

# **Christ's Message to the Seven Churches**

**Christ's Message to His Churches**

*Revelation 1:12-20*

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# Christ's Message to His Churches

## Scripture

We are currently in a series of messages titled, "Christ's Message to the Seven Churches," that is based on the first three chapters of the Book of Revelation.

Previously, we looked at the prologue of Christ's revelation, Christ's greeting to his churches, and Christ's messenger on Patmos. Today, I would like to look at Christ's message to his churches.

Let's read about Christ's message to his churches in Revelation 1:12-20:

<sup>12</sup> Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking to me, and on turning I saw seven golden lampstands, <sup>13</sup> and in the midst of the lampstands one like a son of man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash around his chest. <sup>14</sup> The hairs of his head were white, like white wool, like snow. His eyes were like a flame of fire, <sup>15</sup> his feet were like burnished bronze, refined in a furnace, and his voice was like the roar of many waters. <sup>16</sup> In his right hand he held seven stars, from his mouth came a sharp two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining in full strength.

<sup>17</sup> When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. But he laid his right hand on me, saying, "Fear not, I am the first and the last, <sup>18</sup> and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades. <sup>19</sup> Write therefore the things that you have seen, those that are and those that are to take place after this. <sup>20</sup> As for the mystery of the seven stars that 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. (Revelation 1:12-20)

## Introduction

Pastor Bob Petterson of Covenant Presbyterian Church in Naples, FL tells the story of the Venetian adventurer, Marco Polo. His Italian mother named him after the gospel writer, Mark, in the hopes that he too would proclaim the gospel. But 13<sup>th</sup> century Europeans found it impossible to believe Marco's tales of faraway lands. He claimed that, when he was only seventeen, he took an epic journey lasting a quarter of a century, taking him across the steppes of Russia, the rugged mountains of Afghanistan, the wastelands of Persia, and over the top of the world through the Himalayas. He was the first European to enter China. Through an amazing set of circumstances, he became a favorite of the most powerful ruler on planet earth, the Kublai Khan. Marco saw cities that made European capitals look like roadside villages. The Khan's palace dwarfed the largest castles and cathedrals in Europe. It was so massive that its banquet room alone could seat 6,000 diners at one time, each eating on a plate of pure gold.

Marco saw the world's first paper money and marveled at the explosive power of gunpowder. It would be the 18<sup>th</sup> century before Europe would manufacture as much steel as China was producing in the year 1267. He became the first Italian to taste that Chinese culinary invention, pasta. As an officer of the Khan's court, he travelled to places no European would see for another 500 years. After serving Kublai Khan for 17 years, Marco began his journey home to Venice, loaded down with gold, silk, and spices.

When he arrived home, people dismissed his stories of a mythical place called China. His family priest rebuked him for spinning lies. At his deathbed, his family, friends, and priest begged him to recant his tales of China. But setting his jaw and gasping for breath, Marco spoke his final words, "I have not even told you half of what I saw."

Though 13<sup>th</sup> century Europeans rejected Marco's stories as

## Christ's Message to the Seven Churches

the tales of a liar or lunatic, history has proven the truthfulness behind the book he wrote about he saw – *The Travels of Marco Polo*.<sup>1</sup>

1,300 years before Marco Polo wrote about China, another man, the Apostle John, wrote a book about what he saw that seems too astonishing to believe. And yet history will also prove the truthfulness of what he wrote. The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave to John is a truly astonishing piece of literature.

### Lesson

The analysis of the vision of Christ as set forth in Revelation 1:12-20 teaches us about the glorified Christ.

Let's use the following outline:

1. The Glorious Appearance of Christ (1:12-16, 20)
2. The Worshipful Response to Christ (1:17a)
3. The Reassuring Message of Christ (1:17b-19)

#### I. The Glorious Appearance of Christ (1:12-16, 20)

First, let's look at the glorious appearance of Christ.

John received the revelation of Jesus while on the island called Patmos. Each part was not intended to be isolated from the whole. It was the whole picture that gave majesty and beauty to the vision, much like the entire rainbow is beautiful.

We learn nine truths from the glorious appearance of Christ.

##### A. Christ Indwells His Church (1:12-13a, 20b)

First, Christ indwells his Church.

John said in verses 12-13a, **“Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking to me, and on turning I saw seven golden lampstands, and in the midst of the lampstands one like a**

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.preachingtoday.com/illustrations/2011/february/5021411.html>.

**son of man.”** Verse 20b identified the **seven golden lampstands** as **“the seven churches.”** The **lampstands** had lamps that were used to light a room, thus symbolizing churches as “lights in the world” (cf. Philippians 2:15). They were **golden** because gold is the most precious metal, thus symbolizing that the church is Christ’s most precious possession. And **seven** is the number of completeness, symbolizing that although the message was directed to seven specific churches, the message was intended for all churches in all times.

John said that **in the midst of the lampstands** he saw **“one like a son of man.”** This was of course the glorified, resurrected Lord Jesus Christ. When Christ was alive on earth, his preferred title for himself was “Son of Man.” That term came from Daniel 7:13, and it was Christ’s way of identifying himself as the fulfillment of the prophecy in the Old Testament. That Christ was **in the midst of the lampstands** indicates his presence in his Church. When Christ gave the Great Commission to his disciples (in Matthew 28:18-20), he concluded it with these words, “And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

John MacArthur says, “Christians do not worship a well-meaning martyr, a dead heroic religious leader. The living Christ indwells his church to lead and empower it.”<sup>2</sup> Christians have the astonishing privilege of fellowshiping with the indwelling Christ.

#### *B. Christ Prays for His Church (1:13b)*

Second, Christ prays for his Church.

The first thing that John saw about Christ was how he was dressed. He said that Christ was **“clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash around his chest”** (1:13b). A **robe** was worn by kings and prophets. “But,” as MacArthur noted, “the word

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<sup>2</sup> John F. MacArthur Jr., *Revelation 1–11*, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1999), 44.

## Christ's Message to the Seven Churches

translated **robe** was used most frequently (in six of its seven occurrences) in the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Old Testament) to describe the robe worn by the high priest.”<sup>3</sup> That means that “while Christ is biblically presented as prophet and king, and his majesty and dignity emphasized, the **robe** here pictures Christ in his role as the Great High Priest of his people.”<sup>4</sup> And the primary task of the priest was to intercede for his people.

### C. *Christ Exercises Wisdom Over His Church (1:14a)*

Third, Christ exercises wisdom over his Church.

John said in verse 14a, **“The hairs of his head were white, like white wool, like snow.”** Commentator Grant Osborne said, “In ancient culture white hair indicated both dignity and the accumulated wisdom of years of experience.”<sup>5</sup> Christ is symbolized as the one who exercises eternal wisdom over his Church.

### D. *Christ Sees His Church (1:14b)*

Fourth, Christ sees his Church.

John said in verse 14b, **“His eyes were like a flame of fire.”** Christ once said to his disciples (in Matthew 10:26), “. . . for nothing is covered that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known.” And the writer to the Hebrews said (in Hebrews 4:13), “And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.”

### E. *Christ Chastens His Church (1:15a)*

Fifth, Christ chastens his Church.

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<sup>3</sup> John F. MacArthur Jr., *Revelation 1–11*, 44.

<sup>4</sup> John F. MacArthur Jr., *Revelation 1–11*, 44.

<sup>5</sup> Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002), 90.

John said in verse 15a, “. . . **his feet were like burnished bronze, refined in a furnace.**” These words are very difficult to translate because they are so rare, even in ancient Greek. Nevertheless, MacArthur explains the symbolism as follows, “The red-hot, glowing feet of the Lord Jesus Christ picture him moving through his church to exercise his chastening authority, ready to deal out remedial pain, if need be, to sinning Christians.”<sup>6</sup>

*F. Christ Speaks Authoritatively to His Church (1:15b)*

Sixth, Christ speaks authoritatively to his Church.

John said in verse 15b, “. . . **and his voice was like the roar of many waters.**” Jesus’ voice was mighty and powerful, and it reminded readers of the Old Testament of the voice of God (in Ezekiel 43:2). It symbolized authority. Christ has authority over his Church, because he purchased the Church with his blood.

*G. Christ Controls His Church (1:16a, 20a)*

Seventh, Christ controls his Church.

John said in verse 16a, “**In his right hand he held seven stars.**” Verse 20a identified the **seven stars** as “**the angels of the seven churches.**” In the New Testament, **angels** can also mean “messengers.” Some commentators think that the **angels** really do refer to **angels**, but the difficulty with that view is that some of the churches were rebuked for their sin, and angels do not sin. I side with those commentators who believe that the **angels** described here represent Christ’s earthly messengers to his churches. So, the **angels** represent the pastors of the churches.

The use of Christ’s **right hand** symbolizes his control over his Church. Christ has sovereign control over his Church, and he does so through his called, ordained, and installed pastors.

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<sup>6</sup> John F. MacArthur Jr., *Revelation 1–11*, 46.

## Christ's Message to the Seven Churches

### H. *Christ Protects His Church (1:16b)*

Eighth, Christ protects his Church.

John said in verse 16b, “. . . **from his mouth came a sharp two-edged sword.**” This is what MacArthur says:

The Lord Jesus Christ's presence also provides protection for his church. The **sharp two-edged sword that came. . . out of his mouth** is used to defend the church against external threats (cf. 19:15, 21). But here it speaks primarily of judgment against enemies from within the church (cf. 2:12, 16; Acts 20:30). Those who attack Christ's church, those who would sow lies, create discord, or otherwise harm his people, will be personally dealt with by the Lord of the church. His word is potent (cf. Hebrews 4:12-13), and will be used against the enemies of his people (cf. 2 Thessalonians 2:8), so that all the power of the forces of darkness, including death itself (the “gates of Hades”; Matthew 16:18), will be unable to prevent the Lord Jesus Christ from building his church.<sup>7</sup>

### I. *Christ Is Glorified in His Church (1:16c)*

And ninth, Christ is glorified in his Church.

John said in verse 16c, “. . . **and his face was like the sun shining in full strength.**” John saw the resurrected Christ in his glorified state, and it seemed to him **like the sun shining in full strength**. Christ wanted John to know that he would be glorified in and through his Church.

So, to recap, John had an incredible vision of the resurrected Christ. In this vision, he saw Christ symbolically as the One who indwells his Church, prays for his Church, exercises wisdom over his Church, sees his Church, chastens his Church, speaks authoritatively to his Church, controls his Church, protects his Church,

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<sup>7</sup> John F. MacArthur Jr., *Revelation 1–11*, 48.



and is glorified in his Church.

How, then, did John respond to the glorious appearance of Christ?

### III. The Worshipful Response to Christ (1:17a)

Second, notice the worshipful response to Christ.

John said in verse 17a, **“When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead.”** When I read this response, I am somewhat surprised. John spent three years with Christ. He was one of Christ’s inner circle of apostles. He was the one whom Jesus loved (John 13:23). I would think that when he saw Christ, he would rush over to him and give him a great, big bear-hug! But, he did not. Instead, when John saw the glorified, resurrected Christ, he **fell at his feet as though dead**. He was completely overcome by the presence of Christ.

Grant Osborne said, “The natural reaction in the face of an epiphany is to fall to the ground in fear, and John does so several times in the Apocalypse (1:17; 19:10; 22:8). . . . It is even more common to ‘fall down’ in worship (4:10; 5:8, 14; 7:11; 11:16; 19:4), and this could also be connoted here, though the ‘fear’ aspect is certainly uppermost.”<sup>8</sup>

Worship in many evangelical churches has become flippant. People dress as if they are going to the beach; they carry in their coffee as if they were about to chat with a casual friend; they don’t focus on what they have come to do. People in our culture have lost the sense of reverence and awe in the presence of God. Of course, the writer to the Hebrews warned the people of his day to keep that in mind when he said to them (in Hebrews 12:28-29), “Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire.”

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<sup>8</sup> Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, 93–94.

## Christ's Message to the Seven Churches

When John saw the glorified, resurrected Christ, he responded by falling at his feet, and offered to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, for his God – and our God! – is a consuming fire.

### III. The Reassuring Message of Christ (1:17b-19)

And third, observe the reassuring message of Christ.

Christ gave two commands to John that were intended to reassure him.

#### A. *Do Not Be Afraid (1:17b-18)*

The first reassuring message was: do not be afraid.

John said in verse 17b that Christ **laid his right hand on him, saying, “Fear not.”** That was a touch of comfort and reassurance. Christ had given his life to pay for the penalty of John’s sins. Christ had secured John’s right standing with God. Christ was John’s Savior. And so, in his infinite grace and compassion, Christ touched John to reassure him that he belonged to Christ.

Then Christ went on to give the reason for his reassuring message to John. He said in verses 17c-18, **“I am the first and the last, and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades.”** This statement by Christ affirms in the strongest possible language that he has conquered death, that he is alive forevermore, and, in fact, that he alone has the power over life and death.

I read somewhere that a black preacher painted a picture of Satan in hell with all his demons and with all non-Christians. When Christ died on the cross and defeated sin and Satan forever, Satan ran around hell, shouting about Christ at the top of his voice, “He got the keys! He got the keys! He got the keys!” Now, while that is a dramatization, the truth is that Christ is the only one who has

power over death and hades.

That truth reassured John. And it should reassure us too. Knowing that Christ has sovereign authority over death and hell gives us assurance, and we no longer need to fear it. Jesus conquered Satan by his death and took the keys away from him, so “that through death [Christ] might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery” (Hebrews 2:14-15). Jesus said, “I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live. . . . Because I live, you also will live” (John 11:25; 14:19).

*B. Write What Was Seen (1:19)*

And the second reassuring message was: write what was seen.

Christ said to John in verse 19, **“Write therefore the things that you have seen, those that are and those that are to take place after this.”** Here was John’s commission restated to write what he had seen. And he did so, and we are the recipients of the revelation of Jesus Christ.

The words of the revelation of Jesus Christ were given to strengthen Christians and churches that were experiencing growing opposition, difficulty, and even persecution. Christ wanted to reassure his people that he was in their midst, that he was in sovereign control of all things, and that he was calling his people to continue testifying to his grace in their respective circumstances. And that is still Christ’s message to us today.

## Conclusion

Therefore, having analyzed the vision of Christ as set forth in Revelation 1:12-20, we should let the message of Christ shine through us to the community around us.

## Christ's Message to the Seven Churches

We need to grasp a fresh, new vision of the glorified and resurrected Christ. If we are ever going to impact our culture, it will be because our view of Christ is real and vibrant and personally transformative.

Jesus once asked his disciples (in Matthew 16:15), “But who do you say that I am?” That is a crucial question in our day because there are so many misconceptions about who Jesus is. As Pastor Kevin DeYoung said, not every Jesus is the real Jesus:

There’s the Republican Jesus – who is against tax increases and activist judges, for family values and owning firearms.

There’s Democrat Jesus – who is against Wall Street and Wal-Mart, for reducing our carbon footprint and printing money.

There’s Therapist Jesus – who helps us cope with life’s problems, heals our past, tells us how valuable we are and not to be so hard on ourselves.

There’s Starbucks Jesus – who drinks fair trade coffee, loves spiritual conversations, drives a hybrid, and goes to film festivals.

There’s Open-minded Jesus – who loves everyone all the time no matter what (except for people who are not as open-minded as you).

There’s Touchdown Jesus – who helps athletes run faster and jump higher than non-Christians and determines the outcomes of Super Bowls.

There’s Martyr Jesus – a good man who died a cruel death so we can feel sorry for him.

There’s Gentle Jesus – who was meek and mild, with high cheek bones, flowing hair, and walks around barefoot, wearing a sash (while looking very German).

There’s Hippie Jesus – who teaches everyone to give peace a chance, imagines a world without religion, and helps us remember that “all you need is love.”

There’s Yuppie Jesus – who encourages us to reach our full potential, reach for the stars, and buy a boat.

There’s Spirituality Jesus – who hates religion, churches, pastors, priests, and doctrine, and would rather have people out in nature, finding “the god within” while listening to ambiguously

spiritual music.

There's Platitute Jesus – good for Christmas specials, greeting cards, and bad sermons, inspiring people to believe in themselves.

There's Revolutionary Jesus – who teaches us to rebel against the status quo, stick it to the man, and blame things on “the system.”

There's Guru Jesus – a wise, inspirational teacher who believes in you and helps you find your center.

There's Boyfriend Jesus – who wraps his arms around us as we sing about his intoxicating love in our secret place.

There's Good Example Jesus – who shows you how to help people, change the planet, and become a better you.

And then there's Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God. Not just another prophet. Not just another Rabbi. Not just another wonder-worker. He was the one they had been waiting for: the Son of David and Abraham's chosen seed; the one to deliver us from captivity; the goal of the Mosaic law; Yahweh in the flesh; the one to establish God's reign and rule; the one to heal the sick, give sight to the blind, freedom to the prisoners and proclaim Good News to the poor; the Lamb of God who came to take away the sins of the world.

This Jesus was the Creator come to earth and the beginning of a New Creation. He embodied the covenant, fulfilled the commandments, and reversed the curse. This Jesus is the Christ that God spoke of to the Serpent; the Christ prefigured to Noah in the flood; the Christ promised to Abraham; the Christ prophesied through Balaam before the Moabites; the Christ guaranteed to Moses before he died; the Christ promised to David when he was king; the Christ revealed to Isaiah as a Suffering Servant; the Christ predicted through the Prophets and prepared for through John the Baptist.

This Christ is not a reflection of the current mood or the projection of our own desires. He is our Lord and God. He is the Father's Son, Savior of the world, and substitute for our sins – more loving, more holy, and more wonderfully terrifying than we

## Christ's Message to the Seven Churches

ever thought possible.<sup>9</sup>

It was this Jesus Christ who revealed himself to John on the island called Patmos. And it is this Christ that we need to believe. And it is this Christ that we need to communicate to each other and to our dying culture.

May God help us to do so. Amen.

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<sup>9</sup> <http://www.preachingtoday.com/illustrations/2009/august/1082409.html>.

# Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ  
and membership in his church family,  
develop them to Christlike maturity,  
equip them for their ministry in the church  
and life mission in the world,  
in order to magnify God's name.*

## Sermons by Rev. Freddy Fritz

This sermon, and other sermons, by the Rev. Freddy Fritz can be found at:

1. [www.tampabaypresbyterian.org/sermons](http://www.tampabaypresbyterian.org/sermons)
2. [www.sermoncentral.com/contributors/freddy-fritz-sermons-11181.asp](http://www.sermoncentral.com/contributors/freddy-fritz-sermons-11181.asp)
3. [www.sermonaudio.com/source\\_detail.asp?sourceid=FreddyFritz](http://www.sermonaudio.com/source_detail.asp?sourceid=FreddyFritz)

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**PRAYER:**

Our Father, thank you for Christ's message to his churches.

We are so grateful for the vision that John had of the glorified, resurrected Christ. We thank you that even today Christ is the One who indwells his Church, prays for his Church, exercises wisdom over his Church, sees his Church, chastens his Church, speaks authoritatively to his Church, controls his Church, protects his Church, and is glorified in his Church.

May our response to Christ be one of reverential submission, trust, and worship.

And for all of this I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

**BENEDICTION:**

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and always. Amen.

**CHARGE:**

Now, brothers and sisters, go and serve God wholeheartedly!