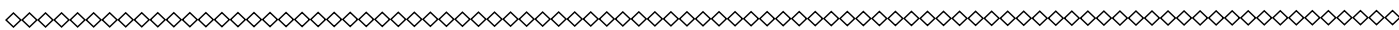




Pastor of the International Baptist Church in Cologne Germany.

Sermon Brief
Text: Rev. 1:4-20
Title: The Reigning Lord
 Lorin L. Cranford

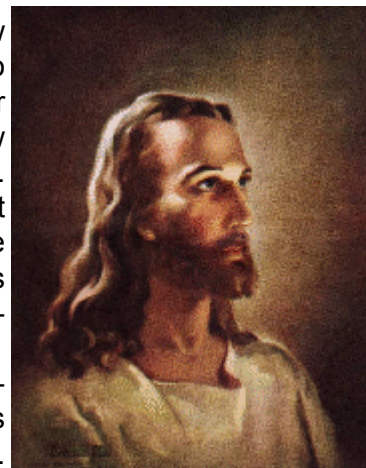
Seeking to faithfully proclaim the whole council of God in scripture!



INTRODUCTION

Today is Lord's Supper Sunday for us. We come to the Lord's table to celebrate his death and resurrection, as well as to affirm our confidence in His return to claim us as his bride for Heaven. He is the focus of our worship today.

Who is He? Various pictures of Jesus emerge through the pages of the New Testament. Interestingly, no physical description of him is ever given. We have no idea how tall he was. The average man in the first century was just slightly over four feet tall -- almost two feet shorter than in most western society. We know nothing about his weight, the color of his hair or eyes, the complexion of his skin. Thus drawings of him by artists in our world reflect more the culture of the artist than an accurate physical representation of Jesus. Most artistic sketches make Jesus look like a white American or European. Early Catholic art nearly always had a halo surrounding Jesus' head. Of course, none of these come close to accurately representing Jesus' actual physical appearance.



Why did the NT writers not give us a physical description? The simple answer is that his physical appearance was not important. What mattered was his character and lifestyle. And here is where the NT writers focus their attention. Only in western culture are we curious about one's physical appearance. Ancient Jewish tradition placed little or no emphasis on this what so ever. And thus neither did the writers of the New Testament.

What John provides us in Revelation 1:4-20 is a character depiction of Jesus using symbolical 'physical' depiction. The portrait of Jesus in vv. 13-16, when sketched out in a drawing, is a gruesome picture of a rather grotesque looking individual. Jesus is a aged man with snow white hair; he has a sharp sword sticking out his mouth, his eyes look like flaming fire, his feet look like bronze; and his face shines so brightly that you can't look him in the face. This is not the picture one imagines of Jesus' physical appearance during his earthly life. Luke 2:52¹ suggests that Jesus mostly like looked very much like a typical first century Jewish boy who grew into manhood quite normally.



So what is John trying to tell us in his portrait of Jesus at the beginning of his writing? In dramatic fashion John is reminding us that the exalted Jesus is God and reigns supremely over the universe. And especially over his churches. Christ is BOSS! He runs the show; he answers to no higher authority. He is in absolute control over everything. And he holds the creation of God utterly accountable to him for their devotion to him and their ways of living. To believers under persecution in the late first century, this was a message they needed to hear. It provided hope and courage to face their persecutors who were exercising power over them. They needed reminding that standing behind and above their persecutors was the Lord Christ who held authority over their Roman enemies. But that authority extended to the churches as well, and for both enemies and churches meant accountability. Tough times didn't bring laxness of expectation upon the churches by the Lord. Just the opposite was the case.

Our passage provides two foundational emphases that I want to touch on this morning. Logically they seem to stand in tension with one another, but only because we don't understand the nature of both love and judgment in our lax western culture. In biblical times they blended together quite naturally. Christ loves us, and He judges us sternly. The connection between love and high demand need to be understood.

BODY

I. He loves us. vv. 4-8²

¹NRSV: "And Jesus increased in wisdom and in years [or, in statue], and in divine and human favor."

²1.4 Ἰωάννης ταῖς ἑπτὰ ἐκκλησίαις ταῖς ἐν τῇ Ἀσίᾳ· χάρις ὑμῖν καὶ εἰρήνη ἀπὸ τοῦ ὄντος καὶ τοῦ ἦν καὶ τοῦ ἐρχομένου καὶ ἀπὸ τῶν ἑπτὰ πνευμάτων ἃ ἐνώπιον τοῦ θρόνου αὐτοῦ 1.5 καὶ ἀπὸ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, τοῦ μάρτυρος τοῦ πιστοῦ, τοῦ πρωτό-

4 John to the seven churches that are in Asia:

Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven spirits who are before his throne, 5 and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth.

To him who loves us and freed us from our sins by his blood, 6 and made us to be a kingdom, priests serving his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. 7 Look! He is coming with the clouds; every eye will see him, even those who pierced him; and on his account all the tribes of the earth will wail. So it is to be. Amen. 8 “I am the Alpha and the Omega,” says the Lord God, who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.

In verses four through eight, we find elements of an ancient letter and a doxology. In both of these we discover an emphasis upon who Jesus is and what he does. Note both these aspects.

Notice who Jesus is: v. 5a

from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth.

καὶ ἀπὸ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, ὁ μάρτυς ὁ πιστός, ὁ πρωτότοκος τῶν νεκρῶν καὶ ὁ ἄρχων τῶν βασιλέων τῆς γῆς.

This message, John declares, comes not just from the imprisoned apostle John on the island of Patmos. But ultimately it comes of Jesus Christ. Both He and the Heavenly Father are the sources of grace and peace. Additionally, this grace and peace comes from the “seven spirits” before the throne, a symbolical reference to the fullness of the Spirit of God most likely, although it could allude to the seven angels before the throne of God in Jewish tradition.³

Grace and peace come from Jesus, John says. And this Jesus stands with three outstanding traits emphasized here. He is the faithful witness. That is, what God made known to Christ; Christ faithfully gave witness to it while on earth. Therefore, to hear Jesus’ words is to hear God the Father speaking. This Jesus is also the ‘firstborn of the dead.’ The first born son in ancient society occupied a special role in the family that was unique and unlike that of all of the other children. Jesus stands as the first to be raised from the dead, thus guaranteeing that all those who are God’s children will experience resurrection as Christ did. This Jesus additionally stands as the sovereign ruler over all the kings of the earth. None is higher or more powerful than He.

Thus the one who loves us comes as faithfully representing God, as the first to experience resurrection from death, and as the sovereign authority over all powers on the earth. We can trust Him! We can put our hope in Him! We must bow down before Him in acknowledgment of His sovereign power!

Notice what He does: vv. 5b-7

In these verses of the doxology we discover more about this Jesus Christ who brings us grace and peace. He is a man of action who has reached out to sinful humanity in very concrete ways. Notice what John stresses here.

τοκος τῶν νεκρῶν καὶ ὁ ἄρχων τῶν βασιλέων τῆς γῆς.

Τῷ ἀγαπῶντι ἡμᾶς καὶ λύσαντι ἡμᾶς ἐκ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ἡμῶν ἐν τῷ αἵματι αὐτοῦ, --1.6 καὶ ἐποίησεν ἡμᾶς βασιλείαν, ἱερεῖς τῷ θεῷ καὶ πατρὶ αὐτοῦ, -- αὐτῷ ἡ δόξα καὶ τὸ κράτος εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας [τῶν αἰώνων]: ἀμήν.

1.7 Ἴδου ἔρχεται μετὰ τῶν νεφελῶν,

καὶ ὄψεται αὐτὸν πᾶς ὀφθαλμὸς

καὶ οἴτινες αὐτὸν ἐξεκέντησαν,

καὶ κόψονται ἐπ’ αὐτὸν πᾶσαι αἱ φυλαὶ τῆς γῆς. ναί, ἀμήν.

1.8 Ἐγὼ εἰμι τὸ Ἄλφα καὶ τὸ Ὠ, λέγει κύριος ὁ θεός, ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἦν καὶ ὁ ἐρχόμενος, ὁ παντοκράτωρ.

³Cf. references to seven angels in [Tobit](#) 12:15 and [1 Enoch](#) 20:1-8 in ancient Jewish writings outside the Bible: **Tobit 12:15** (NRSV): “I am Raphael, one of the seven holy angels who present the prayers of the saints and enter into the presence of the glory of the Holy One.”; **1 Enoch 20:1-8** (RH Charles: “1These are the names of the angels who watch. 2Uriel, one of the holy angels, who presides over clamor and terror. 3Raphael, one of the holy angels, who presides over the spirits of men. 4Raguel, one of the holy angels, who inflicts punishment on the world and the luminaries. 5Michael, one of the holy angels, who, presiding over human virtue, commands the nations. 6Sarakiel, one of the holy angels, who presides over the spirits of the children of men that transgress. 7Gabriel, one of the holy angels, who presides over Ikisat, (31) over paradise, and over the cherubim.(31) Ikisat. The serpents” (Charles, p. 92; Knibb, p. 107).

1. He loves us, v. 5

To him who loves us and freed us from our sins by his blood, 6 and made us to be a kingdom, priests serving his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.”

Τῷ ἀγαπῶντι ἡμᾶς καὶ λύσαντι ἡμᾶς ἐκ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ἡμῶν ἐν τῷ αἵματι αὐτοῦ, --1.6 καὶ ἐποίησεν ἡμᾶς βασιλείαν, ἱερεῖς τῷ θεῷ καὶ πατρὶ αὐτοῦ, -- αὐτῷ ἡ δόξα καὶ τὸ κράτος εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας [τῶν αἰώνων]· ἀμήν.

This Jesus continually loves us. The verbal expression is present tense in the Greek underscoring the ongoing sacrificial love of Christ for his people. The beginning of that love was Calvary but it didn't stop there. Christ's love for his church continues and will continue until the day He comes to claim us as His bride for all eternity.

2. He loosed us, v. 5

To him who loves us and freed us from our sins by his blood, 6 and made us to be a kingdom, priests serving his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

Τῷ ἀγαπῶντι ἡμᾶς καὶ λύσαντι ἡμᾶς ἐκ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ἡμῶν ἐν τῷ αἵματι αὐτοῦ, --1.6 καὶ ἐποίησεν ἡμᾶς βασιλείαν, ἱερεῖς τῷ θεῷ καὶ πατρὶ αὐτοῦ, -- αὐτῷ ἡ δόξα καὶ τὸ κράτος εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας [τῶν αἰώνων]· ἀμήν.

Christ's love, however, is and was not sentimental feeling toward others. Divine love is seldom ever portrayed in scripture as emotion. Far more, divine love is concrete action taken to benefit others in specific ways. Normally it is personal sacrifice in expressed action. God loves us, and so He gave His only Son John had written earlier in his gospel message (cf. John 3:16). Jesus loved us and thus loosed us from our sins by shedding his blood on the cross. People, love is action. This kind of action. We can stand cleansed of our rotten sinfulness today, only because Jesus shed his blood for us out of his love for us. This we must never, ever forget, nor take for granted!

3. He made us, v. 6

To him who loves us and freed us from our sins by his blood, 6 and made us to be a kingdom, priests serving his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

Τῷ ἀγαπῶντι ἡμᾶς καὶ λύσαντι ἡμᾶς ἐκ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ἡμῶν ἐν τῷ αἵματι αὐτοῦ, --1.6 καὶ ἐποίησεν ἡμᾶς βασιλείαν, ἱερεῖς τῷ θεῷ καὶ πατρὶ αὐτοῦ, -- αὐτῷ ἡ δόξα καὶ τὸ κράτος εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας [τῶν αἰώνων]· ἀμήν.

He made us into somebody, John declares. First, we as the church of Christ are His kingdom. That is, we are the place where God rules and reigns on earth, first and foremost. In other words, Christ is indeed Lord over our lives, over our church, over our family, over everything we are and have. He is to reign supreme!

Second, Christ made us into priests who serve the Father. Ministry is the name of the game for the people of God. You don't come as a spectator in the Kingdom of God. You come as a ministering priest. This we must also never forget.

Here is a point I want to especially stress to you today. Our church in its reorganization is becoming structured to be a ministering congregation. Ministry is absolutely not something just the preacher, or a few leaders of the church are to do. The entire church, and every member of it, is to function as a ministering priest! And this is the direction we are headed in our reorganization. My deep longing for this congregation is that we indeed will become a biblical model as a seriously ministering congregation. Our focus must always be on others, and not on ourselves! That is the only way we can experience God's continued blessings on us. Our children's ministry helps the children of our church. Our youth ministry seeks to minister to the young people of our city. The new emerging women's ministry will do the same for the women. Our Friday evening prayer and Bible study ministry in Bonn will seek to present a powerful witness to the large English speaking community in the Bonn / Bad Godesberg area. A self-centered church dies spiritually. A ministering church with attention on others thrives spiritually. That's who we must become in the coming days.

Our response: v. 6

to him be glory and dominion forever and ever

αὐτῷ ἡ δόξα καὶ τὸ κράτος εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας [τῶν αἰώνων]· ἀμήν.

The doxological nature of verses 5b-6 climaxes in this final declaration of John. To one who has done so much for us, we must give back praise and glory always. Let us commit ourselves to glorify Him in our

worship and in our living. No one in the church must become the center of attention. Not the preacher, not the church leaders, not anyone. No one but Jesus deserves and merits our praise and adoration. Our songs of worship must center on Jesus and away from us. Our prayers must focus on adoration and thanksgiving. Our offerings must be motivated by a desire to honor Christ. The preaching and speaking from this pulpit must ever center on Jesus as the object of praise. As the Psalmist put it (Ps. 150:6),

“Let everything that breathes praise the Lord! Praise the Lord!”

II. He judges us, vv. 9-20⁴

9 I, John, your brother who share with you in Jesus the persecution and the kingdom and the patient endurance, was on the island called Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. 10 I was in the spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet 11 saying, “Write in a book what you see and send it to the seven churches, to Ephesus, to Smyrna, to Pergamum, to Thyatira, to Sardis, to Philadelphia, and to Laodicea.” 12 Then I turned to see whose voice it was that spoke to me, and on turning I saw seven golden lamp stands, 13 and in the midst of the lamp stands I saw one like the Son of Man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash across his chest. 14 His head and his hair were white as white wool, white as snow; his eyes were like a flame of fire, 15 his feet were like burnished bronze, refined as in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of many waters. 16 In his right hand he held seven stars, and from his mouth came a sharp, two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining with full force. 17 When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. But he placed his right hand on me, saying, “Do not be afraid; I am the first and the last, 18 and the living one. I was dead, and see, I am alive forever and ever; and I have the keys of Death and of Hades. 19 Now write what you have seen, what is, and what is to take place after this. 20 As for the mystery of the seven stars that you saw in my right hand, and the seven golden lamp stands: the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lamp stands are the seven churches.

The second foundational emphasis of John comes in verses 9-20 and receives even greater emphasis than the first. This Jesus who loves us also judges us. Notice that I said, ‘judges,’ and not ‘will judge.’ Clearly in these verses that stand as foundational to chapters two and three of Revelation in particular, Jesus both judges his church now and will judge it on his return.

The dramatic imagery set forth by John here underscores Christ's continual presence in his churches and his unwavering high expectation of them to live up to His standards. This expectation means that He is fully prepared to shut down at any time any church that does not meet his demands. My people, this we dare not ignore or forget. Christ's love for us is a ‘tough love,’ not a sloppy sentimentality. Love disciplines because it loves. This is biblical love, something far different from so-called love in our day.

Again, John's emphasis is twofold, emphasizing both who Jesus is and what He is doing. Note these aspects around the central motif of judge.

Notice who Jesus is, vv. 13-17

1. He is in the midst of the churches, v. 13a
and in the midst of the lamp stands I saw one like the Son of Man,

⁴1.9 Ἐγὼ Ἰωάννης, ὁ ἀδελφὸς ὑμῶν καὶ συγκοινωνὸς ἐν τῇ θλίψει καὶ βασιλείᾳ καὶ ὑπομονῇ ἐν Ἰησοῦ, ἐγενόμην ἐν τῇ νήσῳ τῇ καλουμένῃ Πάτμῳ διὰ τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τὴν μαρτυρίαν Ἰησοῦ. 1.10 ἐγενόμην ἐν πνεύματι ἐν τῇ κυριακῇ ἡμέρᾳ καὶ ἤκουσα ὀπίσω μου φωνὴν μεγάλην ὡς σάλπιγγος 1.11 λεγούσης, Ὁ βλέπεις γράψον εἰς βιβλίον καὶ πέμψον ταῖς ἑπτὰ ἐκκλησίαις, εἰς Ἔφεσον καὶ εἰς Σμύρναν καὶ εἰς Πέργαμον καὶ εἰς Θυάτειρα καὶ εἰς Σάρδεις καὶ εἰς Φιλαδέλφειαν καὶ εἰς Λαοδίκεϊαν.

1.12 Καὶ ἐπέστρεψα βλέπειν τὴν φωνὴν ἣτις ἐλάλει μετ' ἐμοῦ, καὶ ἐπιστρέψας εἶδον ἑπτὰ λυχνίας χρυσαῖς 1.13 καὶ ἐν μέσῳ τῶν λυχνιῶν ὅμοιον υἱὸν ἀνθρώπου ἐνδεδυμένον ποδήρη καὶ περιεζωσμένον πρὸς τοῖς μαστοῖς ζώνην χρυσαῖν. 1.14 ἡ δὲ κεφαλὴ αὐτοῦ καὶ αἱ τρίχες λευκαὶ ὡς ἔριον λευκόν ὡς χιών καὶ οἱ ὀφθαλμοὶ αὐτοῦ ὡς φλόξ πυρός 1.15 καὶ οἱ πόδες αὐτοῦ ὅμοιοι χαλκολιβάνῳ ὡς ἐν καμίνῳ πεπυρωμένης καὶ ἡ φωνὴ αὐτοῦ ὡς φωνὴ ὑδάτων πολλῶν, 1.16 καὶ ἔχων ἐν τῇ δεξιᾷ χειρὶ αὐτοῦ ἀστέρας ἑπτὰ καὶ ἐκ τοῦ στόματος αὐτοῦ ῥομφαία δίστομος ὀξεῖα ἐκπορευομένη καὶ ἡ ὄψις αὐτοῦ ὡς ὁ ἥλιος φαίνει ἐν τῇ δυνάμει αὐτοῦ.

1.17 Καὶ ὅτε εἶδον αὐτόν, ἔπεσα πρὸς τοὺς πόδας αὐτοῦ ὡς νεκρός, καὶ ἔθηκεν τὴν δεξιάν αὐτοῦ ἐπ' ἐμὲ λέγων, Μὴ φοβοῦ· ἐγὼ εἰμι ὁ πρῶτος καὶ ὁ ἔσχατος 1.18 καὶ ὁ ζῶν, καὶ ἐγενόμην νεκρὸς καὶ ἰδοὺ ζῶν εἰμι εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων καὶ ἔχω τὰς κλεῖς τοῦ θανάτου καὶ τοῦ ᾗδου. 1.19 γράψον οὖν ἃ εἶδες καὶ ἃ εἰσὶν καὶ ἃ μέλλει γενέσθαι μετὰ ταῦτα. 1.20 τὸ μυστήριον τῶν ἑπτὰ ἀστέρων οὓς εἶδες ἐπὶ τῆς δεξιᾶς μου καὶ τὰς ἑπτὰ λυχνίας τὰς χρυσαῖς· οἱ ἑπτὰ ἀστέρες ἄγγελοι τῶν ἑπτὰ ἐκκλησιῶν εἰσιν καὶ αἱ λυχνίαι αἱ ἑπτὰ ἑπτὰ ἐκκλησίαι εἰσίν.

ἐν μέσῳ τῶν λυχνιῶν ὅμοιον υἱὸν
ἀνθρώπου

First, John asserts that Jesus is in the midst of his church as the Son of Man. Folks, Jesus is here in our church, right now! He stands invisibly present every time we gather as a church. What does that mean? To the churches in the first century Roman province of Asia where the seven churches were located, this was both comforting and threatening at the same time. Through being present in the churches Jesus knows absolutely everything that is taking place. Both the good and the bad. To these ancient churches under persecution, he knew exactly what they were enduring. But he also was keenly aware of the weaknesses and failures of the churches and the members in every church. Read chapters two and three that contain the letters to the seven churches of Asia. In most every one of them is some compliment,⁵ but in every one of them is a warning as well.⁶



Jesus stands in the churches as the [Son of Man](#).⁷ This was the apocalyptic figure understood as the Messianic Deliverer from the Old Testament, and in particular from the book of Daniel. He is present as God's Anointed One who has come with power and authority to straighten out the churches that are out of line with God's will.

2. He has authority over the churches, vv. 13b-16

[clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash across his chest. 14 His head and his hair were white as white wool, white as snow; his eyes were like a flame of fire, 15 his feet were like burnished bronze, refined as in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of many waters. 16 In his right hand he held seven stars, and from his mouth came a sharp, two-edged sword, and his face](#)

⁵As an example, cf. Ephesus (2::2-3): "I know your works, your toil and your patient endurance. I know that you cannot tolerate evildoers; you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them to be false. I also know that you are enduring patiently and bearing up for the sake of my name, and that you have not grown weary."

⁶Also see the warning to the Ephesian church (2:4-5): "But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first. Remember then from what you have fallen, repent, and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you, and remove your lamp stand from its place, unless you repent."

⁷In Revelation 1:13 the Son of Man is in the midst of the lamp stands (the churches); in 14:14 he sits on a cloud, wearing a golden crown and holding a sharp sickle.

Ninety-three of the 106 occurrences of the term in the Old Testament are in the Book of Ezekiel where it is God's standard way of addressing the prophet. Elsewhere it is also a reference to either humanity as a whole or to a particular human person except in Psalms 8:4; 80:17; and Daniel 7:13. As already noted, the writer to the Hebrews interprets Psalm 8:4 messianically and probably 80:17 should be as well. Daniel 7:13-14 introduces a different perspective. Here one like a Son of Man is an apocalyptic figure from heaven who receives an all-inclusive kingdom, unlimited by space or time.

Intertestamental references to Son of Man are in the same vein as that of Daniel's vision. In that section of 1 Enoch called the Similitudes or Parables (37-71) the Son of Man is a heavenly person, eternal, righteous, and holy, who rules and judges. Second Esdras (4 Ezra) 13 relates a vision of "something like the figure of a man come up out of the heart of the sea ... this man flew with the clouds of heaven" (v. 3). He defeats the hostile (cosmic) powers and delivers captives through a series of actions that precede the confirmation of his reign.

Controversies abound about the origin, use, meaning, and implications of "Son of Man" in biblical literature and particularly its use by Jesus. The term could be a synonym for "I" or "a human person." Some scholars have thought it to be a corporate term including Israel (n.b., Dan 7:18) or the church (e.g., T. W. Manson), an office Jesus expected to receive (e.g., A. Schweitzer), or a figure imported into Judaism from a foreign source. [source: J. Julius Scott, Jr, "Jesus Christ, Name and Titles of," [Baker's Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology](#)]

was like the sun shining with full force.

ἐνδεδυμένον ποδήρη καὶ περιεζωσμένον πρὸς τοῖς μαστοῖς ζώνην χρυσαῖν. 1.14 ἡ δὲ κεφαλὴ αὐτοῦ καὶ αἱ τρίχες λευκαὶ ὡς ἔριον λευκόν ὡς χιών καὶ οἱ ὀφθαλμοὶ αὐτοῦ ὡς φλόξ πυρός 1.15 καὶ οἱ πόδες αὐτοῦ ὅμοιοι χαλκολιβάνῳ ὡς ἐν καμίνῳ πεπυρωμένης καὶ ἡ φωνὴ αὐτοῦ ὡς φωνὴ ὑδάτων πολλῶν, 1.16 καὶ ἔχων ἐν τῇ δεξιᾷ χειρὶ αὐτοῦ ἀστέρας ἑπτὰ καὶ ἐκ τοῦ στόματος αὐτοῦ ῥομφαία δίστομος ὁξεῖα ἐκπορευομένη καὶ ἡ ὄψις αὐτοῦ ὡς ὁ ἥλιος φαίνει ἐν τῇ δυνάμει αὐτοῦ.

The second point made by Jesus has to do with the authority exercised by Jesus over the church. The character portrait of Jesus sketched out here pictures Jesus as God with all the qualities and traits of the Heavenly Father. He is an aged man dressed in a long white robe held in place with a golden sash. Although these may be priestly garments, they most likely symbolize the presence of the divine in the temple. His white hair and facial features reflect the profound wisdom and understanding of God. The flaming fire protruding out of his eyes reflect a piercing glance and ability to see right through everything in order to grasp the full reality. His feet of burnished bronze reflect strength and stability. The powerful voice with overwhelming volume of sound when he spoke underscore his authority and ability to command attention. You can't ignore this fellow! His gigantic right hand was large enough to hold seven stars in its palm. And a keenly sharp double-bladed sword extended from his mouth, rather than a tongue. His words penetrate to the very core of human existence. His face glowed brighter than the noon day sun so that no one could look directly at him without being blinded.

Wow! What a fellow! He certainly would never win a Mr. Universe contest in our day. But this Jesus is indeed Mr. Universe who holds absolute power and control over everything. And this authority covers the churches. This is John's major point here.

When we think of the Lord whom we serve and who controls our church, this is He. Not some weakling who is unable to know what's going on or to do anything to correct the problems in the church. Not at all! The Lord God, ruler of the universe, controls our church. Our very existence depends on Him. Our prosperity comes only from Him. Our future is totally in His hands.

Our response, vv. 17- 20

17 When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. But he placed his right hand on me, saying, "Do not be afraid; I am the first and the last, 18 and the living one. I was dead, and see, I am alive forever and ever; and I have the keys of Death and of Hades. 19 Now write what you have seen, what is, and what is to take place after this. 20 As for the mystery of the seven stars that you saw in my right hand, and the seven golden lamp stands: the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lamp stands are the seven churches.

1.17 Καὶ ὅτε εἶδον αὐτόν, ἔπεσα πρὸς τοὺς πόδας αὐτοῦ ὡς νεκρός, καὶ ἔθηκεν τὴν δεξιάν αὐτοῦ ἐπ' ἐμὲ λέγων, Μὴ φοβοῦ· ἐγώ εἰμι ὁ πρῶτος καὶ ὁ ἔσχατος 1.18 καὶ ὁ ζῶν, καὶ ἐγενόμην νεκρὸς καὶ ἰδοὺ ζῶν εἰμι εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων καὶ ἔχω τὰς κλεῖς τοῦ θανάτου καὶ τοῦ ᾄδου. 1.19 γράψον οὖν ἃ εἶδες καὶ ἃ εἰσὶν καὶ ἃ μέλλει γενέσθαι μετὰ ταῦτα. 1.20 τὸ μυστη-
ριον τῶν ἑπτὰ ἀστέρων οὓς εἶδες ἐπὶ τῆς δεξιᾶς μου καὶ τὰς ἑπτὰ λυχνίας τὰς χρυσαῖς· οἱ ἑπτὰ ἀστέρες ἄγγελοι τῶν ἑπτὰ ἐκκλησιῶν εἰσιν καὶ αἱ λυχνίαι αἱ ἑπτὰ ἑπτὰ ἐκκλησίαι εἰσιν.

How then are we to respond to this powerful Lord? John's reaction in his vision suggests a pattern appropriate for us. In essence, John was 'blown away' by the presence of the reigning Lord. He was literally knocked off his feet. I want to ask you: when was the last time you were knocked off your feet by the presence of Christ? To be certain, Christ invites us to come before Him. And to do so with confidence. But to parade into the throne room of God as if we owned the place is to invite disaster. A healthy dose of being scared to death is necessary for coming into the presence of a holy God. It's called reverence and awe. We must never ever lose the capacity to fall on our knees in utter reverence of this mighty God. This is why worship -- true worship -- must always incorporate quietness along with praise. At times we must open our mouths and lift our voices in jubilant praise. But at other times, we must shut our mouths, get on our knees and just listen for and see the greatness of our God. In those moments we can then hear Jesus say, "Don't be afraid. Just know who I am and respect that." Then we must do what He tells us to do. With the command given to John to write was the commissioning to deliver a message to others. That commissioning to share remains in force for us today.

People, we must see this Jesus clearly in our church, the way John did. And then we must respond in reverence and obedience. Then, and only then, do we have a future as one of the lamp stands burning the

light of the Gospel for others to find their way to Christ.

CONCLUSION

Christ is Lord over our church. He knows who we are, what we're doing. He also knows what we can be through His grace and help. We must be committed to pleasing Him in absolutely everything we do. Our church programs and ministries must honor Him. Our worship must genuinely praise Him. Our Bible study must earnestly seek His truth. Our witnessing must be led of His Spirit.

Are we ready to stand before Christ in judgement? Are you prepared to face Him in eternity? Today is the day to get ready. Come to Him now.