

**Christ Community Covenant Church**  
**Revelation of John: 'I have a letter for you!'**  
**Pastor Dave Scherrer - June 5, 2011**

It is a bit of a past pleasure, getting a letter in the mail. In this day of instant communication by Facebook and twitter and text and even the old fashioned phone, handwritten letters are more than old fashioned. They are in large part passé. Let's just check in here. Who has received a...

- Letter in the last week
- Letter in the last month; in the last half year
- Letter in the last five years; in the last 15 years
- I can't remember when I last wrote or received a handwritten letter.

I am curious, is there someone here who has never received a hand written letter?  
What is it about a hand written letter that is different from an email or voice mail or text?

We are about to embark on a study of one of the most famous letters ever written; The Revelation of John - the last book of the Bible. I am wondering another thing; How many of you will read the last chapter of a book before you finish? You can do it, but I generally think it ruins a book. In the case of this last 'chapter' of the Bible, it is fittingly at the end. It is a book about the end. There is a reason that we study the rest of the Bible before we get to Revelation. This final Word of God is deep in theology and prophecy and worship. It is even very rich in practical advice. It is probably the most complex and mysterious of all the books in the Bible. We will study this book, but in phases over the next couple of years. In this study we will only go through the first part, essentially chapters 1 through 3. These chapters are the most directly applicable passages and I believe that there is a living word for our church in this study of the "Letters to the Seven Churches" of Asia Minor. I believe that Jesus has a message for our church, a letter of hope and purpose and we will unpack that the last week of this series. We have a lot to look forward to so we better get started.

**Prayer**

Son of Man, The apostle John saw you as the Lord on high, sitting at the right hand of the Father. We think of you as you have been painted as you were on earth. But you have changed. You have risen from the dead and you have ascended to your glorious eternal form. He described you as clothed in a robe reaching to your feet, and girded across His chest was a golden sash of a Royal Priest. Your head and hair were white like white wool, like snow; and Your eyes burned through him like a flame of fire. Even your pierced feet glowed like molten metal making the ground you stood on holy. And then when you spoke it sounded like the terrifying wind of a tornado, like the sound of a tremendous waterfall. Lord he fell at your feet as though dead. Who can stand before you?

It is this Jesus we worship now, this triumphant and majestic Jesus. This powerful and daunting Jesus. We cannot even hope to approach you unless you bid us come. Jesus bid us come now. We long to be in your presence and to see you face to face. We are afraid, cast out our fear with your love. It is in your name that we pray Lord. Amen.

As we study Revelation we will see that God is addressing seven specific churches and He has some good things to say to them but he also has some hard things to say. I want our church to be one of the churches that gets a good report card in the end, and not just me but you too (this is your church too) will be held accountable so I think we should all pay close attention.

What I am hoping to do today is to simply read through this with you and perhaps fill in some missing or hidden information that I think will help us get our bearings and provide a foundation as we prepare for this summer study. Let's read the first several passages together:

**Revelation 1:1-3**

The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show to his servants the things that must soon take place. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John, who bore witness to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw. Blessed is the one

who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear, and who keep what is written in it, for the time is near.

### **Prologue or Title Page**

These first three verses are essentially a prologue. Ray Stedman, the long time pastor of Peninsula Bible Church wrote that this little paragraph is like a flyleaf on today's books – the summary that gets your attention so that you will buy the book and read it. So what do we know from this little prologue:

- We know that the author of this book is Jesus Christ. It opens clearly enough; “The revelation of Jesus Christ.” It is his story. Revelation is a book about Christ, the King of kings and Lord of all, shown supreme and unchallenged in authority. Revelation is the story of finished redemption from the fall and the beginning of the story of eternity in life with God, all orchestrated by, through and for Jesus Christ...
- The name Revelation is a translation of the Greek word *apokalupsis*, meaning ‘unveiling’ or ‘revealing.’ It is a book of prophecy regarding last days, describing in wonderment and a coded or symbolized form a series of end-time events that ushers in something known as the ‘Last Days.’
- We know that this revelation was sent to his servant John who “bore witness”. To call this “The Revelation of John,” like it probably says in your Bible, is a bit of a misnomer. John simply recorded what he saw; the revelation is from Jesus himself. And this John is generally understood to be John, the beloved disciple of Jesus who also wrote the account of the life of Christ and the three little letters that also bear his name. It was believed to have been written in his old age when he was 90 years old, at the end of the first century. Maybe 50 years after Jesus ascended to heaven.
- And we know that the time is near and that we have been admonished to pay attention to the words in this book or suffer the consequences. Based on this, I'll tell you what . . . I'm buying and reading this book!! ***‘Blessed are those who hear . . . and blessed are those who keep what is written . . .’*** I want that!!

Let's keep reading;

### **Revelation 1:4-8**

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

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

**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. Even so. Amen.

**"I am the Alpha and the Omega,"** says the Lord God, "who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty."

This section is often called the ‘Salutation.’ This is a common form of introduction in virtually all first century personal letters. The author identifies themselves at the start, while we typically do that at the end. I tell you that because it has been a while since you got a letter so you might have forgotten.

**The Seven Churches** (map)



### ***John to the Churches: “Grace and Peace”***

This seems important to me. This book is filled with terrifying images of destruction and fearful accounts of death and destruction. By saying this book is given with Grace and Peace by Jesus meant it was designed to comfort me and inform me so that I do not have to be afraid of what I read. Otherwise I am not sure that I could read this account and not tremble daily.

### ***The Threefold Doxology***

- Who loves us
- Who has freed us from our sins
- And has made us a Kingdom of Priests – reconcilers!

### ***Who is and who was and is to come***

We just celebrated Ascension Sunday, remember? The day Christ was taken into heaven. Remember how the angel said (Acts 1), “Why do you stand here looking into the clouds? This same Jesus will come in this same way.” Some day the clouds will open and with a shout Christ will descend.” And this Jesus is known as the beginning and the end, the alpha and omega. He is the “ALMIGHTY” – there is no question who is before John. This is not the Jesus in the form of the “suffering savior” – this is the one who is the mighty Son of Man, the one who defines eternity, the creator of all things – the “ALMIGHTY!”

I want to come back to this but if you have an artistic image in mind of what Jesus looked like on earth, this is an altogether different image. This is not your grandfather’s Jesus that we read about in the Revelation of Jesus recorded by John. Not by a long shot. Let’s keep going!

### ***Revelation 1:9-11***

I, John, your brother and fellow partaker in the tribulation and kingdom and perseverance which are in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos, because 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 the sound of a trumpet, saying, “Write in a book what you see, 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.”

According to verse 9 John was exiled on the island of Patmos “because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.” Let me fill in some missing information that may help explain this. Around the end of the first century AD, all people in the Roman Empire were ordered to offer prayers and sacrifices to the Roman emperors, who had been declared gods, referred to as the Imperial Cult. The practice began with Augustus, and became a prominent element of Roman religion. Within a few decades the cult spread over the whole Empire, more strongly in the east, like here in Turkey, than in the west. Subjects and citizens alike were expected to make periodic incense offerings to the spirit of the Emperor, and upon doing so they received a certificate that they had in fact demonstrated their loyalty. Christians, of course, refused to worship the Emperor, considering it idolatry.

Those who refused to make sacrifices on the altar of the emperor were regarded as traitors, and could be put to death. Christians wondered whether their disobedience would mean the end of the church. John, the author of Revelation, received a special message from God that answered these questions. He shared it with the churches in what was then the Roman province of Asia

(western Turkey today), where the Imperial Cult was especially practiced. But John's message is really for all Christians and it has three main parts:

1. Evil forces are at work in the world, and Christians may have to suffer and die.
2. Jesus is Lord, not the Emperor, and he will conquer all people and powers that oppose God.
3. God has wonderful rewards for those who remain faithful, especially for those who lose their lives while serving God.

Revelation was a powerful message of hope for those early Christians who faced suffering and death for their faith. In this book, they learned that, in spite of the cruel power of the Roman Empire, Jesus (the Lamb of God) would win final victory. Jesus was so real and so precious to John that he would rather be exiled to a barren island than to worship a man, no matter how powerful they might be. He 'couldn't not' talk about Christ. So John was exiled. John had gazed at Jesus long enough to become like him in this way: obedient fellowship was more important than the comforts of life.

But now on the island God gives John another remarkable chance to gaze at Jesus. He gives him a vision. And he does this not just for John but for the seven churches of Asia and for us. In verse 10 John says that he was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day. That means that on one of his Sundays on the island he was deeply in tune with the Spirit of God. So much so that suddenly (v. 10) he "heard behind [him] a loud voice like the sound of a trumpet."

The voice says in v. 11, "Write in a book what you see, and send it to the seven churches." This means that the vision John is about to get is meant not just for him but for us as well. And the point of writing it down is to transmit to us the same kind of experience of seeing Jesus that he had.

### **"Write What You See"**

This is not easy to do—"write what you see." It is easy to write words that you hear. But it is not easy to write in words amazing and glorious things that you see with your eyes. But it is possible, because Jesus said to do it. Jesus does not intend to come to each of the seven churches the way he came to John. He could have appeared to each congregation with this same vision. But he doesn't. He appears to John and says, "Write in a book what you see, and send it to the seven churches." John gets the vision. We get the book.

But this is not because Christ wants to be distant and impersonal with his churches. It is because he wants to come to us in and through his Word. If He had come to each church with this same apocalypse, in one, two or three generations the visit would have lost its power. Certainly the message would have been translated by a thousand different eyes. He gave it to us in a book because He wants us to seek him in his Word, and know him by his Word, and gaze upon him steadily through his Word. And when we do, the Lord stands forth from his Word in ways beyond the merely rational and intellectual possibilities of reading. **"Write in a book what you see and send it to the . . . churches." Why else write in a book what he saw except to transmit to the readers some of that same experience. That is what I want us to have this morning.** Let's go on . . .

#### **Revelation 1:12-17**

And I turned to see the voice that was speaking with me. And having turned I saw **seven golden lampstands**; and in the middle of the lampstands **one like a son of man**, clothed **in a robe** reaching to the feet, and girded across His breast **with a golden girdle**. And **His head and His hair were white** like white wool, like snow; and His eyes were like a flame of fire; and His feet were like burnished bronze, when it has been caused to glow in a furnace, and His voice was like the sound of many waters. And in His right hand He held seven stars; and out of His mouth came a sharp two-edged sword; and His face was like the sun shining in its strength. And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as a dead man.

Verse 12: John turns to see whose voice was like a trumpet (v. 10). And what he saw was seven golden lampstands and Christ in the midst of them. If you drop down to verse 20 Jesus gives definition to the lampstand symbolism: "As for the mystery of the seven stars which you saw in my right hand, and the seven golden lampstands: the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches."

So the vision that John gets is Jesus among the churches. Christ is standing among the churches. He is not merely over the churches. He is not distant from the churches. He is in the middle of them. Verses 12b–13a: "I saw seven golden lampstands; and in the middle of the lampstands one like a son of man."

Here we can see how our reading is meant to be so much more than a mere remembering of something that happened to John a long time ago. He begins the record of his vision by telling us that the Christ we are about to look at is in our midst. He is among the churches. He is not far away in time or space. He moves among his lampstands, trimming the wicks and carving wax, breathing life back into flickering flames.

4Cs is one of his lampstands. Jesus is here this morning. He is eager to see us burn with the light of his own countenance. And so he bids us look at what John saw.

### ***'One like a Son of Man'***

John saw (according to v. 13) "one like a son of man." "Son of Man" was Jesus' favorite title for himself when he was on the earth. You might think it refers merely to his humanity, and so is only a title of humility. But in fact it was probably that, plus a lot more, because of its use in Daniel, another prophecy book about end times.

#### ***Daniel 7:13–14***

I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days [God the Father] and was presented before him. And to him was given dominion and glory and kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed.

In Daniel the term "son of man" or "one like a son of man" refers to a great ruler. So when John says that he saw "one like a son of man" standing in the middle of the lampstands, he means that he saw someone with dominion and glory and kingly power with authority over all the nations and over all the peoples and who would rule the world forever and ever because his kingdom could not be destroyed.

The one who stands among the churches and trims our wicks and fans our flames is the one who received from the Ancient of Days dominion and glory and kingdom over all rule and power and authority in heaven and on earth. We need to see Jesus like this today, just like the seven churches needed to hear it in John's day. It is "the son of man" who walks among us right now. And that means one with everlasting dominion whose kingdom cannot be destroyed. We must renew this eternal focus and assurance again and again in the midst of the adversities and the allurements of life.

### ***Clothed with a Robe and Girded with a Girdle***

The next thing John saw (in v. 13) was that this son of man was "clothed in a robe reaching to the feet, and girded across His breast with a golden girdle." The word translated "robe reaching to the feet" is not used anywhere else in the New Testament, but in the Old Testament it almost always refers to the robe of the high priest. And the gold band across his chest shows two things: the fact

that it is high—not around the waist but around the chest—and the fact that it is gold, show that the priesthood that he holds is very great.

Jesus is not only the son of man from Daniel 7 who receives everlasting dominion over all nations; he is also the final high priest who brings all the priestly work of the temple to an end. There is no more need for animal sacrifices with all their priestly labors. Verse 5 says Christ "released us from our sins by his blood." This priest is so great that he gave his own blood once for all at the end of the age to put away sin once for all by the sacrifice of himself.

He stands among the lampstands—he stands here by us today—as one with authority and everlasting dominion and one with final, decisive forgiveness for our sins.

### ***His Head and Hair Were White like Wool and Snow***

Then John sees in verse 14 that "his head and his hair were white as white wool, like snow." This is remarkable, because in that same chapter in Daniel where John gets this picture of "one like a son of man" (v. 13–14), God the Father is described like this in verse 9, "The Ancient of Days took his seat; his vesture was like white snow, and the hair of his head like pure wool." In other words John is describing the Son of Man in terms used for God himself (Daniel 7:9-10).

I think John wants us to see something here about the age of Christ and the wisdom and dignity that come with age—everlasting age!

In American culture today, we respect the process of aging less and less. A person is admired if he can keep looking young, not if he has the dignity of age. The Bible saw it another way.

Proverbs 16:31 says, ***"A white head is a crown of glory."*** So much so that in the law (Leviticus 19:32) God commanded, ***"You will rise up before the white head, and honor the face of an old man, and you shall fear your God; I am the Lord,"***

One of the reasons we don't want to grow old is that we associate age with the fading of powers that make life worth living—the capacity to see and hear and think clearly and move about and not have pain. But all of those things do not belong to aging as aging. They belong to aging in a futile and fallen world of sin. Once God does away with sin and the curse, and establishes the new heavens and the new earth, aging will not have any of these negative connotations. It will only be associated with growing wisdom and insight and maturity. All the strength will still be there. All the mental powers. All the sight and hearing and agility. Nothing that is great about youth will be left behind. There will only be added all the powers and beauties and depth of age.

This is what John saw in Jesus. He was like the Ancient of Days with all the wisdom of eternity and all the maturity and steadiness of age, but he was not weak or weary or faltering in his step.

### ***Eyes "Like a Flame of Fire"***

Put this picture together with the next thing John saw at the end of verse 14, "His eyes were like a flame of fire." The eyes of this son of man are not the clouded eye of fading glory. They are eyes of sharpest clarity. They miss nothing that happens in the universe. And they are exploding with energy.

We all know the drooping eye that is about to go to sleep or is sullen and half shut with scowl or a bad mood. And we know the eye that is alive with wonder and excitement and hope and expectancy and energy. Jesus' eyes were like a flaming fire. What we see then is hair as white as snow and eyes like fire—wisdom and maturity like the Ancient of Days together with the energy and vitality and zeal of youth!

***"When I saw Him, I fell at His feet as a dead man"***

**Isaiah 6:1-5**

<sup>1</sup> In the year of King Uzziah's death I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, lofty and exalted, with the train of His robe filling the temple. <sup>2</sup> Seraphim stood above Him, each having six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one called out to another and said,

“Holy, Holy, Holy, is the LORD of hosts,  
The whole earth is full of His glory.”

And the foundations of the thresholds trembled at the voice of him who called out, while the temple was filling with smoke. Then I said, “Woe is me, for I am ruined! Because I am a man of unclean lips, And I live among a people of unclean lips; For my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts.”

Falling in death like worship before this ALMIGHTY Jesus is as natural as running into the arms of the Jesus that walked the earth. And somehow it is all the same character.

**Revelation 1:17b-20**

And He laid His right hand upon me, saying, ***'Do not be afraid***; I am the first and the last, and the living One; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of death and of Hades. Write therefore the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall take place after these things.

***Which Jesus do you worship? Which Jesus do you need?***