

## **“Revealed” Series / #1: Revelation 1 Jesus / August 16, 2015**

Sometimes it’s hard to follow Jesus, isn’t it? We know what he wants us to do, and sometimes we’d just rather not.

- Sometimes to us telling a little lie seems a whole lot easier than telling the truth.
- Or, sometimes forgiving someone like he wants us to just seems ... wrong.
- Or, sometimes we get tired of trying to be decent to someone who is a jerk.
- And, sometimes giving up your Sunday mornings to do church, or giving your first part back to God when money is tight gets hard.

But sometimes following Jesus is hard because of what they do to us because we are Jesus followers.

- Have any of you ever been teased or ridiculed because you took a stand you thought was God-honoring?
- Have any of you ever been penalized or punished at work or at school because you took a stand you thought was God-honoring?

Did you know it’s going to get worse? There used to be this ... superficial respect for God and for Christian values in our culture. That’s fading fast. Now it is perfectly acceptable to marginalize God, and to disrespect his values. More and more we Jesus followers are considered unenlightened, and unsophisticated, and intolerant. Our values are considered quaint, and archaic, and repressive, and even toxic... Okay. So be it. In reality, our world has always been at war with God, and with us God followers.

Jesus said it would be so.

- Jesus said, “Everyone will hate you because you are my followers.” But if you don’t quit, it will be so worth it. (Mark 13.13) Do you buy that?
- The apostle Peter said, “Don’t be surprised at the fiery trials you are going through, as if something strange were happening to you.” (1 Peter 4.12) Taking heat because you are a Jesus follower is not weird, it’s normal.
- The apostle Paul said, “Everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.” (2 Timothy 3.12) That’s the way it has been, that’s the way it will be, until Jesus comes back. So be it.

And to tell you the truth, I think it's going to get worse ... way worse. Our religious freedom is already under attack in this country. And it is already way worse in so many parts of our world. We are the most persecuted religious group on earth. According to a group called "Open Doors," which serves persecuted Christians all over our world, every month 322 Christians die because they are Jesus followers, 214 churches are burned or destroyed, and there are over 700 acts of violence against Christians. They published this map showing countries where right now Christians have it way worse than we do... at least for now.

You see pictures of Christians murdered by radical Muslims nearly every week. We are told to convert to Islam, pay a stiff fine, or die. So many of us run. And Isis publishes these pictures of their "warriors" shooting Christians, or beheading Christians, or drowning Christians, or burning Christians, or crucifying Christians, or burying us alive, or making us kneel on bombs and detonating them... ..

Guys, when following Jesus gets hard – whether it's hard because sometimes we don't want to do what he wants us to do, or whether it's hard because even in our country we are taking more and more heat, or whether it's hard because Satan and his minions want us dead – when following Jesus gets hard, what picture of Jesus will give you courage? What kind of Jesus do you want standing by your side, or covering your back?

- For those of us who are older, this is probably the most famous picture of Jesus. It was painted in 1941. It sold over 500 millions copies. Perfect skin, perfect hair, serenity written on his face. Maybe a little sissified. This is the picture of Jesus a lot of people default to, since it hung in so many of our houses, and churches. When your world is falling apart, is this what you want Jesus to look like?
- Or maybe you could draw some strength from a Jesus who looks like this. The Lamb of God. He's carrying the cross. His throat has been cut, bleeding into your communion cup. It's a powerful picture. Remember, you won't suffer anything he doesn't feel.
- Or maybe you'd rather hang on to a picture of Jesus like this. Kind of like Aslan on steroids. When life gets hard, it's good to know that this is the one who stands by your side, who's got your back.

- How about this one, from the Book of Revelation, chapter 1. The apostle John writes, “When I turned to see who was speaking to me, I saw seven gold lampstands. And standing in the middle of the lampstands was someone like the Son of Man. He was wearing a long robe with a gold sash across his chest. His head and his hair were white like wool, as white as snow. And his eyes were like flames of fire. His feet were like polished bronze refined in a furnace, and his voice thundered like mighty ocean waves. He held seven stars in his right hand, and a sharp two-edged sword came from his mouth. And his face was like the sun in all its brilliance. When I saw him, (when I saw this) I fell at his feet as if I were dead.”

Well, that picture is kind of weird. But when life gets hard, there's something about this picture of Jesus that is so ... powerful, so ... comforting. You see, we are going to spend the next 4 weeks on portraits of Jesus from the book of Revelation. And they are pretty weird. You need to know that the book of Revelation was written by the apostle John on an island called Patmos. I want you to try to imagine for a moment what John felt like on Patmos. Remember, John was a disciple of Jesus, and a close friend. In fact he was called, “the one Jesus loved.” John had been with Jesus for 3 years. He listened to him preach. He saw Jesus heal the sick, cast out demons, walk on water, hush storms. He saw Jesus die and raised from the dead. He was there on the day of Pentecost when God poured out his Holy Spirit on the Jesus followers. He had preached Jesus and planted churches for a lifetime. He wrote one of the gospels – one of our eyewitness biographies of Jesus. He wrote 3 letters which became part of our New Testament... And what did all that Jesus following get him? Patmos.

Here's what John writes. He says, “I, John, am your brother and your partner in suffering” -- literally “in tribulation. Because he lived in a world – like ours -- that hated Christians. He says, “I was exiled to the island of Patmos for preaching the word of God and for my testimony about Jesus.” (Rev 1.9) He's in exile because he's a Jesus follower. He's there because of persecution. He's an old man – maybe 90 years old – a prisoner on a rock in the middle of the sea. He can't preach Jesus anymore. He can't do life with other Christians – he is cut off. Patmos ... is a place of disappointment, maybe confusion, a place where you feel alone, a place where following Jesus is flat-out hard.

Ever been there? Ever been in a place where following Jesus gets so hard, maybe a place where you feel disappointed, or confused, or alone? Maybe you are there now, and you are praying, “God, get me out of this place!” “God, I don’t want to be here; I need you to get me out of here!” But God’s plan was not to take John off of Patmos. His plan was to show him something that made Patmos seem very, very little.

John says, “It was the Lord’s Day, and I was worshiping in the Spirit. Suddenly, (he says) I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet blast. It said, “Write in a book everything you see...” (Rev 1.10) And what God is about to reveal to this old Christian warrior, now in exile, is going to amount to something like this ... “John, It’s going to be stunningly okay!” “Just hang in there: you ain’t seen nothing yet!” Some of you need to hear that.

And God starts his Revelation by giving John a glimpse of Jesus. The same Jesus he had done time with 60 years before, but extraordinarily different now. Now you need to understand: these pictures of Jesus God is going to give to John are not meant to be physically literal. They are meant to reveal something about Jesus’ heart, and his character, and his power.

John says, “When I turned to see who was speaking to me, I saw seven gold lampstands. And standing in the middle of the lampstands was someone like the Son of Man.” That’s what Jesus kept calling himself, when he was here, on earth – the Son of Man. John sees Jesus, the Son of Man, but now a Jesus way different, way more ... God-like. He says, “(This Son of Man) He was wearing a long robe with a gold sash across his chest.” (John 1.12-13) Why the gold sash was around his chest, and not his waist, I don’t know. But it blew John’s mind.

John says, “His head and his hair were white like wool, as white as snow.” (1.14a) Now in our world we try to hide white hair, or grey hair. Ladies try Clairol Nice and Easy. I prefer Grecian Formula. As you can tell. But their perspective was different in the Bible. One of my favorite Proverbs is this one (stroke beard): “Gray hair is a crown of glory; it is gained by living a godly life.” (Prov 16.31) Some of you guys prove there are exceptions to this rule. But in the world of the Bible, grey hair, or white hair, symbolized

wisdom. This is someone who's been through it, someone who has seen a lot, someone worth listening to.

And that's what John saw, when he looked at Jesus. This is someone who understands. He understands what has been; he understands what will be. He understands you, your dreams, your disappointments, your strengths and your weaknesses, your hopes and your fears. He understands the path you are on, where it will end, and what course corrections are necessary. I hope that's what you see when you picture Jesus – someone who understands. There are times we get confused: he understands. There are times when our problems seem insurmountable: not to him! There are times we can't figure God out, when what he wants seems counterintuitive: well, he understands, and he can be trusted.

John keeps going. He says, "His eyes were like flames of fire." (Rev 1.14b) Well that's just weird, isn't it? But remember, there are symbols of Jesus' power, and his character... Have you ever felt like someone was not looking at you, they were looking into you, or through you? Have you ever felt convicted just by a look? Moms have eyes like that. You ever shivered in your shoes because of a look from mom? People say that moms have eyes in the back of their head. I don't think they really do. But they know what's going on, and they can correct you with their eyes.

Well John says that the eyes of the Son of Man, the eyes of God, are constantly watching. They miss nothing. And they are blazing like flames of fire. Probably because in the Bible fire was purifying. It still works that way. We use fire to purify our food, to kill the bacteria in it that can make us sick, ... and to make it taste good. Well in the world of the Bible they used fire to purify things a lot. They used it to purify their food; they used it to purify their gold, or their silver. And it came to symbolize how God purifies us.

So Jesus is pictured with eyes of fire: eyes that see, eyes that blaze, eyes that correct and purify – that make us better. Have you ever noticed that when you are sinning, you do your best to shut your eyes so God can't see you? It's hard to sin when you are staring into the eyes of God. How do you respond when you look into God's eyes, and in addition to the love that is always there, you also see rebuke? It hurts. He's there, he sees,

he understands, he loves, and he corrects. And it makes life infinitely better.

Then John says, “His feet were like polished bronze refined in a furnace.” (Rev 1.15) Well that’s kind of weird, isn’t it? Hair dazzling white, eyes that blaze, feet of bronze. What’s that mean? Well it meant a lot to the early Christians, who knew their Bible. You see, one of their heroes, a guy named Daniel – the one from the lion’s den. Well Daniel interprets a vision of a king named Nebuchadnezzar – a powerful king; the most powerful man in that part of the world. Well in this vision Nebuchadnezzar’s body was made up of all these different metals. He had a head of gold, a chest and arms of silver, belly and thighs of bronze, legs of iron, but feet of clay – so he had this powerful body, but a weak foundation. We still use the metaphor: feet of clay. It means there is some fundamental weakness, some terrible character flaw... But not with Jesus. With him, a foundation that will not be moved.

And we believe it. We believe that anything built on anything else is weak; it’s not going to hold up; it’s not going to last. Build your life on money, build your life on success; build your life on emotion – build your life on whatever is not God – one day it’s going to fall apart, it won’t last. But this one like the Son of Man has feet of bronze... You see, bronze is a blend of tin and copper. It’s strong, and it doesn’t rust. Which is why we still use it for bronze statues, and bronze bells, and other stuff that has to be strong and never rust. Some of you guys will remember the old hymn, “On Christ the solid rock I stand, all other ground is what? \_\_\_\_\_ sinking sand.” Well that’s what John sees in Jesus: someone steady, solid, unshakeable, strong.

And that matters. Because sometimes it feels like life is kind of falling apart? Ever lay awake at night, because you are anxious, or worried, or flat out scared? Any of you guys ever bite your nails, or grind your teeth, or bite your lips, or maybe even cut yourself? Maybe you just try to numb your fear with booze, or pills, or food, or sleep, or TV, or shopping. Well, he’s your anchor.

You see, John is an old man, he is in exile on an island in the middle of the ocean. He’s there because he’s a Jesus follower. Times are really hard. In fact, up just a couple of verses before this description of Jesus he says

“I, John, am your brother and your partner in suffering... Literally, he says, your “tribulation.” Life’s really hard. But he says, I not only share in the tribulation we Jesus followers experience, he says, I also share “in God’s Kingdom and (I share) in the patient endurance to which Jesus calls us.” (Rev 1.9) He’s an old man, all alone, separated from his family, his church, his work. And he talks about “patient endurance.” You know why? You know how he can pull it off? Because he’s hanging on to someone with feet of bronze. He knows he’s not the one in control – neither are you. He knows his Romans captors are not the one’s in control. He knows the one who really is. And he throws himself at the feet of someone who cannot be shaken, and he has this peace. Wouldn’t you like some of that?

He goes on. He says, “His voice (the voice of this Son of Man) thundered like mighty ocean waves.” (Rev 1.15) This is actually the second description of Jesus’ voice. Back in verse 10 John says his voice sounded like a trumpet blast. Remember – these are symbols. First it’s like a trumpet blast, then it thunders like mighty ocean waves. The blast of a trumpet will get your attention. The thunder of mighty ocean waves will fill you with awe.

When Julie and I go back to Oregon, sometimes we like to drive down the coast. It’s rocky, it’s wild, and it’s loud. Some of our favorite places have these funnels in the rock. The waves come crashing into these funnels and then the water just explodes into the sky. It sounds like cannons firing off. It is stunning; literally awesome. Can you imagine a voice with that kind of power?

If you are a parent, you probably know the difference between an inside voice and an outside voice. And if you are a parent, you would probably love to know how to surgically remove the outside voice. No sane parent encourages their children to use their outside voice. Well, God has an inside voice. He can whisper. We talk about those gentle nudges of God. But God has an outside voice too – like the thunder of ocean waves. And someday he’s going to use it, and everyone, everywhere is going to hear it, and they will be filled with awe.

The idea here is that God has this unchallengeable authority. The Bible calls him the King of kings, and the Lord of lords. Just think of the people

we call movers and shakers. Well, Jesus is their King too, whether they know it or not. Forbes called these people the 10 most powerful people in the world: #1 Vladimir Putin; #2 Barack Obama; #3: The Chinese president Xi Jinping. Then there is Pope Francis, Angela Merkel, Bill Gates, Bill Bernanke, Saudi Arabia's Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz Al Saud, Mario Draghi, President of the European Central Bank, and Michael Duke, CEO of Walmart. Well ... He's ruler over them all, whether they know it or not. Donald Trump, Hillary Clinton, Michael Jordan, George Lucas, Oprah Winfrey, Steve Jobs, Rush Limbaugh, Stephen Hawking, Kim Jong Un, Bill Maher: someday every knee will bow – even the most stubborn and proud knees, someday every tongue will confess – even the most vile and arrogant, that this Son of Man is King of kings, and Lord of lords... Do you believe that?

But before you get too excited about that moment -- which is coming, you need to understand that this means he intends to rule over you too, and me. As powerful as those words are, they bring up a question: Are you totally submitted to the authority of God – are you Christ Driven 24/7? Is there any area in your life where you're holding back from God? Are there any sinful habits that you're not willing to give up? Any dark closets in your heart you try to keep locked to him? When he speaks to you in that still, small, inside voice do you respond?

Guys, he's the ruler over the kings of the earth, and he wants you to accept his rule over your life right now. Right now he gives you the freedom to say "yes" to him, or ... "no ... not yet." But someday Jesus is going to use his outside voice – a voice like the thunder of mighty ocean waves. Can you imagine what that's going to sound like? And every knee – every knee – will bow. Now, can you understand why this vision of Jesus gave an old warrior like John strength, in his exile on Patmos?

And then John says, "In his right hand he held seven stars, and coming out of his mouth was a sharp, double-edged sword." (Rev 1.16) So he's holding these stars in ... which hand? \_\_\_ Yeah, his right hand. You see, in the world of the Bible the right hand was considered the noble hand. The place of honor was at the king's right hand. A soldier with a sword in his right hand was ready to fight. The right hand was the hand that counted, because you used your left hand for other ... less noble things.

Any of you guys left-handed? Sorry about your luck. Just messing with you.

So in his right hand he held these 7 stars, which, if you keep on reading, you'll discover represent the angels, or maybe even the pastors of the 7 churches John is writing to. Here's what John is telling us: "You Christians, you Jesus followers, you churches, in the middle of your suffering, in the middle of your disappointments, in the middle of your persecution, you are safe. You are safe in his right hand. You are not out there on your own; he's got you perfectly safe in right hand. Is that cool?"

Some of you guys need to hear that. You see, some of us battle all these insecurities. You try to put up a front, but you are scared. Or you try to make enough money to feel safe, but you are scared. Or you try to connect with enough friends that you feel safe, but you're scared. Or you try to find that one person who will always be there for you, always protect you. None of that is enough. John is alone on an island and looks at Jesus – that's all he's got left ... and it's enough. God says, "You are absolutely safe in my hands. There is nothing that can really hurt you, nothing that can take away from you what matters most. Will you trust me? Will you?"

Two more pieces. John says, "A sharp two-edged sword came from his mouth." (Rev 1.17) Now that's just weird. And the word John uses doesn't point us to one of those short swords, or daggers; it points to one of the big ones. This symbol is kind of scary. It's going to pop up 3 more times in John's Revelation. And every time it's talking about judgment. Someday Jesus going to speak. And those who don't want to listen ... will have to.

And then John says, "His face was like the sun in all its brilliance." (Rev 1.17) Looking at Jesus was like trying to look into the August sun. We still use that idea. Sometimes a woman who is pregnant is radiant. She's beautiful. Sometimes we say that a bride is radiant – just beautiful. They never use "radiant" to describe a dad, or a groom – no one cares what we look like. But sometimes we call a woman radiant – because she is.

John had gotten a peek at that radiance 60 years before, in what we call the transfiguration. You see, Jesus took Peter and James and John up on

a mountain, and for just a moment he pulled down the veil and gave them a peek. For a moment, they reported, his face was as bright as the sun. It blew their minds. And here it is again – “His face was like the sun in all its brilliance.”

You see, the radiance of his face symbolized his perfect holiness, his unblemished righteousness. Think about it, guys: Here’s a Jesus who never compromised on truth, ever; who never had a petty thought, ever; who never responded to anyone out of spite or meanness, ever. Blows your mind, doesn’t it? Here is one who is perfectly holy, incapable of being unfair, or callousness, or cruel.

Well ... here’s what happens. John says, “When I saw him, (when I saw Jesus unveiled) I fell at his feet as though dead.” No kidding! You would too. And then... This is for me the most intense part of the scene... “Then he placed his right hand on me and said: “Do not be afraid.” “Don’t be afraid!” “Don’t be afraid!!” Can you imagine hitting the ground in ... terror, and wonder ... and then feeling his hand – that all powerful right hand, touching you tenderly on your shoulder? I don’t think I have enough tears to express the gratitude and the wonder I would feel.

When being a Jesus follower is hard, would this picture of Jesus help? Jesus doesn’t remove the persecution ... yet. He doesn’t remove John from Patmos. Instead He reminds John and us, “All this is temporary. But you are not! Neither am I. I am in control. Trust Me.”

Do you believe that? We beg for relief and sometimes God simply reminds us...this will pass. Better things are waiting. It may get worse before it gets better; but better things are coming for those who stubbornly follow Jesus.

Do you believe that? Is your confidence in Him strong enough to carry through the fire? Tough times clarify priorities. Tough times reveal where your allegiance lies. This morning somewhere Christians will be given a choice: Choose Jesus and die, or denounce Jesus and live. In a thousand little ways, every one of us faces that same choice every day.

The scene closes with Jesus saying these words, incredible words. He says, “Don’t be afraid! I am the First and the Last. I am the living one. I died, but look—I am alive forever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and the grave.”

In a moment we Jesus followers are going to come to these tables around the room, and we are going to take a piece of bread – representing his body, broken for us, and a cup filled with juice -- representing his blood, shed for us. And as we eat that bread and drink that cup we are going to be telling him: We believe you. You are the First and Last; you are the living one. We believe you died, but now you are alive forever, and ever, and ever. And we believe you hold the keys to our eternity. And we will follow you ... anywhere.

“You are a miracle ...  
Sweeter than I’ve ever dreamed ...  
You’re so much more than beautiful ...  
How can it be that you belong to me.”