

# Jesus and His Church (1): A Picture of Christ

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(Revelation 1:12-18)

## I. Introduction

A. Results were released of study by *Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life*

1. It showed Americans believe—92% believe in God & 75% pray regularly
  - a. Only 16% of 36,000 surveyed said religion was not important to them
  - b. 40% say they attend church regularly (*Another study: 20% actually do*)
  - c. 79% believe in miracles while 68% believe in angels and demons
2. But while most believe in Christ, most don't see him as only path to heaven
  - a. About 70 % believe there are others ways to heaven other than Jesus
  - b. **Surprise:** 57% of “*evangelicals*” believe that there are other way to God
    - 1) They accept Christ, but are willing to accept Buddha/Mohammed too
    - 2) Jesus is one of many spiritual counselors or gurus that lead us to God
3. Those kinds of contradictions are seen all through the results of the survey
  - a. 12% of Orthodox Christians speak or pray in tongues once a week
  - b. 29% of Catholics believe in an impersonal force rather personal God
  - c. 20% of atheists says that they believe in a God or a universal spirit.
4. I like this observation by Dr. Michael Lindsay, a sociologist at Rice  
*The issue with religion in America is not that Americans don't believe in anything, it's that they believe in everything. Religion is 3,000 miles wide, but it's only 3 inches deep*

B. *What do we believe?* Our world makes a deep faith difficult does it not?

1. What exactly do we see when we look at the world around us?
  - a. We see **geopolitical** chaos—radical Islam, terror and unending war
  - b. We see **environmental** chaos—constant storms, earthquake, drought, etc
  - c. We see **economic** chaos— how high can gas go before system collapses?
  - d. We see **personal** chaos in our lives— *sickness, unemployment, divorce*
2. Faith leads us to sing, “*Majesty, worship his majesty; unto Jesus...*”
  - a. Sometimes real life doesn't seem to match the words of our songs!
  - b. Sometimes the world, for all the world, seems to be totally out of control
  - c. In world of uncertainty, we need to decide what we believe is really real

- C. That was the world at the end of the first century—total and complete chaos
1. Domitian Caesar declared himself “*lord and god*” and demanded worship
    - a. It was much worship—just a pinch of incense and a formalize prayer
    - b. Domitian just wanted to be worship alongside others gods and deities
      - 1) Church refused emperor worship, and Rome launched a persecution
      - 2) All of a sudden, trying to follow God meant risking pain and death.
    - c. If Jesus was Lord, why did Domitian seem to be holding the real power?
  2. About 70 miles southwest of Ephesus was the prison island of Patmos.
    - a. Apostle John was exiled there after outliving Peter and Paul by 30 years).
    - b. Caesar sent the old man there to shut him up... but he wouldn’t shut up
      - 1) One Sunday morning, he was visited by friend hadn’t seen in 60 yrs.
      - 2) Jesus said, “*Write what you see*” and held back curtain of cosmos.
    - c. What we see isn’t plot of *Left Behind*; what we see picture of Jesus
  3. It’s a picture of Jesus far different from *Bruce Marciano* or *Jim Caviezel*
  4. We need this morning is to see this picture of Jesus (**Revelation 1:12-18**)

## II. The Opening Vision of the Christ

- A. This bizarre picture of Christ was designed to have emotional impact on church
1. **First**, it speaks of **AUTHORITY**; robe tied at chest with gold sash (**13**).
    - a. A everyday Roman tunic was secured at the waist with a cloth belt
    - b. Royal robes had golden sashes, so Jesus is presented here as a king.
  2. **Second**, it speaks of **PURITY**; head and hair are white as wool (**1:14**).
    - a. White is a symbol of purity; it has that significance often in the book.
    - b. Martyrs under the altar in **Rev 6:11** are given white robes to wear.
  3. **Third**, it points to His **VISION**; His eyes are blazing fire (**1:14**).
    - a. It was Jesus’ eyesight of Jesus that most worried the 1<sup>st</sup> century church
    - b. Could He not see what was going on; did he know His people suffered?
    - c. John here assures the church that Jesus does see; His eyes penetrate all.
  4. **Fourth**, it stresses **POWER**; His feet blaze and His voice thunders (**1:15**).
    - a. His feet will trample all those who dare to oppose him.
    - b. His voice, like pounding surf, carries power and weight of authority.

5. **Fifth**, it points to **JUDGMENT**; Double-edged sword in his mouth (**1:16**).
    - a. In **Rev 19**, that sword from His mouth will destroy Christ's enemies.
    - b. This is the sword of judgment; Christ had not forgotten about justice.
  6. **Sixth**, it speaks to **RESURRECTION (1:17-18)**. Was dead, is now alive.
    - a. It is Christ, and not Rome, who holds the power of death and Hades.
    - b. Jesus's message to John is also His message to us, "*Do not be afraid!*"
- B. It appeared to all the world for all the world that all of the world was Rome's.
1. Church faced extinction because a megalomaniac proclaimed himself god.
    - a. Christians recognized only one God and they would worship no other
    - b. When they refused to share worship, Domitian launched his attack
  2. At height of this holocaust, Christians wondered who really was Lord God.
    - a. How could a few powerless Christians bear up under imperial weight?
    - b. Where was Christ. Who really sat on the throne of the universe?
  3. Revelation begins by assuring us Christ is Lord; He was on the throne
- C. But then Christ was not just relaxing as he sat on His throne as well (**1:19-20**).
1. Lampstands are the 7 churches of Asia to which the book is written (**1:11**)
    - a. The 7 stars that Jesus holds in his hand are the 7 angels of the 7 churches.
    - b. The word "*angel*" means "*messenger*" ("*To the angel of the church at...*")
      - 1) These may be angels who deliver the letter or elders who receive it
      - 2) Don't get hung up on the angels; the main point is absolutely crucial
  2. *Where is Jesus in this opening vision? In middle of the church! (1:13)*.
    - a. Yes, the church suffers terribly, but Jesus was right there with them.
    - b. He knows their suffering. He suffered for them and suffers with them
      - 1) Jesus knows. Hew also knows their weaknesses and their betrayals.
      - 2) He begins the 7 letters to the 7 churches, "*I know your works...*"
  3. It is usually bad form to read other people's mail, but that what we'll do
    - a. Over the next 7 weeks we will read Jesus' mail to these 7 churches
    - b. The letters are addressed to Ephesus, Smyrna, Thyatira and the rest.
    - c. They are ultimately addressed to the church today... to us at Denbigh!
  4. **Same Point:** Jesus is present in His church us and He knows His church

### III. Apocalypse Now: Conclusion

- A. Revelation is confusing; it's hard to follow outline or understand its visions
1. How to apply those visions has always been the subject of much debate.
    - a. Some see a comprehensive timeline of history from 1<sup>st</sup> century to end.
    - b. Others see a blueprint of not-so-distant future of the 2<sup>nd</sup> coming
    - c. Some see specific prediction of the fall of Caesar and victory of church
  2. Each view has its points and proponents... and maybe the same weakness.
    - a. If Revelation speaks only to past or future, what does it say to present?
    - b. It must speak to the present of struggling Christians of every generation
      - 1) It must speak to Roman Christians being slaughtered by Domitian
      - 2) It must speak to those in the Middle Ages of Inquisition & Crusades
      - 3) It must be a word from God to these who suffer for their faith today
  3. Revelation was not primarily written to past or future, but to the present.
    - a. Speaks to struggling Christians of all generation and every circumstance
    - b. Revelation speaks afresh to church today, and it always begins the same
      - 1) It points us to Christ as the alpha and Omega, the beginning and end
      - 2) It reminds us of his power, authority, justice, vision... and presence
  4. Thru the darkness of chaos around us, we see a shining vision of Christ
- B. I remember seeing a T-Shirt with most depressing and distressing thought—  
*"I'm not a slave to God that does not exist; I'm a slave to a world that does not care"*
1. How sad to think that all that is on throne is an uncaring, unfeeling world
    - a. John screams to us from Patmos down through time, *"That's not true!"*
    - b. There is one who sits on the throne and rules over the universe
      - 1) Not everything that happens is His will because he gives us free will
      - 2) But ultimately He will is going to be done— the word in His mouth
  2. The question is not who reigns but what will we do about it?
    - a. Will we worship his majesty? Will we exalt lift up the name of Jesus?
      - 1) If Jesus is on the throne, then e deserves your worship and obedience
      - 2) If he is not, then you are the slave of a world that really doesn't care
    - b. Jesus Christ reigns... So what are you going to do about it?