

Providence Presbyterian Church (OPC)
Pflugerville, Texas

S E R M O N T R A N S C R I P T

***Christ Among the Golden
Lampstands***

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Scripture: Revelation 1:9-20

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Revelation 1 verses 9 through 20. Hear the word of God:

⁹I, John, both your brother and companion in the tribulation and kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was on the island that is called Patmos for the word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ. ¹⁰I was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day, and I heard behind me a loud voice, as of a trumpet, ¹¹saying, "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last," and, "What you see, write in a book and send it to the seven churches which are in Asia: to Ephesus, to Smyrna, to Pergamos, to Thyatira, to Sardis, to Philadelphia, and to Laodicea."

¹²Then I turned to see the voice that spoke with me. And having turned I saw seven golden lampstands, ¹³and in the midst of the seven lampstands *One* like the Son of Man, clothed with a garment down to the feet and girded about the chest with a golden band. ¹⁴His head and hair *were* white like wool, as white as snow, and His eyes like a flame of fire; ¹⁵His feet *were* like fine brass, as if refined in a furnace, and His voice as the sound of many waters; ¹⁶He had in His right hand seven stars, out of His mouth went a sharp two-edged sword, and His countenance *was* like the sun shining in its strength. ¹⁷And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as dead. But He laid His right hand on me, saying to me, "Do not be afraid; I am the First and the Last. ¹⁸I *am* He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore. Amen. And I have the keys of Hades and of Death. ¹⁹Write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after this. ²⁰The 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 which you saw are the seven churches.

Let's pray and ask God to bless us as we look into His word:

Our Heavenly Father we thank you for this portion of your inspired, inerrant, infallible word. We pray, O Lord, that by your Spirit you would help us to understand what is written and taught here; and by your Spirit you would apply it to our hearts and our lives for your glory. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

At this point John begins to tell us about his vision. You had beginning in verse 4 the standard introduction to a letter. *John, to the seven churches which are in Asia, grace to you and peace*; and then he goes on from there.

Before that you had in the first three verses a preface that is not attached to other letters in the New Testament; but is here, because this is the revelation of Jesus Christ himself. But the revelation came predominantly in the form of a vision, or if you will a series of visions, but all on the Lord's Day on Patmos, the island where John was in exile for the word of God and for the testimony of Jesus. In other words, he was in exile because he was preaching and teaching the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ who was in exile because he was being persecuted. That's important because he writes to the persecuted church. In all probability during the time of the reign of Emperor Demician, around 95 or 96 A.D. And during that time, during Demician's reign there was widespread persecution of Christians in the Roman Empire. And John's writing to a persecuted church that needs encouragement, needs comfort, needs hope; but what we're also going to see as we go through this, a church that needs correction in some ways as well.

As John writes he writes as he says in verse 9, *as their brother and companion in the tribulation*. He faces what they face, he's subject to persecution like they do, he's their brother. He identifies with them, he's their companion. But he is explicit about being their brother and companion not only in tribulation, but also in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ. He wants them to think of Christ's kingdom; because that's going to be

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important as part of the way they're dealing with tribulation—but also just—what the church is about, what it stands for. **Tribulation** is what happens to churches and Christians who are oriented towards Christ's kingdom; and so he wants them to understand that.

You see when you understand the importance and keep in mind your commitment to Christ's kingdom, then the tribulation is just part of what goes with it; and patience is yours **because of** what you're committed to—it's something great enough, big enough, important enough that John, and those he addresses, can deal with the other things because of what is most important.

He heard what Matthew wrote when Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount, *seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness*; and so He's reminding them that He's their companion in this. And so I want you to picture as we get into this, John as a brother and companion to his hearers and also as someone who identifies with us through the ages as well. He's a man, he's a regular human being; he's an Apostle, yes; but he's just a regular human being—so much unlike Jesus Christ. But this is a man who knew **Jesus** as a companion.

And I want us to not miss that. I mean this is the disciple who writes about himself in the Gospel of John, refers to himself several times as the apostle whom Jesus loved. He felt that love. He reclined leaning against Jesus at the last supper. There was great affection towards Jesus, yes; but great affection that he would see from Jesus. There was probably at that point no human being on earth that John felt—when I say “at that point” at the time when they were together at the last supper, during that period of Jesus' ministry—there was probably no human being on earth that John had a greater love for; even though one of the apostles was John's brother James.

And so we would be able to forgive John if John got to feeling a little too familiar toward the Son of God. He was supposed to feel closeness and love; but it might be easy for him to forget who this man was who was not just a man. And so in this vision we see that Christ reveals Himself in His glory and majesty so that John fell at His feet as dead (John says in verse 17). That was not how John normally reacted to Jesus, but this time he did. And as he writes to us **John needed** to be very much aware, as he was facing persecution, who his Savior was; not just the One who underwent persecution before him and for him, which he does refer to in verse 18, but the One who is great and glorious and majestic in heaven.

And so on the Lord's Day, which would be Sunday, the Christian Sabbath, a day which not only was called the Lord's Day because Christ was resurrected on that day, but because it is given to Christ as a day that is His (by Christians); he was **in the Spirit** on the Lord's Day; by which we are to understand that as he was worshipping on the Lord's Day, the Lord gave him this vision.

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And he says *and I heard behind me a loud voice, as of a trumpet*, you know a trumpet can be loud; and so it was a loud voice, it was a mighty voice. And different old manuscripts in the original Greek differ as to whether or not the first words are properly, at this point, in the Scriptures. *I am the Alpha and the Omega the first and the last*, but certainly we know that's true about Jesus. But he goes on and tells John:

"What you see, write in a book..."

And so he's going to be shown things, visions of things; and he's to write those down. So that the interpretation of the Book of Revelation is going to be the interpretation of pictures, of imagery. He wasn't told words to write in a book, though God inspired through His Holy Spirit the exact words that John did write in the Book of Revelation, but those words are descriptive of images that John was shown.

And then the book is to be sent to the seven churches which are in Asia. We've talked about those before, we recognized that by seven churches there is intended, yes, those specific seven churches in Asia-Minor; but like the other usages of the number seven throughout this book, it is a number that implies the fullness, the completeness of all of the churches really. Just like the seven spirits was the fullness of the Holy Spirit; and we find seven used in that way, again and again and again in this book. And so here's this address that is to us as well then.

So he hears the voice and he turns to **see the voice** [meaning the source of the voice] **that spoke with me. And having turned I saw seven golden lampstands,...**

There were seven of them, yes, which represents a fullness, but could not have helped but evoke in John's mind, the golden lamp stands (10 of them) that we read about in the temple. That the lampstands are a part of the temple, they're a part of the worship of God; "ten" also is a number for fullness. And so the "ten" there in one sense could represent what the "seven" here represent.

So he saw seven golden lampstands. And in the midst of the seven lampstands, and then there's this description of the Savior as he saw Him then.

One like the Son of Man, clothed with a garment down to the feet and girded about the chest with a golden band. ¹⁴His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and His eyes like a flame of fire; ¹⁵His feet were like fine brass, as if refined in a furnace, and His voice as the sound of many waters; ¹⁶He had in His right hand seven stars, out of His mouth went a sharp two-edged sword, and His countenance was like the sun shining in its strength.

That's an overwhelming picture. If you pay attention to the details of the picture, you understand why John fell at His feet as dead. Why John was afraid and the Savior said to him when laying His right hand on him:

"Do not be afraid; I am the First and the Last."

And it goes on.

Here is someone who in his appearance is radiant like the sun shining in its strength. You know, you can—you're not really even supposed to do it this time—but when the sun is setting off in the distance you can, your eyes can survive kind of looking over at it if you only glance a little bit, because it's not as bright, it's not in its strength. But on a

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hot, clear day, when the sun's overhead, you don't look at it, you can't look at it because of its brightness. **Christ was that radiant!**

Now we're not supposed to get a picture here of, okay I need to form in my mind an image of what Jesus looks like; rather we are supposed to be getting the picture that Christ is glorious beyond imagination. We're to get a picture here not so much of, "Well let's see what does He look like? What does His tongue look like?" Well out of His mouth went a sharp two-edged sword. We're not to think of Jesus as somebody who has a weird looking tongue, we are rather to realize that He is whom John calls earlier, The Faithful Witness, the one whom John describes in the Gospel of John the first chapter, as The Word. We are to hear him as The Great Prophet; the one who is The Source of the Gospel message to us. But that this message and the whole message of scripture is viewed as a sharp two-edged sword, which means it can cut. And it can rebuke as well as help.

It may be rightly understood as a Sword of Judgment by the truth of the Word of God; and Jesus is like that. His eyes are described like a flame of fire—several points, this one included, are mirroring if you will the imagery in Daniel chapter 10. But we think of one whose gaze is piercing not just in a personal sense and looks that way, but the one who from heaven looks on us, sees us and sees everything. The one who looks on the heart. We could go on and on with details. But I want you to see and to imagine that this Savior is glorious in heaven. And put yourself for a few minutes in the shoes of those who were there in Asia-Minor facing that persecution and realizing that you have a Savior who is glorious beyond imagination.

And at that point I want us to move on because there's more we need to see here. We want to know a little bit more of what John says first about the Savior Himself. At the end of verse 17 He says "*I am the First and the Last*"; He is the beginning and the end; He is the Alpha and the Omega; He is the eternal God; but he also, according to verse 18 is He Who lives and was dead and *behold I am alive forevermore* He says. He is the crucified and resurrected Savior of these people; and in pointing out to them that **He** is one who lives and was dead and now is alive forevermore. He is reminding them of what they know from the gospel, that they too may die, will die at some point, but will live. That death will not be the end.

That if they first face persecution to that point, they have the promise of a resurrection from Him. And he goes on to encourage them about that when he says *and I have the keys of Hades and of Death*.

Just stop for a second and think about, you know, all our great doctors and we appreciate those and what all they can do; but none of them have the keys of Death. Christ though has that, it's in His hand, it's in His hand when we die; it's in His hand that we will be as believers, resurrected at the last day; and that even Death does not separate us from the Lord but takes us directly into His presence, not with our bodies

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until the Great Resurrection, but we go into His presence. Christ has the key to all of that. And He tells these people through John, *write*—well he tells John to write the things—but he tells these people the mystery of what John saw.

It's really no mystery that Christ is so great. But here's something that already needed interpretation: *the seven stars in his right hand and the seven golden lampstands*. And he says *the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches; and the seven lampstands which you saw are the seven churches*. Seven churches, representative of all of Christ's churches through the ages, are represented by seven golden lampstands. Lampstands give off light, as churches carry the light of the Gospel to the world. These are golden lampstands, which is to say they are precious, they are of great value.

We look at churches like ours and we say “well we could value the building, but you know, what are the people worth?” We don't—we're not—we might be prone to thinking we're a small church so we're not so very valuable, we're not as important, we're not significant; you know, we're not told these are different sized lampstands for different sized churches or anything like that; there's seven lampstands that represent seven particular churches, but they also represent all churches. And we're represented there as lampstands that are gold that are Christ's that are precious to Him and should be precious to us—the whole church of God should be precious to us.

And Christ is pictured in their midst. In the first verse of chapter two it's specifically says *He walks in the midst*. We don't have in chapter 1 that he's walking, simply that He's there. But He walks in the midst of the seven lampstands; which is to say that Christ Himself observes, watches, watches over His churches. Those churches in Asia-Minor that were being persecuted, Jesus saw what was happening. He was walking among them, caring for them, taking care of them.

When churches face difficulties one of our first remembrances needs to be that Christ is walking among the churches: watching us; taking care of us; seeing us; meeting our needs as He sees those and understands those rather than the way we might interpret them. But he's doing that.

When we look at our church and we think of the good and the bad and difficulties and all of the various things, do we do that with an awareness that we are always before the face of Jesus Christ; that he is aware of us; that he's not missing anything good or bad that's happening; he's aware of it all.

And then there are these seven stars. Now what a picture: In Christ's hand are seven stars. And the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches; and then later in chapters two and three when specific letters are sent to each of the seven churches, each one begins *to the angel of the church of* (fill in the blank) *write*. Why write letters to angels? Well, the literal meaning of the word “angel”—angel is one of several words that are just standard words in the Greek New Testament but are used as technical terms. I

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mean standard words in the Greek language, the common Greek language of the day, but are used as technical terms: “elder and deacon”, are just the literal standard words for old person and servant, but they become technical terms in the church. And “angel” is like that. It’s the literal standard word that means “messenger”; but it takes on a technical meaning sometimes when we talk about these heavenly beings that God created—Angels.

You’ve got, you know, the various angels that are mentioned in scripture; Satan as a fallen angel; and so those are angels. And we still want to say well wait, does each church have an angel and if so, what’s the point of John writing him a letter? I wouldn’t know how to address a letter like that, would y’all know how to address a letter to an angel? And the point I’m trying to make is that John wasn’t to write letters to angels, because I don’t know that they had special delivery to angels as angelic beings.

But the messenger to each church, which would be the minister. Now you can understand how John as a minister and an apostle and how ministers of those seven churches, and ministers of all the churches in our day would take comfort that the messengers are in Christ’s hand. Pictured as stars somewhat—in some way—not in the sense that we talk about Hollywood stars and those kinds of things; it’s not **that** kind of star; but pictured as the stars in the heavens that give light, that shine. And these stars, these messengers, your minister and all true Christian ministers are held in Christ’s hand. And Christ sends His message to His church through these messengers.

In the next two chapters we’ll see seven letters addressed to seven particular churches, all of which teach us—and churches in our day as churches through the ages—but the message of Christ to His churches is through His messenger through the minister, that’s the way God chooses to do it, which is to say God doesn’t give His special messages to church members who need to come up and say, “Well, God gave me a message that this is what He wants our church to do.” And ministers in our day are not to get those special messages directly from heaven through the Spirit, any more than the ministers, messengers of the seven churches were; they got theirs from scripture. That’s how your minister has to get the message from God to you, it’s from scripture.

But you see, here’s this picture **Christ is great and glorious and He’s with His churches**; and He sends them the message that they need, **individualized to their church** as we will see in these two chapters that follow; through a messenger that He has in His hand. And that’s reason to take hope.

I take comfort in it; you should take comfort in it. And part of what you need to hear in this is that Christ through his messenger to you gives messages somewhat like those messages in chapters 2 and 3 to the seven churches; we’re going to see several things there. We’re going to see messages that include some praise for the churches “you’re doing good at this”. We’re going to see messages that include comfort and encouragement; but we’re going to see in these letters to seven churches, we’re going to

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see in these seven letters: criticisms, rebukes, warnings, and calls to repent as well. With Christ saying at some point, “if you don’t heed this message, I’ll step in directly.”

These seven letters are interesting. We are going to—when we look at them one at a time—we’re going to look at some things and we’re going to say—we’re going to ask ourselves “does our church have these positives?” And we’re going to ask ourselves, “does our church have these negatives?” And in many cases what you’ll say is, “well we’ve got some people that have these positives, and we’ve got some people that have some of these negatives.”

And so as we look at that, we’re really seeing a picture of what Christ wants the church to be like; and that may call us to change some things. I think that the Lord has given us a good church in many ways; but we have weaknesses. One of the things that is staggering to the mind, these churches are all less than 50 years old. The oldest would be Ephesus, Paul planted Ephesus. The apostle spent three years there. He left Timothy there to minister after him. We’re going to see next week that the church at Ephesus, something like under 50 years less is in decline. You’re going to see other churches in decline.

This year Providence has its 25th Anniversary from our beginning, and that’s a great blessing! But we can’t say “Oh! Because we’ve had a good start!” or “Oh! Because we’re good at this point or that point that we don’t have to guard ourselves against decline. The OPC exists because the mainline northern Presbyterian Church in this country declined to the point where we kind of had to say, “This is not a Bible-believing church any longer.” And the OPC was formed pulling out of that denomination.

The same thing with the PCA out of the Southern Presbyterian Churches; you see other signs of that kind of decline. The tendency apart from the work of the Holy Spirit and churches’ dependence on the work of the Holy Spirit and dependence on the Lord and a strong commitment to following and heeding His word, is that there will be decline set in.

Have we declined in some areas? Do we need to watch ourselves lest we decline in some areas? These are questions that these churches—these letters will be raising.

I’m not saying this mainly to protect myself for later when I raise things that you might not like to hear and say, “Oh, well this is a message, I’m just a messenger. You know, don’t shoot the messenger because you don’t like the message.” But rather to prepare us to **hear God’s messages**; to think about them. I would encourage you over the next several weeks to read Revelation chapters 2 and 3 several times.

Next week we will look at the first 7 verses of chapter 2; the letter to the Church at Ephesus, read that; but read the others as well. Read over them multiple times and let’s look at what message Christ sends to all of His churches, for **their good** and for His glory.

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Let's pray:

*Our Father we thank you that we have a glorious incomparable Savior and Lord. We thank you Lord that He has undertaken Himself the care of His churches. We thank you that He sends His message through His messengers and takes care of those messengers. We thank you for the messages that were sent to the seven churches, and we pray that we would learn what we need to learn from them more. We pray that our church would be preserved from decline, would be encouraged; would be a church to hear only the praises of Christ, only the encouragement, but Lord we pray for an openness to hear His rebuke and criticism; not so that we can think poorly of ourselves, but so that we can do as He calls some of those churches to do—to repent, to change, to renew the things that are right and good. Lord, we pray this not so much for ourselves, but for **His glory** in His church. We pray in His name. Amen.*

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