus changed to murder as the investigation began. The suspect was her own husband. A week after his wife's funeral, which he wasn't permitted to attend, this man hung himself in prison.

Right now the devil is working very hard in the hearts of this young man I know and his other family members to drag their hearts down into despair and anger. Although you haven't experienced this exact tragedy, you too have suffered great losses. Losses that the devil has tried and continues to try to use to drag you down into despair and anger. There are Christians around the world who are enduring severe persecution for their faith in Christ, and they too are being tempted by the devil to despair, to hang their heads low in shame and defeat, to even give up.

Friends, the book of Revelation was written at a time and to a people just like the young man, like you and like the persecuted Christians of today. The Apostle John, the one who received these amazing visions from the Lord was also no stranger to suffering, loss and persecution. His own brother was the first of the apostles to lose his life for Jesus, having his head chopped off in Jerusalem. John tells us as he writes this book that he was exiled on the island of Patmos "because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus." In other words, he was exiled to Patmos for preaching the gospel, something that was not uncommon in the Roman Empire at that time.

John tells us that he received these visions on a Sunday "the Lord's Day" while he was "in the Spirit." Like the prophets of the Old Testament, and like the other Apostles, such as Paul, who were given visions by the Lord of the future, so too with John. By the power of the Holy Spirit, God gave John these visions.

Now it is important that before we go any further that we understand a few things about this book. This isn't a narrative, like his Gospel, recording things that have happened. John is receiving from the Lord a series of visions about things

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<sup>1</sup> JJ is the acronym for *Jesus Juve*, which is Latin for "Jesus Help". It is a short prayer used by many ministers and sacred musicians at the beginning of their work.

yet to happen. He says this in the introduction to the book. “The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him [i.e. Jesus] to show his [i.e. Jesus or the Father] servants what must soon take place. He [i.e. Jesus] made it known by sending his angel to his servant John, who testifies to everything he saw—that is, the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ.” (Rev. 1:1-2) These things that are about to happen are the End Times, which the Lord tells us began when he ascended into heaven (Heb. 1:2). They’re also visions about the Last Day and eternity.

Now people get themselves into all kinds of trouble with this book when they forget the forest for the trees. What I mean is, people get themselves into all kinds of trouble when they divorce this book from the rest of Scripture and forget to let Scripture interpret Scripture. Our goal is to take this book literally, meaning, John literally did see these things and wrote them down, but not literalistically. That means, taking things that are figurative, or symbolic or representative and saying that is exactly what they are. To do that we would fall into one of the errors of the Jehovah’s Witnesses who say that only 144,000 people are going to heaven.

We have an example of this already in the first chapter. John writes that in his vision he sees seven lampstands and that Jesus had seven stars in his right hand. That is

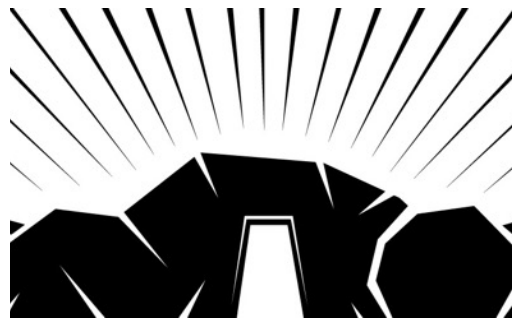
actually what John saw. At the end of the chapter, John tells us that the lampstands represented the seven churches to which this book was originally sent. And the seven stars are the seven pastors of those congregations.

These visions are best understood when we examine and study them just like one of Jesus’ parables, where with words, Jesus would tell a story to describe a spiritual truth. Where here, Jesus does it with visions. We miss the point of Jesus’ parables if we get lost in all the details or search for hidden meaning in all the de-

tails when every one of Jesus’ parables are spoken to make one particular point. Really, you could summarize the entire point of Revelation in this way: *Jesus wins, and because he wins, we win too!* This book wasn’t written to

confuse God’s suffering people of long ago or today. This book was given to comfort us. That’s why our theme over these six weeks following Easter is **KEEP YOUR HEAD UP**. Today we are reminded to do just that because **Death’s Enemy Is On Your Side**.

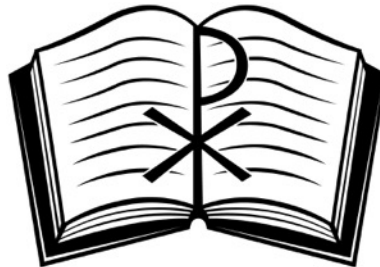
“On the Lord’s Day I was in spirit, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet, which said: ‘Write on a scroll what you see and send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea.’ All these cities were in the western part of what we know today as



the country of Turkey. The cities are also listed in the order that a messenger would take making a circuit to deliver the scroll.

"I turned around to see the voice that was speaking to me. And when I turned I saw seven golden lampstands, 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. His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and his eyes were like blazing fire. His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of rushing waters. In his right hand he held seven stars, and out of his mouth came a sharp double-edged sword. His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance."

John sees Jesus in his heavenly glory, just like he saw him on the Mount of Transfiguration. And John's response is the same as it was then. He's terrified and falls down like a dead man! And wouldn't you be too if you saw the Lord, still a sinful human being! No general or ruler has ever looked this intimidating. No authority has ever and will ever shine forth with holiness, glory and power. His eyes blaze straight into the darkest depths of the soul. His voice thunders like a mighty waterfall. Out of his mouth comes a sharp double-edged sword, which other Scriptures tell us is God's mighty Word (Eph. 6:17; Heb. 4:12).



Terrifying indeed! John certainly felt like Isaiah when he saw the LORD and cried out: "Woe to me! I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty." (Is. 6:5)

But "then he placed his right hand on me and said: 'Do not be afraid. I AM the First and the Last. I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive again forever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades.'"

In an instant, John's heart is put at ease. This One before him is the same Jesus he learned from for three years. This One before him is the same One who rose from the grave and called him his brother.

This is his eternal God and Savior who mocks death through his own resurrection and his promise to John that "because I live, you also shall live." (Jn. 14:19) This One before him is the One who has death as his enemy and conquers it! Even the executioners sword cannot reach beyond Jesus' ability to help and save. His power reaches even into the grave!

Friends, **KEEP YOUR HEADS UP!** Jesus says the same thing to you! "Do not be afraid!" **Death's enemy is on your side!** The Jesus who gently called Thomas to repentance out of weakness of faith is the same Jesus who calls you to repentance

for weakness of faith. The Jesus who emboldened Peter to stand in faith in the middle of persecution is the same Jesus who strengthens you to endure all things. The Jesus who comforts aged John that he is death's enemy and is on John's side is the same Jesus who comes to you today with his resurrection joy and promises! Jesus is the one who was dead, and behold, he is alive again forever and ever! Jesus is the one "who loves us and freed us from our sins by his blood...!" Jesus has taken away our punishment in hell. That in itself would be more than enough to let our hearts rest in peace knowing that when we die at least we would sleep and not suffer. But Jesus' love goes beyond that!

In his love, Jesus has given us high positions in his kingdom. He says that he "has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father." Right now we rule with Christ, even though it doesn't seem like it. But through our prayers and petitions, Christ invites us to take part in his rule over all creation for the good of his people and the furthering of his kingdom throughout the world!

But best of all, our Jesus who suffered persecution, pain, loss, humiliation and even murder is now glorified and alive forever and ever. What happened to Jesus will also happen to us one day. We too

will be glorified, body and soul. Why, because **death's enemy is on your side!** So **KEEP YOUR HEAD UP!** Amen.

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<sup>2</sup> SDG is an acronym for *Soli Deo Gloria*, which is Latin for "To God Alone Be The Glory". This is a statement of humility used by many ministers and sacred musicians at the end of their work to let themselves and others know that it isn't about getting glory for themselves, but about giving all glory to God.