

I. Introduction

A. Thirty-six years ago, on a three-day break from seminary, I went with a friend to his home in Minneapolis. During dinner with his parents the first night, his Mom said that their church was having a choir concert that evening, and that Tom Skinner was speaking. And to my amazement - and horror - my friend said, “Oh we got to go to that.”

B. I’m thinking, “are you kidding me?” It’s Friday night. We’ve been locked in a library for weeks. We spent the day in a long car ride. And you want to go to a choir concert? That wasn’t exactly my idea of unwinding.

C. As it turns out, I will never forget that night. For starters, it was the first Gospel Choir I had heard and I fell in love. Secondly, Tom Skinner – the speaker, a 45-year-old black evangelist from Harlem, laid out a challenge that was life-changing.

D. He opened by noting that although he grew up going to Sunday school, he didn’t believe in Jesus. He explained, early on he seen “a picture of Jesus” – likely this one – on the wall in a Sunday School class. And he said, “I didn’t know who that guy was, but I knew he wouldn’t last ten minutes in my neighborhood.”

E. It wasn’t until sometime later that he met the real Jesus and all of that changed.

II. This leads me to ask a question: have you met the real Jesus? Or is your Jesus small, safe, well-groomed? When you think of Jesus, do you see the fair-haired, Sunday school Jesus? Or the Jesus of the Bible? It matters. A lot. What we think about matters. What we think about Jesus matters a lot. It shapes us.

III. Last week – in the first half of this two part sermon - I made four points. I said:

A. Don’t forget, who you vote for as President on Tuesday, does not matter as much as who you honor as Lord. God is primary, politics is secondary. Do not get those out of order. Seek first the Kingdom of God.

B. Don’t forget, we are called to be people of hope. Not optimism because of polling numbers, CDC reports or economic forecasts, but an unshakable hope based on the death and resurrection of the Son of God.

C. Number three: Don’t forget, we are called to love our neighbor – and even our enemy. And while it can occasionally be hard to know exactly what that looks like, it certainly doesn’t mean demonizing them – ascribing evil intentions to their vote.

D. Don’t forget, we – Christ’s-followers – are called to unity. Not to a stale uniformity. But because our identity is to be so fundamentally shaped by Jesus - not by a party’s platform, and because we are humble and loving – the church is to be a caring community that survives disagreement over issues like an election.

IV. I shared those four points to guide you as you thought about voting. The goal of my sermon this week – which, like last week’s sermon, I started working on a year ago – was drafted with the idea that some people would be up and some would be down and needed to say something to both groups.

A. 2020 – being what it is, the year that just keeps on giving – has thrown me a few curves here. First, most of you are not here, you are watching online; and second, the election is not fully decided.

B. But, that actually doesn't matter given what I have to say.

V. I want to be sure you are looking at Jesus – the Son of God. The real Son of God. The one described in the Bible. Not however you might think of him. Not some projection of yourself – someone who looks and thinks – AND VOTES – like you. Someone who is a lot like you only nicer. I want to be sure you are looking at the real Jesus, because when you do, a lot of problems go away.

VI. It turns out there are lots of Biblical examples of people seeing the wrong things, looking in the wrong direction – of people failing to see what is really going on. In failing to see God for who He really is.

A. Psalm 2 offers one example. It starts with a question: **Why do the nations conspire and the peoples plot in vain?** This is a particular type of question. Not exactly rhetorical. But it's asked in light of a set of circumstances.

1. It makes me think of Christmas morning about 15 years ago.

B. It's why do people miss the point? Then it says, **The kings of the earth rise up and the rulers band together against the LORD and against his anointed, saying, Let us break their chains and throw off their shackles.**

1. The context here is that a number of Israel's powerful enemies have surrounded her – this tiny nation – and are planning to crush her. They are beating the drums of war. It looks like death and destruction are about to rain down on the Jews. *The nations are conspiring and the people are plotting and it looks bad for Israel.*

2. But then we read verse 4, "The One enthroned in heaven laughs." God looks at the attackers and laughs.

3. Everyone is worried. This looks like the end. But they are looking at the wrong things. They are looking at Israel's enemies instead of at God.

C. We have another example of this in 2 Kings 6, where Elisha and his servant wake up to find themselves surrounded by King Aram and his Assyrian army.

1. Aram is mad at Elisha – the prophet who has repeatedly thwarted him. So he chases him down. He has his army come at night and trap Elisha in a cave. In the morning, Elisha's servant goes out to get water – doesn't know that the army is there - sees them and panics. Elisha steps out, sees Aram's army, but also sees an army of angels there to protect them, and prays – V 17: **"Open his eyes, LORD, so that he may see." Then the LORD opened the servant's eyes, and he looked and saw the hills full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha.**

D. We get another example of the importance of seeing things accurately in Rev 4:1. This is right after Jesus has dictated the seven letters to John. As soon as that section is over, chapter 4 begins with John writing: **After this I looked, and there before me was a door standing open in heaven. And the voice I had first heard speaking to me like a trumpet said, "Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this.**

1. Jesus has John step into heaven and look down, so he can gain a different perspective. He gets to see things as God does. He can see all that is going on and look ahead at what is to come (that is the essence of the Book of Revelation).

2. This changes John’s attitude, and allows him to bring a message of hope to his people – people who are suffering and are about to suffer more. He can tell them what he has seen. He knows how things will end, and more important than even that - he has seen Jesus.

E. Men and women, we face a number of obstacles and distractions. It is easy to fill our days and our vision with things that do not matter. It is easy to look at problems and be overwhelmed. But when we look at Jesus – not the Sunday School Jesus, but the real Jesus. When we fill our mind with truth, when we fight for God’s perspective. When we see what we are supposed to see – in particular, when we focus on Jesus, and our view of Him lines up with who He really is – well, that changes everything.

F. Pastor and best-selling author, Max Lucado, argues that from heaven's viewpoint, our earth is populated by “sightless people who do not see the meaning of life or the love of God.” “How else,” he asks, “do we explain the confusion and chaos? How else do we explain the constant threat of world war, plagues of hunger, racism, and the holocaust of the unborn? Billions of people simply cannot see.”

1. He notes that 2 Cor. 4:4 states that, 'The devil who rules this world has blinded the minds of those who do not believe. They cannot see the light of the Good News—the Good News about the glory of Christ, who is exactly like God.'

2. He concludes by noting that, “there are other passages that suggest we need Jesus to do for us what he did for the man on the side of the Jerusalem road who was blind.”

VII. Some of you are discouraged right now. It doesn’t look like your guy is going to win. You may even be depressed. Some of you are happy or relieved right now, because it looks like your guy is going to win. OK, as far as it goes. But none of that goes as far as you think.

VIII. If your mood is primarily shaped by something other than Jesus, you are doing it wrong. And you are not looking at the Jesus of the Bible. We need to see the real Jesus. You need to see the real Jesus. The Jesus of Revelation 1. Jesus in power. Not the Ricky Bobby baby Jesus of Talladega Nights. Not the Sunday school version of Jesus – the pasty white, well-groomed Jesus with neatly combed long hair.

IX. But the Jesus who spoke truth to power; the Jesus who hung out with sinners; the Jesus who forgave those who nailed him to a tree; the Jesus who died in your place, defeated death, rose again and later ascended into heaven where he was exalted. And where he will rule and reign forever.

X. You need to see the real Jesus, and in order to do this we need to back up to Revelation 1

A. We have been in the Book of Revelation for a while now – and so you’ve heard:

1. It’s the last book in the Bible.

2. It was written to people who were suffering for Christ, and directed to them in an effort to tell them: 1) that they are going to suffer even more; but, 2) it will be OK. God wins. He has everything under control.

B. You may also know that:

C.

1. The book of Revelation is some people's favorite - more books have been written about it than any other book in the Bible - G.K. Beale's commentary on Revelation has a bibliography that cites 852 sources.
  2. The Book of Revelation introduces lots of ideas and terms that have made their way into general culture: Armageddon, Anti-Christ, the number 666, the four horsemen of the apocalypse.
- D. You may know:
1. That this book arrives in a unique genre: it is: 1) a letter; 2) a work of prophecy; and, 3) an apocalypse (which means a revealing).
  2. That it has caused a lot of confusion, because people bring different approaches to understanding it:
- E. There is more that I could say. Let me simply note, my take is that the Book of Revelation is:
1. Helpful to focus on the forest more than the trees. If you try to understand it by understanding every verse you can get lost. It's tough sledding.<sup>1</sup>
  2. Helpful to let it set a tone, a mood – of victory
    - a) Jesus is talking to people who need some encouragement and direction. And He gives that to them. And while part of that encouragement comes in knowing that things end well. A bit part of that encouragement is an accurate picture of a powerful and glorious Jesus. Someone who is bigger than any problem. Someone who cannot be managed or controlled.
- XI. Our text today is Revelation 1: 9 – 20. As you turn there let me note:
- A. Verses 1-3 are an introduction to the introduction.
  - B. Then verse 4 – 6 is a more standard introduction: **John, To the seven churches in the province of Asia: Grace and peace to you.** As with the start of most of the other New Testament books, it starts by introducing the writer, identifying who the letter is directed to and then moves into some form of doxology.
  - C. Then in V7 we get a bit more preamble: **“Look, he is coming with the clouds,” and “every eye will see him, even those who pierced him”; and all peoples on earth “will mourn because of him. So shall it be! Amen.**
  - D. Then in V8 we get an introduction to Jesus: **I am the Alpha and the Omega,** (in the face of Rome, who thought it was the beginning and the end. It's a merism) **says the Lord God, “who is, and who was, and who is to come the Almighty.”**
    1. 318 x in NT the return of Christ is mentioned)
    2. This turn of a phrase is a bit awkward, but that is because it is mirroring the structure of the great I Am statement in Ex 3, when God appeared to Moses via a burning bush.

**XII.** Now our text, V9: **I, John, your brother and companion in the suffering and kingdom and patient endurance that are ours in Jesus, was on the island of Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. On the Lord’s Day I was in the Spirit, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet, which said: “Write on a scroll what you see and send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea.”** These are the seven cities that got the seven letters we just looked at.

**XIII. I turned around to see the voice that was speaking to me. And when I turned, I saw seven golden lampstands:** As I have noted, the Book of Revelation is a bit of a picture book. We are given all of these objects.

A. In the Old Testament, the lampstand – or menorah – was found in the temple and it represented the nation of Israel. Here the claim is that it is the church.

**XIV. V13: and among the lampstands was someone like a son of man**

A. This is Ancient of Days language in Daniel 7

**XV. , dressed in a robe reaching down to his feet and with a golden sash around his chest.** As you may know: 1) the term “Son of Man” is the way Jesus most frequently describes himself; 2) it comes from the Book of Daniel; and 3) it is a huge claim to deity.

A. Remember, the Book of Revelation draws more frequently from the Old Testament than any other New Testament book. Lots of Daniel, Isaiah, Ezekiel. This passage has

1. Daniel 7 – Son of Man will appear and smite evil doer
2. Zech. 12 – when he comes, they who pierced him will mourn (but the word means repent)

B. And in six of the seven letters, Jesus introduced himself by citing an Old Testament passage that was used to refer to God the Father in the Old Testament. By using it to refer to himself He is making another bold claim to be fully God.

C. And somehow these Old Testament passages included something that made it clear that Jesus understood the unique challenges being faced by the Christians in a particular city – and was perfectly equipped to speak to it.

**XVI. The hair on his head was white like wool, as white as snow – he is wise / also Ancient of Days - and his eyes were like blazing fire – there is nothing he does not see, does not know.**

**XVII. V15: His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of rushing waters.**

A. John turns and sees Jesus. Amazing sight. John says, literally, it was like looking into the sun and like feeling a furnace and listening to all of the oceans roar at once.

**XVIII. V16: In his right hand he held seven stars, and coming out of his mouth was a sharp, double-edged sword.**

A. His words are penetrating. Remember, this will be referenced in ?, where the magistrate had the power of the sword. But Jesus has a tongue that is a sharp twoo-edged sword.

**XIX. His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance.**

- A. This is just like what the Old Testament says about God's face.
- B. It is being compared to the sun. Stop and think about that. If you look right at the sun it is the last thing you will see.
- C. In OT you hear, "If you look at my Face you will die." Here Jesus has glory, the "fatal brilliance" of God. John is not killed, Jesus touches him.<sup>2</sup>

XX. The big takeaway here is that Jesus has been glorified and now has power and glory and radiance and strength. He is overwhelming. And so John is overwhelmed - and in case you think maybe he isn't, let me read verse 17: **when I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead.**

- A. Remember, John had been with Jesus every day for three years. This is not their first time together. And he had even seen Jesus glorified at the Transfiguration. But seeing Jesus now – in heaven, in glory on the other side of the crucifixion and resurrection – is yet another thing. And his response is to be overwhelmed. Very much like Isaiah in Isaiah 6.

**XXI. Then he placed his right hand on me and said: "Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. <sup>18</sup> I am the Living One; I was dead, and now look, I am alive for ever and ever!"**

XXII. What are you looking at? What do you focus on?

- A.

XXIII. Suffering and yet brilliant (v13)

- A. What are the lamp stands? The churches. And we are the churches. We are a lamp stand. We are to be god's light in a dark world.
- B. These churches are going through suffering.
- C. The older you get, the more suffering you. The more you suffer. The more your friends suffer. John now knows this. He is old. Life is hard and then you die.
- D. Here is John knowing that the churches he has been working with are going through bad things
  - 1. Some will be impaled on pole, some covered in pitch and it on fire; some have holes drilled in head and molten led poured in, some thrown to lions. Many crucified.
  - 2. In the book of Revelation some really bad things will happen.
- E. And in the midst of these bad things, beaten people, this great figure is walking. Vs. 13 – he is in middle of lamp stands. And it is like a furnace. Affliction often called furnance<sup>3</sup> in the Bible. Soo much reminds you of Daniel 3 – Shadrach, Meshack and Abednego. Neb sees 4 walking around, fourth like Son of God.<sup>3</sup>

XXIV. And let me say again, the Christian life does not make any sense if you are not living in light of forever.

- A. Eternity changes things. It must change your thinking. I'm not sure you can be sane without
- B. This is doctrine of second coming to judge the world.
- C. Liberals: This is a metaphor. Jesus comes every time someone lives a good life.

- D. Conservatives: This is real and historic event, but obsess on when it will be and what are the signs.
1. Jesus said. No one knows. When Jesus on earth he said he didn't know.
  2. To guess suggests we do not understand how this doctrine should shape us.
- E. Christ's return is imminent. This changes everything. Relax. No one gets away with anything.

XXV. There is a lot here. I said if you showed up, I would give you my advice for this week – here it is: look at Jesus. The real Jesus. Focus on him. On who He is, where He is and what He will bring.

XXVI. Be shaped by Christ, not election results, not party platforms.

XXVII. In my devotion this AM, I was reading Psalm 86:1-4, and in that section, David puts on a clinic on how to face life when it's out of control. And what he does, over and over, is remind himself to look at God.

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<sup>1</sup> John Calvin – who wrote on every book of Bible except Revelation. When asked he said, “Because I don't get it.”

1. <sup>2</sup> In Daniel 10, God shows up to Daniel and it is like Jesus here. Daniel falls to the ground, as dead. But we are also told an angel touches him, comforts him, tells him more.
  2. Here is it is Jesus who touches and John not killed. To get this you need to trace Genesis 2, Isaiah 6 and then Rev. 1 and connect the dots.
    - a) Gen. 2 – we were built for face of God. All value and all beauty you see, art, people, significant, love is in his face
    - b) Psalm 16 – in his face is fullness of joy. We were built by him and for him. We were built for God. To love, adore him – this is to your soul what water is to a dying fish. It is life
  3. Isaiah 6 – prophet is pulled into Heaven and it's traumatic. He doesn't see his face, just getting hear his feet undoes him. He thinks he will die
- B. <sup>3</sup> Isaiah 43 – fear not. When you walk through the fire you will not be burned.
1. Daniel 3 we see figure. What did it mean? We now know. Jesus has keys to death and hades, it is b/c he went into the fire. the ultimate furnace is the judgment of God.
  2. Until you see that he took it in ultimate sense for you, you will not have him walking in the penultimate furnace with you. If you see that, you will find that the flame will not make you worse but better.

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3. If you believe Jesus died for you – then the ultimate wealth, gift and health is waiting for you. And to the point you get this, you can walk in your suffering and it will make you wiser, better, kinder. Not angrier and meaner. I can face this for you Jesus, because you faced so much worse for me and my future is good!
- C. Jesus is Alpha. If you want to see yourself, get into him. If you want to stop obsessing with your pain, think about his. Get into His. See what He did. Then you will understand your own and it will not make you worse.
- D. My power is made perfect in weakness.
- 1.