

## Encountering the Risen Christ

### Easter Sunday

Revelation 1

David Sunday

April 8, 2012

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Let the heavens rejoice! All the earth exalts for Christ our eternal joy is risen! He is risen indeed. Praise God for that! Our Lord Jesus Christ is full of life today. First John 5 says He is the true God and eternal life. In fact, apart from Jesus there is no life. Death reigns apart from Him. First John 5:11-12 says, *“And this is the testimony, that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life.”*

I want you to know that you have the Son of God, that you have life in the name of Jesus. The resurrection of Jesus is not just a fact of history but it's the reality that empowers you today. One day every eye is going to see Jesus. Each and every one of us will encounter the risen Christ. He is alive and He is unavoidable.

When you have an important interview or you're going to meet someone of great dignity, you want to learn as much about that person as you can so you can be prepared to meet him. My aim is to prepare you for your encounter with the risen Christ by introducing Him to you through His Word. The clearest picture we have in all the Bible of what Jesus looks like right now is found in the book of Revelation—the last book of the Bible.

Here in Revelation 1, we find Jesus as He is now. Not a baby lying in the manger. Not a suffering servant dying on a cross. But an almighty Savior Who is gloriously and eternally alive, radiant with resplendent and overwhelming glory. The Jesus we're going to read about here is the Jesus Whom all of us will meet one day. Let's get to know Him better as we hear His Word read and preached.

Hear the Word of the living God, beginning at Revelation 1:9:

*I, John, your brother and partner in the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance that are in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I*

*heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet saying, "Write what you see in a book and send it to the seven churches, to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamum and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea."*

*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 this 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. 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.*

This is God's living Word.

You'll notice it divides into three paragraphs here and we're going to look at them one at a time and ask three questions about encountering the risen Christ.

1. Where Can I Meet Him today?
2. What is He Like?
3. How will I be affected by Him when I meet Him?

### **Where Can I Meet the Risen Christ Today? (Verses 9-11)**

The answer from this paragraph is twofold. We meet the risen Christ in the midst of trouble and we meet Him in His Word. Look at John, one of Jesus' the disciples. He's the one who is writing down this vision. John is expressing how believers encounter the risen Christ today as we walk faithfully in the midst of trouble. John was the one who called himself, "The disciple whom Jesus loved." It wasn't because Jesus didn't love the other disciples but because John was so profoundly aware of Jesus' love for him that this was the defining characteristic of his life.

You know how when you're in a room full of people who are meeting one another for the first time, sometimes you'll go around the room and say, "Tell us something about

yourself.” If you were in a room like that with John, the first words I believe out of his mouth would be, “Jesus loves me, this I know!”

That was the most profound thing about his life. “Jesus loves me!” John followed Jesus all the way to the cross. In fact on the cross, Jesus said to John, “Here John, you take care of my mother, Mary.” That’s how close they were.

By the time of Revelation though, John is an old man. Jesus has been gone for decades. It’s quite possible John has outlived all the other apostles—he could be upwards of 90 years old. He’s been walking with Jesus now for about 60 years. Jesus has been at the right hand of the Father in glory for a long time and where do we find John in this passage? The best friend of Jesus is suffering. We find him in the midst of trouble. We find him on the island of Patmos, off the coast of Turkey in the Aegean Sea. It’s not a Hawaiian holiday. It’s more like Alcatraz. It’s a Roman prison.

We find him in the midst of tribulation as he says in verse nine. That word speaks of intense pressure; of crushing anguish. He’s there, he says, on account of the Word of God and the testimony of Jesus. John didn’t choose a life of ease and comfort in his old age. He chose faithfulness to God’s Word; faithfulness to the gospel of Jesus Christ. That faithfulness brought him into hard-pressed anguish. John makes it clear in verse nine that he’s not alone in his sufferings. He calls himself “...*your brother and partner in the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance that are in Jesus...*”

As John’s life is wasting away on Patmos, the evil emperor Domitian is breathing down the necks of Christians everywhere and harsher days are on the horizon. Some Christians are going to be thrown to wild beasts. Others will be impaled on stakes. Some of them will be sown into sacks and thrown off cliffs into the oceans. Others will starve to death in prison or be driven into the wilderness to die of exposure and starvation. Some will be doused with fuel and set ablaze in the emperor’s garden while he entertains his dinner guests. And worse things than these will happen to believers.

Even this very day, Christians continue to suffer on account of the Word of God and for the testimony of Jesus. I just received an e-mail this morning from a trustworthy source about a pastor in Katmandu, Nepal. He preached his Easter message less than 24 hours ago and as is his custom, he went out into the streets of Katmandu to preach the gospel of Jesus in the open air. A mob attacked him violently and beat him to a pulp. All for the sake of the Word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ—today, in the past 24 hours.

Christians throughout the ages have suffered because they believe in the resurrection of Jesus. They believe He is worth living for and dying for.

Let me say something for a moment about what Christianity is **not**. I know many people come to church on Easter Sunday who don't normally come at other times. I think one of the reasons people don't come to church more than occasionally is that sometimes preachers are too often guilty of selling a bill of goods. We can make it sound like Christianity is all about victory and triumph and health and wealth and happiness—the American dream plus Jesus. Now a message like that might make you feel good for a day but it doesn't fit with reality. It disillusiones people regarding Christianity.

As a preacher of the gospel, I'm not called to give you a "pep talk." That's not what anyone needs. What you need to live as a real Christian is what John says in verse nine: "*patient endurance that is in Jesus.*" The truth is, if you become a Christian, it will not make your life easier. It will bring new pressures into your life as you seek to live faithfully for Christ and His Kingdom in a world that is hostile toward Him. What you need to live as a real Christian is patient endurance. If you think about it, that's really practical; that's what you can gain as you worship Jesus week by week and look into His Word. He gives you patient endurance. This is one of the reasons why I respect the gospel so much. Jesus doesn't hide the cost from us. It's not like the drug advertisements where the risks and side effects are in really small print at the bottom. Jesus makes it very clear—there is no bait and switch.

Look at verse nine again. What will you find in Jesus? Tribulation, the Kingdom of God and patient endurance. When you get Jesus Christ, that's what you get wrapped up in the Jesus package. You get tribulation, God's Kingdom and patient endurance—and you can't separate any one of those things from the package. Every part of the package is a gift—even the tribulation!

Jesus tells us right up front, "It will cost you everything if you have to follow Me" (Mark 8:34). But He also promises, "I will give you everything My Father owns! I will give you the Kingdom" (Matthew 16:19). One of my favorite verses of Jesus speaking is Luke 12:32 where He says, "*Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.*" He will never leave you nor forsake you. He will give you what you need to endure patiently.

Now look at verse ten. Where do we get this patient endurance? How do we find this patient endurance? Verse ten: "*I was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day...*" John was doing

what Christians had done since the resurrection of Jesus. He was setting apart the first day of the week—the day on which Jesus rose from the dead—to worship Christ. Even though he may have been the only believer on the island of Patmos, he says, “I’m going to worship Jesus. I’m going to be in the Spirit and in truth. I’m going to listen to His Word; I’m going to worship Him because that’s where I get the patient endurance as I wait for the Kingdom of God to finally appear.”

He’s worshipping Christ. For believers, every Sunday is a celebration of the resurrection of Jesus! So if today is your first time worshipping in church in a long time, I would invite you to make this a new habit. Make every Sunday Easter Sunday! Come every week and worship the risen Christ.

Now let’s look at what happened at the end of verse ten. As John is worshipping in the Spirit on the Lord’s Day, he “...*heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet saying, ‘Write what you see in a book...’*” That’s the second place where we encounter the Risen Christ. We encounter Him in the midst of trouble as we walk faithfully and we encounter Him in a Book. Jesus says to John, “I don’t want the patient endurance that I’m going to give you in this vision to be for you alone, John. I want you to write it down in a Book so my people through all generations— My people at New Covenant Bible Church in 2012—can be strengthened by what I show you.”

Friends, I want to tell you this Book is alive and active. It searches us—it reads us even as we are reading it. Jesus, the Living Word, meets us here in the written Word of God. We encounter the risen Christ in this Book. He comes to us; He speaks to us in this Book.

Believers agree with what the 16<sup>th</sup> Century Pastor Martin Luther said: “The Bible is alive, it speaks to me; it has feet, it runs after me; it has hands, it lays hold on me.” That’s our experience with this Book. We behold the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ as we open this Book. We encounter the Risen Christ in this Book! It’s a living Book.

### **What is this Risen Christ Like? (verses 12-16)**

That brings us to the second question in verses 12-16—the middle paragraph. What is Jesus like today? John tries to explain in words what he has seen but you can imagine how hard that is. Imagine standing on the edge of the Grand Canyon, looking over its magnificence and then someone says, “Write what you see in a book.” How do you write that down? How do you describe it? John says, “I’m going to do the best I can here. I’m

going to give you a snapshot of the risen Christ. I'm going to do all I can to help you see what I saw because this is what He's like right now."

Let's look at this snapshot and fix our eyes on Jesus together with what we see first in verses 12-13. He is the Savior Who is near His people. Yes, He's at the right hand of the Father but He's also in our midst. He's active amongst us. He's sovereign over us.

Verse 12: "*Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking to me, and on turning I saw seven golden lampstands...*" That's referring to each of the individual churches to which John was writing this letter. What is a local church to God? What is New Covenant Bible Church to God? It's a golden lampstand. This church—and each faithful church—is precious in God's sight. More precious than libraries, universities, art museums—God treasures His church. The church belongs to Him. It's golden to God. He says, "Handle with care. Treat My church with respect."

And each church is a lampstand. What does a lampstand exist for? To give forth light. Why does our church exist? To shine brightly for Jesus in our community. That's why we're here.

Where is Jesus right now? He's walking in the midst of the lampstands (verse 13). He's tending our wicks—trimming our wicks—so we can keep burning brightly. When we run out of fuel, He refuels us. When we're just barely burning and smoldering, He fans us back into a flame. His main purpose in walking amongst us is to keep us burning brightly for Him. Jesus is active, present and sovereign in our midst. He doesn't rule His church by remote control. He's right here, right now, even here in our midst now as we open His Word.

He's also "*...One like a Son of Man...*" (verse 13). He is thinking back to Daniel 7 where "*One like a Son of Man*" came to God—"*the Ancient of Days*"—to almighty God. And God gives to this mysterious figure "*dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations and languages should serve Him.*" God says of this One, "*His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed*" (Daniel 7:13-14).

What John is saying is, "That's Jesus—the King promised long ago. He is the One Who has that everlasting, indestructible Kingdom that will never pass away. All nations and all peoples will worship Him." So we worship Him as the most important Person in the universe and submit to Him as Heaven's King in our midst.

Jesus is also a great High Priest. We can see that He is “*clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash around His chest.*” He ever lives to intercede for us (Romans 8:26).

In verses 14-15, John tries to describe His appearance. He says, “*The hairs of his head were white, like white wool, like snow.*” What do you think of when you think of white hair? You think of age, dignity, wisdom, maturity, depth and beauty of age. Back in Daniel, it was the Ancient of Days Who had the snow white hair. Now it’s the Son of Man. Jesus is the Human Messiah; He is also fully God, the Divine Ancient of Days. “Jesus is everything worthily human, and He is everything marvelously divine.” (Ray Ortlund)

Jesus has all of that wisdom, all the depth, all the maturity, all the beauty that comes with age. Yet He also has all the freshness and vitality and strength and energy of youth. We see that in the next statement about His eyes in verse 14. “*His eyes were like a flame of fire.*” Think about what it would be like to see the eyes of the risen Christ, ablaze with inexhaustible energy. Jesus doesn’t have tired eyes. Jesus doesn’t have dark circles around His eyes. His eyes are not sullen, not fatigued, not weary. He is full of passion and relish for the work He is going to do in the world today. Nothing can escape His pure searching gaze. No sin that we ever commit escapes His notice. No work of obedience that we ever do is unnoticed by Him. No injustice that is ever done to His people is done without Him noting it.

Jesus sees that pastor in Nepal today. Jesus is near that pastor, watching those who oppressed and persecuted him. His eyes see everything. He misses nothing. You cannot fool Him. You cannot hide anything.

Then look at His feet in verse 15. They “*were like burnished bronze, refined in a furnace.*” When we see someone’s weakness—his humanity—sometimes we say, “Well, he has feet of clay. He’s just human.” Not so with Jesus! Evil assaulted Him with its very worst. Evil tested Him and He emerged victorious. He stood the test and He will stand firm forever.

Look at the end of verse 15—His voice. Oh, think about what His voice is like—“*the roar of many waters.*” Imagine Niagara Falls where you can go on a little boat beneath those falls. You can’t hear anything else. Then multiply that a million times over and that’s what the voice of Jesus in the end is finally going to sound like. It’s going to drown out all the siren sounds of this world.

Right now people think they can ignore the voice of Jesus; despise the voice of Jesus. They think the gospel is easy to set aside so they treat it with apathy and neglect it. But

there's coming a day when His voice is going to be like a loud trumpet blast and like the roar of many rushing waters and His Word will triumph. With arresting authority, He will make sure that He is heard.

As we think about this, we should ask ourselves, "Do I hear Him now? Am I listening to His voice?"

Verses 16: "*In his right hand he held seven stars*" which verse 20 tells us represent "*the angels of the seven churches.*" So we know the church is safe in His hands.

Then we see "*from his mouth came a sharp two-edged sword...*" which represents His written Word which will have the final word over every individual life and over every church and over all the peoples and nations of this world. We will all be judged by the Word of Christ, by the gospel of Jesus and how we have responded to that gospel.

Then finally at the end of verse 16, "*His face was like the sun shining in full strength.*" John was on the island of Patmos—a wind-swept, barren island right off the coast of Ephesus. I was in Ephesus with Jim Gordon in the middle of August several years ago. The thing I remember the most is the blazing, radiant, brilliant noon-day sun. As John sees the sun beaming down upon him, he thinks, "That's how I can describe the face of Jesus. It's like the sun shining in full strength." Jesus will outshine everything!

That's the snapshot John gives us. This is what the risen Christ is like today. If we could see Him right now, this is what we would see. As we consider this portrait, we need to ask, "Is my vision of Him large enough to include this? Does my Jesus look like this? Do I find that I am worshipping the real Christ? Is He turning my life upside down? Is He transforming me from the inside out?"

Does the Jesus you worship ever disagree with you? Does He ever make demands on your life? Does He ever thrill you? Throw you flat on your face and cause you to tremble in awe before His majesty? If not, your Jesus is too small.

Yes, Jesus includes meekness, mildness, tenderness, warmth, nearness, intimacy—but he's also transcendent and resplendent and terrifying in His majesty. I need to expand my view of Jesus to include this snapshot of His glory. Remember, in the words of C.S. Lewis: "He is good but He is not tame." He is not safe. That's Jesus as He is now.

### **How will I be Affected by Him When I Meet Him? (verses 17-18)**

That brings us to the last question from verses 17-18. How will I be affected when I encounter the risen Christ? What impact will He have on me? Look at John's response in

verse 17. Remember, this is the John who knew Jesus; the John who was His best friend. At the Last Supper, John was so close that he leaned on Jesus' chest. They were the best of friends. But John, after walking with Him for 60 plus years, says, "*When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead...*"

In other words, "When I saw the matchless splendor of heaven's King, the Lord Jesus as He is now in glory, it knocked me to the ground. It took the breath out of me completely and I thought I was a dead man." That's the impact it had on John.

Do you know anyone who says, "Jesus? The Bible? Sure, I believe all that stuff. Yeah, I get that. I'm there." If our response to Jesus is casual, flippant, nonchalant, it's proof that we've never seen Him as He is. We don't know Who we're talking about. The risen Christ in all His glory is a Savior Who will make you fall flat on your face, worshipping in awe of Him. If you've never fallen flat on your face before Jesus, it's probably because you've never really seen Him as He really is. If it's never caused you to feel, "I'm a dead man" you've probably never encountered the risen Christ yet.

I heard someone say this and I think he's right. "Christian worship is not a convenient drive-through for a religious happy meal." I think maybe we've forgotten that largely. Worshipping Jesus is not a convenient drive-through for a religious happy meal but it is falling flat on your face, trembling in awe before heaven's King. It takes your breath away. As you worship—as you fall flat on your face—before the One on Whom your life and your eternity depends, only then can you feel His tender right hand on your shoulder. Only then can you hear His merciful and mighty voice saying to you, "Fear not."

It's only when you've learned to stand in awe of Him that those words can make any sense to you. It's only when you've trembled before Him that "fear not" becomes a precious response. How can it be? How can it be possible to stand in the presence of this resplendent King and have no fear? It's because of what Jesus says to John (verse 17): "*Fear not, I am the first and the last...*" In other words, "Before anything was made, I was here. I created it all. When all the lights of the universe are turned off, I will still be here."

This means there is absolutely nothing in your life right now that can happen that Jesus hasn't seen a million times before. If you trust Him, Jesus says, there is absolutely nothing that can happen to you that He's not able to see you through. Fear not, if you're in the hands of Him Who is the First and the Last. Fear not, Jesus says, "*I am the living One. I have an indestructible life. Death, your king of terrors, has no power over Me.*"

Why is that? Because, as it says in verse 18, *“I died, and behold I am alive forevermore...”* In fact, He died the most dreadful death in history and emerged victorious. He is alive forever. Who else in human history can make such a claim? “I died and now I have a life that will never end. I am alive forevermore.”

Jesus also says, *“I have the keys of Death and Hades.”* Death and the grave. What do keys symbolize? Access and control.

I’ve had the awesome experience twice now of handing over the car keys to teenage children. I see the access—the world that opens up to them—when they get those keys. They have new freedom; new control. When you buy a house and they hand you the keys, that means, “You can go in there anytime. You can move around freely in this place.”

Jesus is saying, “I went before death and entered into mortal combat with death and death met its match. I emerged victorious. I won the fight.” Jesus said to death, “Hand over the keys.”

What that means is that your future is in the hands of Jesus. Your eternal destiny is in the hands of the risen Christ. He has the power to unlock your grave. He will summon you into His presence and He has the authority to release you from the prison of death and He has the authority to consign you to the death that will never end. Jesus has that authority—that control. What Jesus is saying here is, “If you know Me, John, you can be fearless. You don’t need to fear anything else if you fear me—if you stand in awe of Me.”

Look at Revelation 1:7. If you don’t have a relationship with Jesus, there is something to fear. Look at what it says: *“Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him, and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him.”* So for some, when they appear before the risen Christ, they will hear Him say, *“Fear not”* and for others there will be wailing. I desperately want everyone who is listening to be in the “fear not” category. I want you to hear your Savior say, *“Fear not.”*

How can you be sure that will be what you hear Him say when you stand in His presence—for you *will* stand in the presence of this King. Let me give you three simple applications. If you do these things, you can be sure that when you stand in the presence of Jesus, you will hear those sweet words, *“Fear not.”*

1. Believe that He died for you! Look at the second half of verse 5 where it says, *“To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood.”* Believe right now that Jesus loves you. It’s present tense—He loves you actively now. Jesus doesn’t love some future version of you when you get yourself all cleaned up. Jesus loves

sinner; He loves you today. Believe that He freed you from your sins by His blood. His death on the cross is powerful enough to release you from the control sin has over your life; to release you from the penalty of sin which is eternal death and from the power of sin today. Believe that the cross is powerful to free you. "Believe and you shall be saved," the Bible says in Romans 10:9-10.

2. Then believing, the second thing you need to do is bow down before Him. Learn to worship Him as the First and the Last. Realize you owe your life and existence to Him. He gave it to you. You can't even make sense of who you are until you understand Who He is. You need to know your Maker before you can know yourself. He's the First and He's the Last. He's the goal of everything. He's what your life is for. From Him and through Him and to Him and for Him are all things—you exist for Him (Romans 11:36). So learn to bow before Jesus and worship Him. He is not a means to an end—He is the end. Don't worship Him to get what you want out of life—make Him the object of all your desires. Make knowing Him the supreme goal of your life. Make Him the last, the goal, the end of all you do. Believe in Him. Bow before Him and then...
3. Get to know Him in His Word. The best way to get ready to meet the risen Christ is to get to know Him right now. He speaks in His Word. Worship Him with His people, those who share in the tribulation, the Kingdom and the patient endurance. Worship Him week by week; learn all you can about Jesus right now and then you'll be ready to meet Him in the future. Fall before Jesus in reverent worship; fall before Jesus right now and then you won't need to fear when you fall before Him face to face. He will put His tender hand on your shoulder and say, "Fear not—I am yours and you are Mine." Would you bow before Him as I lead us in prayer?

Let's go to our God Who is alive and with us right now. Let's pray to Him. I'm going to pray very simply what you can say right now to Jesus if you want to believe in Him. If you want to know Him as your Savior and if you mean these words from your heart, Jesus the risen Christ will come into your life today. Let's pray:

Lord Jesus, I believe that I need You. I believe Lord Jesus that You died on the cross because You loved me and You died to free me from my sins by Your blood. I thank You Lord Jesus that You can save me from eternal death and I ask You to do so. I bow before You. I get my life and breath from You. All that I have comes from You, Jesus. Apart from

You I don't have any life. Teach me how to worship You Lord. Teach me to know more and more about You. Lord, I pray that the rest of the days You give me will be spent getting to know You better and living for You. I thank You that You live for me today and that You can come into my life today. I want to know You, Jesus. In Your name, amen.

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*All Scriptures quoted directly from the English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.*

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