

# “The Cradle that Rocked the World” // Revelation 1:10–18 // *The Revelation of Jesus... at Christmas*

## Introduction

**Well, it is officially the Christmas season**, so open your Bibles to the book of Revelation, where we are going to spend the next few weeks in what might be the most **unusual Christmas series** you’ve ever heard. But I assure you that **it is a Christmas series** and I’m **really excited about it**.

Most of you are not that familiar with the book of Revelation—it seems like the *Lord of the Rings* installment in the Bible and you are not sure what to do with it—but the Christian tradition I grew up in was pretty obsessed with it because we were obsessed with **the end times**. We had our charts/timelines of the last days, with our educated guesses about which political figures and which Hollywood stars were represented by the various beasts; we had our annual prophecy conferences, our end-times movies, and our rapture board games... None of that is a joke.

I was **particularly obsessed** with the rapture, which is the belief that Jesus will come again in the clouds and believers will rise to meet him there while God unleashes hell on earth.

- And so, if **for any reason** I couldn’t find my parents in the house, I’d run through the house in a panic certain I’d find my mom’s clothes fallen into a pile on the floor... In the movies that’s what happened. **Why naked?**
  - I had this **recurring dream**...

- There was a **book that came out when I was in high school** that became an instant best seller: *88 Reasons Why Jesus is Coming Back in 1988*.” **Pic** (Specifically on **Sept 11, 12 or 13**, the week of the Jewish Feast Rosh Hashanah)
  - This thing sold **2 million copies** in the space of just a few weeks!
  - It was written by Edgar Whisenant, a NASA engineer, and so you had **spaceships and Scripture**. Perfect recipe for **capturing** the attention of superstitious Christians.
  - A lot of people pushed back and said, “But Scripture says that no man knows the day or hour of Jesus’s return.” Whisenant said, “I don’t know the day or the hour. I just know the week: Sept 11–13.”
  - I went to a **Christian school, and that was right at the beginning of soccer season**... “We’re going to sit here and wait...”
- Well, suffice it to say that **Sept 11–13** came and went. You’d think that would have been the **end of Whisenant’s** teaching ministry, but the next year he came out with a book claiming he had done the math wrong, *89 Reasons Why Jesus is Coming Back in 1989*. I **kid you not**. I got that copy, too.

Now, you **may not have had that experience**, but I know for a fact that some of you still have some Y2K food tucked in a closet somewhere and that you own **every volume of the *Left Behind*** series. Show of hands?

**I’m glad we’re not obsessed like that at this church**, but I think we actually might fall into an opposite and even more pernicious error. Most Christians today **rarely think about** the 2<sup>nd</sup> coming of Christ...

- But get this: **the 2<sup>nd</sup> coming of Christ is the most talked about doctrine** in the Bible.
- The Bible talks about the **1<sup>st</sup> coming of Christ a measly 129x** (and we have a whole holiday for that). Yet it talks about the 2<sup>nd</sup> coming 329 times, and we rarely mention it.

- For every **1 prophecy** in the Bible concerning Christ’s first advent, there are **8 that talk about his second**.

**And really, to understand his first advent** you need to see it through lens of his second, which is **what the book of Revelation is about**.

**Now, the bad news is that we don’t have time for a full series through Revelation**—that’s on my future sermon wish-list for another day—but I wanted to take the next **4 weeks** as we head into Christmas to look at **glimpses of Jesus given to us in the book of Revelation**, because, see, that’s **what Revelation is really all about**.

To John, who wrote 4 other books in the NT... Gospel and 3 letters  
*Check out the first verse...*

[1:1] The *revelation of Jesus Christ*, which God gave him to show to his servants *the things that must soon take place*.

- “*Revelation*” means “unveiling.” The revelation of Jesus Christ. Now, the *question* is Jesus the one doing the unveiling, or is it Jesus himself who is being unveiled?
  - Do you get that? If I say, “Ladies and Gentlemen, today we have the presentation of Hank Murphy.” Does that mean Hank is about to present something to us—his solar system that he made for the science fair—or that we are *presenting Hank Murphy* (under a different name like Branan)?
  - Is it **the revelation of Jesus**, or a revelation by Jesus (of something else)? And the answer is... **yes**. In fact, scholars say *the way it is written in Greek is ambiguous*, because what follows is both a **revelation of Jesus** and also a **revelation from Jesus** about the things that must soon take place.
- The main point of Revelation is not to give you a **specific timeline** of events or help you figure out *which beast is Vladimir Putin, Donald Trump or Hillary Clinton* (although that sounds like a pretty scary 3-headed beast); the point is to **pull back the curtain of history** so you can see the powers at work behind the politics on earth.

- **People read the book of Revelation**—with all the dragons and beasts and imagine it as this **delusional, fantasy-world**.
  - But what it’s doing is looking at world through **spiritual eyes** to show you the powers at work behind what we see.
  - It’s actually **the most accurate depiction of the world** you’ll ever see.
  - **It’s the unveiling**. The **unmasking** of what is really going on—the **unveiling of both the powers at work** in the world and Jesus’s power above them all.
  - It reminds me of one of my favorite **Nicolas Cage movies**, *Faceoff*. (Next to *The Rock*, *Raising Arizona*, *Family Man*, *Con-Air* and both *National Treasures*, it’s the best). Nicolas Cage goes into a coma, and John Travolta steals his face (he has a doctor cut it off and put it on him) and then he impersonates Cage in order to gain classified information and steal weapons. He looks like Nicolas Cage, but he’s not... then Nicolas Cage wakes up from his coma without his face, which is always a bad day, so he forces the doctor to put Travolta’s face on him, and *therein lies the drama*. No one knows who is whom. So the climax of the movie is when **who is whom is unveiled**.
  - Think of the book of Revelation as **the “Faceoff” of the New Testament**. Jesus gets unveiled for who he is. The ones who seem to have power are shown to have none; the one who seems to have known is shown to have it all: *Faceoff*
    - (I might get my seminary degree revoked for that analogy. **I’ve always wanted to preach a message where I could say that** Jesus is the truer and better...)

**You see, the church at this point in history is not doing particularly well**—especially John, the author of Revelation.

- **All of the Apostles** have been martyred, except for John, and he’s exiled on the **isle of Patmos**, the Roman equivalent of Alcatraz. He’d been tortured—the Romans had tortured him...
- Nero had made Christians the scapegoat for a number of Rome’s calamities and used that as a pretext for hunting them down and killing them. And **one of his successors, Domitian**, was preparing

to unleash a far worse persecution, unless Christians consented to worship Caesar as Lord, which of course they couldn't do.

- **John, from his remote isle in Patmos**, sees these storm clouds starting to build up.
- This was not a **#GDTBAC**

So, on this lonely, forsaken island of Patmos, Jesus **appears to John**, in his prison cell, and gives him as revelation of who he is and what he is doing in all of this.

Now, you and I are **not facing the same kinds** of persecution. It's **not illegal** where we live to follow Jesus. **(I should add, of course, that for many of our m's listening they are in places where it is) but regardless, we wrestle** with many of the same questions. Many of you **face powers** you believe vastly overwhelm your own. You can see storm clouds rising on the horizon of your life.

- That may come in the form of **some chronic illness.**
- Walking through **divorce.**
- Or an **addiction you can't shake.**
- A **problem with your kids.**
- Or maybe it's just a dark cloud of **anxiety or depression** that hovers over your life!

And now, along comes **Christmas**, which is supposedly all about happiness and good cheer. But **truth be told** you can't stand this time of year, because all it does is remind you of the empty place at your table or the broken relationship that was supposed to last forever that is no more.

- Maybe you **come in today ready to give up.**
- You're not even sure **why you are here.**
- You **certainly didn't come in looking** for hope. You are long past that.

John wrote this book for you: **"I, John, your brother and companion in suffering..." (1:9)**

[10] I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet... [12] Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking to me, and on turning I saw seven golden lampstands, [13] 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. These are images that point to **Jesus being the high priest,**

[14] The hairs of his head were white, like white wool, like snow. His eyes were like a flame of fire, [15] his feet were like burnished bronze, refined in a furnace, and his voice was like the roar of many waters. [16] 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.

These are all **symbols of ultimate power and control.**

- White hair in those days symbolized wisdom; so saying he had brilliant white hair, like snow, means he's wiser than the wise;
- Having eyes of fire means his insight penetrates more deeply than the sharpest laser.
- Having a face brighter than the brightest sun; a voice is louder than the loudest ocean (which indicates not just decibel level, but volume and fullness and immensity) means this is someone with power beyond what John can even imagine
- His words are like a sword, which means they possess the ability to pierce, to separate into part, and to destroy.
- The seven stars he holds, we see in chapter 2, represent the churches, which, shows you that in the midst of all the turmoil, Jesus securely holds the church in his hands.<sup>1</sup>

[17] **When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead.**

- Now, **keep in mind**, this is the first time John has seen Jesus since the ascension, and Jesus and John had been BFF's on earth.

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<sup>1</sup> Tim Keller, "The Cosmic King," from the series *Revelation: The Final Word*, preached at Redeemer Presbyterian Church on May 23, 1993.

- In fact, in his Gospel, John rather **confidently refers to himself** as “the one that Jesus loved,” which I’ve always thought took a **lot of nerve** to put in print.
- **Imagine that as your email signature?** “The one that Jesus loves.” John was like, “Jesus likes you, too... but I’m his favorite.”
- At any rate, John must have felt pretty confident about it.
- (In actuality—saying **‘the one Jesus that loves’** is John’s personal amazement that Jesus kept on loving him until the end despite how badly John had failed Jesus. The tense of the verb really implies, *‘the one that Jesus kept on loving’*. It’s not expressing favoritism so much as John’s amazement at Jesus’s grace in his life.<sup>2</sup>)
- **At the last supper**, John says he **reclined his head** and leaned it back on Jesus’ chest (John 13:23). I’ve got some guy friends that I feel pretty close to, but **none that feel close enough** that they would lean their head back on my chest during dinner.
  - You know who would do that? **My son. This is how John felt about Jesus.**
  - Suffice it to say, **John and Jesus** were close.
  - And this is the first time they are seeing each other in almost **60 years**. So, what does this reunion entail?
- He falls at Jesus’ feet *as though he were dead*. And **that’s not intended to be a figure of speech**. He literally thought he was going to die.
  - **I grew up with a picture of Jesus in one of my Christian School classrooms...** You might have seen the same one. It seemed to be the **most popular** one back in the day. It looked like an Olan Mills portrait. He had perfect skin. Full lips. Beautiful, braided Brooke-Shields hair. He had this expression... (like he’d just seen a bird fly by). You **know the one I’m talking about?** **NIC CAGE gif** (hey, it’s Big...)
  - ...But **my image of Jesus was** this sad, jobless guy with tears in his eyes who talked a lot about his feelings

- **First, I’m not sure where get that image anyway.** Jesus was a carpenter, a table-maker... which means he would have been **rugged and buff**.
- But **that’s definitely not what we see here in Revelation**. He’s got wild hair, this crazy look in his eye... even if you take it at face value, he’s the kind of guy you’d never want to run into in a back alley—but **when you understand all the symbolism** you realize it’s pointing to someone so powerful John feels like he is going to die.

Now, is **this a different Jesus** than the one John had known? No, it’s just that when he was here, and even now, this **part of him is veiled**, invisible to the naked eye.

- **Truth be told, Jesus has always had this power**, but throughout his ministry on earth it had been veiled.
  - For example, **thinking of feeding of the 5000**. We think cool trick. Quaint miracle. But **I read a scientist who considered the question of how much power** would it take to generate the matter to create the food necessary to feed the 5000? Remember, Jesus created that food out of thin air standing on a hillside. The scientist assumed each person ate **8 oz of food**, using Einstein’s infamous matter to energy formula ( $E=MC^2$ ), he concluded that the **amount of energy necessary to create that much matter** would be equivalent to all the electrical power available on earth, working at 100% output, 100% of the time, for 4 years straight, again, just to create the energy to create the matter for that meal. And **Jesus did it without breaking a sweat**.
- That power was always there; you just **couldn’t see it**. It was **veiled**. And here it is, **now, unveiled** in all its strength.

**So why is Jesus appearing this way now to John?** Why not appear as John knew him on earth?

- Because Jesus’s **plan right now is not to deliver his church** from persecution and pain.

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.daveblackonline.com/disciple\\_whom\\_jesus\\_kept\\_on\\_lovi1.htm](https://www.daveblackonline.com/disciple_whom_jesus_kept_on_lovi1.htm)

- He's **not showing up with news**, "Hey, don't worry. It gets better."
  - It's **not going to get better**, at least in the near future.
- So, instead, **he shows John his power**, his majesty and his love so that John can hope in that in the midst of these things.
- **You see, in times of intense persecution**, you don't need a sentimental Jesus who simply makes you feel warm at night—a Jesus who is one part genie, one part therapist, one part life-coach and the rest warm-blanket; you need to **see a Jesus sovereign over all** the other powers at work in the world.

**Watch what happens next:** [17] But he laid his right hand on me, saying, "Fear not, I am the first and the last,

- **First and last.** In our **study of Colossians** we saw what this means. It means that **Jesus is God**, right?
- **Because Jesus is God**, it means he was there at the beginning; and if because he's God he'll be there at the end.
- **And if he was there at the beginning and he'll be there at the end, we can** be sure he's in control in the middle as well.

**Jesus continues...**

- [18] I am the living one. I died and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades.
- And the guy who has the keys has the power! Right?
  - **Illus. I was once at a place—maybe a hotel—where they had all these expensive cars... Lamborghini**—You have to look. Brothers, am I right? Guy starts it up remotely. "You can look, but you're not taking that anywhere. It doesn't go anywhere without me."
  - **This is what Jesus is doing.** The powers of the world, even death and hell, they look powerful, but I have the keys. They don't go anywhere without me.
  - **They are just my servants** now, serving my purposes.
- And **that means, John**, that the **power of the Empire—the power of Nero and Domitian—is just an illusion.**

- Psalm 76 says God makes even the wrath of sinful men to praise him.
- Prov 21:1, The heart of the King is like a river in the hand of the Lord. He turns it whatever way he chooses.
- **Listen:** If God controls even the anger of sinful men the hearts of pagan kings, he's surely got everything else under control as well.
- Eph 1: Paul says that we **"...we have been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will."**
  - **Two words: Purpose/all things.** There is not one stray molecule, not one stray cancer cell, not one stray spouse.
- **Or here's another one:** "Are not two sparrows sold for a cent? And yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. The very hairs of your head are all numbered!" (For some of you men, God has a much easier time with that than he used to!) **(Matt 10:29–30)**.
  - It's **hard to get more micro** than that—Birds in the sky and hairs on your head! Nothing happens apart from the will of the Father.
  - I **do want to be careful** here. I'm **not saying that God** is the one making all these things happen to you. We live in a fallen world, and the result is a lot of people do a lot of terrible things to each other.
  - I'm saying that **Jesus promises that none of those things are outside his control** and he promises to use every single one as a part of his perfect purposes in your life.

Like John, we may feel like we are upon the **precipice of tribulation**. And the purposes God is pursuing **may remain a mystery** to us until eternity. But **the resurrection of Jesus** and **this vision of Jesus**, assure us there is a **purpose that Jesus is pursuing** and he will not fail to fulfill it.

- I've heard it described like a **TAPESTRY**.

- One day Jesus will **flip the picture of history** over, and we'll see **that through all of history** he's been weaving into our lives the beautiful image of himself. And our lives.
- **His purpose.**

**That's the vision** God gives us in the midst of tribulation.

**You see, the world we live in now is characterized by Jesus's first coming.** Jesus was born poor, meek and mild, in a manger. He lived every one of his days under the authority of Rome. He was born into a system of severe oppression and his family had to flee from their home as refugees.

- And that's **still the epoch of history** that we are in. Which means that, like Jesus, we'll find ourselves sometimes in hardship. Victims of injustice. Suffering unnecessarily. Subject to the powers of Rome.
- (And **people who try to tell you that being a Christian** means escaping all that are not telling you the truth.)
- So, Jesus **pulls back the veil and gives us a glimpse** of who he is: because he died for us and overcame death, and **because he is the one standing** at the end, and because he has the keys, I know that in this middle part he is faithfully working out his purposes..
- **Or say it this way: Because he's the one standing at the end, I can be sure he has a plan in the present.**
  - (Friend, "Watching a great show..." 24. Where were you for the decade of the 2000's? 3<sup>rd</sup> season. He dies? He comes back. Not a spoiler... His face is on the box! It may look like the bad guys are in charge, but they are not the ones writing the script.
  - **John says, look: "The powers on earth can do all they want; but they are not the ones writing the script, and **their face is not the one on the back of the box!****

"John," Jesus says, "Look at me. I am more powerful than you could ever imagine."

- **Look at me, John: I died for you...** in your worst moment I showed my love for you. **Look at me, John: I have the keys of death and hell."**
  - John, you may not understand why you are suffering, or what it means. But you can know what it can't mean... I can't mean that I have forgotten you or lost control of your situation.
  - Take that off the table
- **John, look at me:** I used my greatest power to save you, and now I am using that same power to perfect my purposes in you.
- **So, what are you afraid of?**
  - Do you really think Caesar is winning? (The only legacy he's going to leave is a **cheap pizza place** that hubs itself in gas stations).
  - And, NERO? Don't be afraid of Nero. One day the name John will be the most common name in the English language and people will name their dogs Nero.
- **John, look at me: I have the keys to death and hell.**
  - **To you:** Do you think I can't control cancer? *I have the keys to that...*
  - Do you think I don't know you need a job? *Keys...*
  - Do you think I don't know you're worried about your marriage? *Keys...*
- **John, LOOK AT ME!** Look at my power! Look at my control! Look at my love! **Why do you doubt?**

**Let me tell you what I most love about John:**

- **John is the Apostle who most talked about the love of God.** Paul may have been the church's greatest theologian, but no Bible writer comes close to John in their description of the beauty of the love of God.
  - Paul about salvation: justification; propitiation; predestination.
  - **John: John 3:16/1** John 3:1/
  - In fact, 1 John 4:8
  - **How could he say that?** Patmos certainly didn't feel like love. Rome didn't feel like love. Boiled in oil didn't feel like love.

- **Yesterday** didn't feel like love. Today didn't feel like love. **Tomorrow** doesn't look like love.
- It's **because he'd seen Jesus!**
  - **1 John:** "I've seen him. I've touched him. Felt the warmth of his embrace. Tenderness in his friendship. Love in his eyes. Then I saw his cross."<sup>3</sup>
  - **Then "I've seen his power." Resurrection and Rev 1.**
- **I know it doesn't feel like it now**, but trust me, he's love! And this is love.

### Conclusion / Music (It is Well)

**Here's what I know:** Some of you need to see Jesus this way this Christmas.

- Some of you **really want to hear me say**, "God is going to end all your problems."
- **But that is not necessarily true.** At least in the short run. The time of tribulation may last a little while longer. (It won't be forever, but it may be a for a little while longer. We're still in the season of the 1<sup>st</sup> advent of Christ.
- And **you need a theology that accounts for that.** You may think you want a theology that promises that if you're a good person then God will remove all the problems of your life.
- **But here's the thing:** You'll never come to know Jesus that way. The only way to come to know Jesus sometimes is to go through problems.
  - And I know **some of you don't want to hear that.** You are sitting there saying, "I don't receive that. I stand against that in the name of Jesus."
  - And I know I could grow a bigger church if I would promise you they'll all go away.
- **But see, it is through these problems** God makes you stronger. Isaiah says that God wants to turn us into **oaks of righteousness**.

<sup>3</sup> 1 John 1:1-4

- **Oaks in storm-rich areas are the strongest**, because winds force the roots to go deeper.
- **You don't get stronger sitting on a beach**, you get stronger going through the storm.

**I acknowledge that these problems** are real and they could take you out.

- Cancer is real can take you out. **Divorce** can take you out. A **spouse abandoning** you can take you out. **Addiction** can take you out.
- **Abuse** is real and can take you out.
- **Losing a child** is real and can take you out.
- I'm **just here tell you** that **Jesus is real, too**, and he's bigger than that problem.

Christian Counselor Larry Crabb—I love Rev 1 for counseling: "On the island of Patmos Jesus did not give John relief from dire circumstances. Instead he gave him an unforgettable vision of the Son of God." Larry Crabb

I'm **not trying to put a little one-size-fits-all Band-Aid** on your problem.

- I realize that some problems like this are complex and require professional help...

**It's time for some of you to stop shouting at your tribulation and start gazing at your Savior.** And to see that there is no power on earth, not even the power present in your problems that compares to his.

**The key to victory in tribulation is WORSHIP.**

**Listen, this isn't a cliché—this will save your life:** *Worship is not just the 4 songs we sing before the sermon; worship is a weapon you carry with you at all times that pierces through the clouds of darkness and despair and draws you into the light.*

- **That's what Rev 1 is: It's a vision designed to move John to worship.**
- Worship says, "*I feel like this...* but you have revealed yourself as this
- **These problems are big. But you are bigger. They hurt, but you are better.**

This is **what many of you need**. You need to choose to worship in the midst of his tribulation.

- To **say to yourself**, in the midst of pain and overwhelming despair, **even when you don't** feel like it: "*When peace like a river...*"
- LEAD CONGREGATION?

Stop shouting at your problem and start gazing at your Savior.

**Ryah with AGL:** Local hero of faith/Friend... "I don't most need your sympathy. I don't most need your advice. I don't even most need a miracle. Just give me Jesus! Just give me Jesus.

- **That's what you need!**

Stand / Prayer Teams/ Dismissal