



## Sermon Transcript

### June 21, 2020

# God's One Story of Redemption

## The Revelation of Jesus

### Revelation 1:1-20

This message from the Bible was addressed originally to the people of Wethersfield Evangelical Free Church on June 21, 2020 at 511 Maple Street, Wethersfield, CT, 06109 by Dr. Scott W. Solberg. This is a transcription that bears the strength and weaknesses of oral delivery. It is not meant to be a polished essay. An audio and video version of this sermon may also be found on the church website at [www.wethefc.com](http://www.wethefc.com)

**Sermon Text**  
**Revelation 1:1-20**

<sup>1</sup>The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show to his servants the things that must soon take place. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John, <sup>2</sup> who bore witness to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw. <sup>3</sup> Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear, and who keep what is written in it, for the time is near.

<sup>4</sup> John to the seven churches that are in Asia: Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven spirits who are before his throne, <sup>5</sup> and from Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth.

To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood <sup>6</sup> and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. <sup>7</sup> Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him, and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him. Even so. Amen. <sup>8</sup> I am the Alpha and the Omega,” says the Lord God, “who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.”

<sup>9</sup> I, John, your brother and partner in the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance that are in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. <sup>10</sup> I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet <sup>11</sup> saying, “Write what you see in a book and send it to the seven churches, to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamum and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea.”

<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.

## Introduction

This morning we come to the final letter of CASKET EMPTY—the letter “Y.” The letter “Y” stands for “Yet to Come.” This letter lands us in the final book of the Bible, the book of Revelation. Now, as soon as I say that we are in the book of Revelation, ears perk up with a sense of anticipation. There tends to be a fascination with this book because it speaks to the future. The letter “Y” itself points us to the future. The book of Revelation speaks of things that are “yet to come.” But would you be surprised if I told you that this book has as much to do with the present as it does with the future?

John squarely lands this book in the present when he says in Revelation 1:9 that he is a *“brother and partner in the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance that are in Jesus.”* This is his present reality.

John’s present reality is one of suffering and *tribulation*. He is writing this letter while exiled to the island of Patmos. He concludes verse 9 by saying that he was on the island of Patmos *on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus*. This was during the reign of the Roman Emperor Domitian. He insisted on being worshiped as a god and those who refused were punished with public beatings, confiscation of property, exile and even death. Obviously, this call to worship the Emperor caused a problem for Christians throughout the Roman Empire who confessed Jesus to be Lord. And so like his brothers and sisters throughout the Roman Empire at the time, John was a *partner* with them in their *tribulation . . . on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus*. This is a serious letter written for serious times. It was a time of *tribulation*.

Now at the same time, John says that his present reality is that he is also a *partner . . . in the kingdom*. From our study in the New Testament—the word EMPTY—we know that the kingdom of God has come in the person of Jesus. It is a present reality. This was the message Jesus preached; the long expected *kingdom of God is at hand*. He proved that the kingdom of God has come through his miracles. Then Jesus brought about the

present kingdom of God through his death on the cross. I love the way Paul puts it in Colossians 2:15. Speaking of the cross of Jesus he says that God *disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in Jesus*. In other words, at the cross, Jesus defeated Satan. The battle is already won. Jesus rose from the dead! Jesus ascended to heaven as the exalted Lord. The kingdom of God is now advancing through *blood of the lamb and the word of our testimony*.

Consequently, John says that he is also a *partner . . . in the patient endurance that is in Jesus*. He is encouraging the church to not lose hope in the midst of their *tribulation*. Their suffering and *tribulation* is not a sign that all is lost. It may feel like that is the case. But actually the opposite is true. It is through carrying our cross that God often advances his kingdom. Church history has shown us time and time again that this is indeed true. Long have we heard and seen the testimony that “the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church.” And so as John is writing this letter to a suffering church he is encouraging them to *patiently endure* because the kingdom of God has gone viral. It is the same thing Jesus said in Matthew 24:13. After warning his disciples in verse 9, “*Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and put you to death, and you will be hated by all nations for my name’s sake;*” he then adds in verse 13, “*But the one who endures to the end will be saved.*” So like Jesus, John is encouraging his readers, by letting them know that he too is a *partner . . . in the patient endurance that are in Jesus*.

So what is it that John offers in this letter that will enable his readers—which include you and me—to *patiently endure* to the end? He offers us a “revelation.” Notice that the word *revelation* in verse 1 is singular. It is not plural, “revelations.” Rather, it is a singular *revelation*. And what is that singular *revelation* that John offers us to give us strength to *patiently endure*? It is “*the revelation of Jesus Christ*.” This gets to the heart of what the word *revelation* means (in Greek it is the word *apocalypsis*—from which we get the word apocalypse). The word *revelation* means “to see behind the veil.” David Palmer says it this way, “Revelation pulls back the veil and allows us to see a single extended vision of God in his heavenly sanctuary.”<sup>1</sup> It is a sneak peek into heaven. And what do we see? We see the Lord enthroned. We see the Lord worshiped in the beauty of his holiness. We see all the heavenly host and the redeemed from every nation—too many to count—surrounding the Lord in worship. We see God in control, accomplishing his purposes on earth. And so the book of Revelation is first and foremost “*the revelation of Jesus Christ*.” It is not primarily a book about the end times. Instead it is a book that pulls back the curtain for a people who may have trouble seeing God through the clouds of their *tribulation* and gives them a peek into heaven where they (and we) are able to see the **present rule of Jesus and the future glory of Jesus**.

## You Must See Jesus

Basically, John is saying through the book of Revelation that the key to “keep on keeping on” is to keep your eyes on Jesus. That is the same thing Paul says in Colossians 3:1-5. “*Since you have been raised to new life with Christ, set your sights on the realities of heaven, where Christ sits in the place of honor at God’s right hand. Think about the things of heaven, not the things of earth. For you died to this life, and your real life is hidden with Christ in God. And when Christ, who is your life, is revealed to the whole world, you will share in all his glory.*” And then Paul says, as result of keeping your eyes on Jesus, . . . “*So put to death the sinful, earthly things lurking within you.*” By keeping our eyes on Jesu, we can endure.

Are you in need of *patient endurance* this morning? A common refrain that I hear right now—and I confess I have said this as well—is that “these are difficult days.” It sure seems that way. We still don’t know how to fully react to the virus. There is an ever present unrest in our country as we grapple with matters of race and try to discern how to best heal and bring about further reform. The ruling this past week by the Supreme Court on sexual orientation and gender identity has called into question the implications this will have on religious freedom, let alone the impact it will have on our culture. Add to that the underlying tone of our culture—what Kevin DeYoung calls “my-sideism.”<sup>2</sup> When everyone is pointing the finger at the other—and it is coming from all sides—it is hard to sit down at the table and find common ground and come up with solutions. And so consequently, everything feels very unstable. And then add to all of this “going on out there” your own very personal and family struggle, your health issues and your financial struggles. While you are at it, throw in some of your spiritual struggles, your disappointment with God and with life and your doubts and your disenchantment with the church and the loneliness you feel in living out your faith in a deeply secular culture. Are you in need of *patient endurance* this morning?

I wonder if John might turn to you this morning, while sitting in exile on the island of Patmos, and give you a knowing glance. Might he say to you and me this morning. “I get where you are coming from. I am your “*brother and partner in the tribulation.*” But don’t forget, we are also brothers and sisters—partners—in the present kingdom of God. And so, I call you to *patiently endure.*” But how? How can we endure with patience in a time like this? John looks at us and says, “I have something for you to see. Let me pull back the veil and give you a glimpse of heaven. Look! There he is! This week, I want you to see the **present ruling Jesus.** Next week I want you to see the **future coming glory of Jesus.** Keep your eyes on Jesus! That is the point of Revelation!

We could spend weeks looking at what Revelation 1 tells us about Jesus. In fact, I would encourage you to read over Revelation 1 several times this week and take note of the various things John says about Jesus in this opening chapter of his extended vision of Jesus. But this morning I would like to highlight three things John reveals to us about Jesus in this passage.

- Jesus is the Faithful Witness who himself endured the cross.
- Jesus is the Victor who has overcome the world.
- Jesus is the Glorious Son of Man who is present with his church.

Keep your eyes on Jesus!

### **Jesus: The Faithful Witness**

The very first thing John reveals about Jesus is found in his greeting in verse 5. In verses 4-5 you discover that John is writing this letter to seven churches that are located in Asia Minor. In Revelation 2-3 he has a personalized message for each of these churches. They were real churches in real time. At the same time, this letter was a circular letter. That means it was meant to be circulated beyond these seven churches. In addition to that, it is no accident that John wrote this letter to “seven” churches. The number seven is a predominant number in the book of Revelation, it is the number of perfection or completion. You see the number “seven” in verse 4 when he refers to *the seven spirits who are before his throne.* That is a reference to the Holy Spirit, the number seven cluing us into the fact that he is speaking of divine perfection. In fact, this is a Trinitarian greeting: it is a greeting from the eternal God our Father *who is, who was and who is to come.* The *seven spirits* is the Holy Spirit of perfection, fully God. Then Jesus is mentioned. So by writing to *seven churches*, this is not just a revelation for these seven churches, it is a revelation for “the church” in completion and in full—the church that extends all the way to the “Year of our Lord 2020.” It is a word for the church known as Wethersfield Evangelical Free Church.

And what is the first thing John tells us about our Lord? He says of Jesus in verse 5 that Jesus Christ is *the faithful witness.* Do you know what this title tells us about Jesus? It tells us that not only is John, the beloved apostle, a *brother and partner in the tribulation.* I would imagine that as this letter was circulated among a persecuted church that John’s words would carry quite a bit of weight not just because he is an apostle, but also because he is in it with them. He has been exiled. He is suffering just like they are suffering. His call for *patient endurance* is not just an academic thing. John

is not just espousing theoretical truth. No, this real life for John. John is a *partner in the tribulation*. But it is not just John who suffers with the rest of them. Jesus also suffered. Jesus also is a *brother and partner in the tribulation*.

John tells us that as Jesus suffered, he was *faithful*. The Divine Son of God humbled himself and took on human flesh and Paul tells us in Philippians 2 that *he was obedient to the point of death, even death on the cross*. It was through his suffering that God was most glorified and the work of redemption was accomplished. At the end of verse 5 John sings, *“To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood.”* Jesus has paved the way for us and has shown us how to endure with patience.

The endurance of Jesus through his suffering is a model for us. It says so much in Hebrews 12 where we are told to *run the race with endurance*. And the encouragement we are given is found in verse 2, *“looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross.”* And so when Jesus invites us to follow him he calls us to pick up our cross and follow him. In fact, Jesus tells us a disciple is not above his master. If the master has a cross to carry, so will the disciple.

And so as Steve reminded us last week from 1 Peter 4, when Peter says *“Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice insofar as you share Christ’s sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed.”* So, yes, we can say that “these are difficult days.” But can we say that they are any more difficult than what John and his readers experienced? If they endured with patience . . . and if Jesus endured with patience; we can too. Because we know that the one who died has risen again. We know that God uses our suffering to accomplish his purposes. We see the veil pulled back and standing around the throne of God are people from every nation. Some day we will be there. Some day we will see how God’s purposes come together. Keep your eyes on Jesus. He is the *faithful witness* who showed us how to endure with patience.

## Jesus: The Victor

The very next thing John tells us about Jesus is that *he is the firstborn of the dead*. It is a reference to the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. Kevin DeYoung says that the book of Revelation can be summed up with one word: Nike.<sup>3</sup> That is probably not the word you were thinking. *Nike* is the Greek word for victory. In fact, the now popular Nike swoosh that is on any apparel made by Nike is meant to resemble the wing of the Greek Goddess of Victory—Nike. The verb form for this word is used 28 times in the New

Testament, and 17 of those times it is used in Revelation. It is often translated *to overcome*. It means to “be the victor” or “the one who prevails” or “the one who conquers.” It is used to describe an army who defeats their enemy or an athlete who defeats an opponent. It is a word that is applied to Jesus who overcomes sin and death and Satan. This is exactly the testimony of what Paul is heard saying in 1 Corinthians 15:55-57, “*O death, where is your victory? O death where is your sting? . . . Thanks be to God who gives us victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.*” That is what Jesus was referring to when he said in John 16:33, “*In this world you will have tribulation. But take heart.*” Why? “*I have overcome the world.*”

The victory has already been won. We may have differences in the way we interpret some of the details of Revelation, but in spite of our varying opinions and views, we end up at the same place. In the end, God wins! That victory was sealed at the cross and the resurrection of Jesus, the Victor. And so that is why we read verses like this: “*I write to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one.*” (1 John 2:13) “*For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith.*” (1 John 5:4)

That sounds good. That sounds encouraging. But you might be tempted to say, “but when I look around, it is hard to find “the victory.” It kind of feels like the opposite is true. Have you forgotten that “these are difficult days.” But this gets to the heart of what it means to *overcome*. In the messages to the seven churches in Revelation 2-3, John mentions their challenges and struggles and temptations and feelings of irrelevance and obscurity in the vast Roman Empire. And to each of these churches he says, “*to the one who conquers*” that is to say “*to the one who overcomes.*” Do you know what the common characteristic is of the one *who overcomes*? It is *patient endurance*.

Kevin DeYoung says that “Revelation is the story of the Devil trying to conquer the church, but the church overcomes the Devil and the world because she belongs to the Lord who has won for us the victory,”<sup>4</sup> God uses the foolish things of this world to accomplish his victory. Take the cross for example. Graeme Goldsworthy says of the cross, “This, to the world’s way of thinking was the defeat of a pathetic dream. But God has declared this to be the decisive victory over Satan, sin and death.”<sup>5</sup> That should clue us in on how we overcome in this present age. In fact, Goldsworthy goes on to say, “Christ’s mopping up campaign against Satan is actually, marvelous to relate, is being worked out in the front-line trenches of local church evangelism . . . preaching and teaching . . . It is being worked out in the Christian home as children are instructed and taught the meaning of faith in the doing and dying of Christ. God is truly using the

foolish in the eyes of the world to shame the wise and is using what is weak in this world to shame the strong.”<sup>6</sup> Like we said a few weeks ago, God is using ordinary means to accomplish his extra-ordinary work. This is why we endure with patience. Our eyes are on Jesus, the Victor! He has already overcome. So keep on keeping on!

### Jesus: The Glorious Son of Man

The final image I want you to see is what John sees in verse 13. “*And in the midst of the lampstands one like a son of man.*” The *lampstands* represent the seven churches that John is writing to. In the presence of this persecuted church, you find the glorious Son of Man. This is exhilarating to me. This is the one who is currently among us.

Look at him! He is “*clothed with a long robe and a golden sash around his chest.*” In the day that John was writing this, this was the dress of someone dignified or someone important. “*The hairs of his head were white, like white wool, like snow*” signifying that he was filled with wisdom. In fact, the emphasis on “white” like wool and snow indicates that “all wisdom belongs to him.” “*His eye were like a flame of fire.*” and so nothing escapes his sight. That was one of the constant refrains that John said to the seven churches of Asia Minor. Over and over, Jesus said, “*I know your works.*” Nothing is hidden from Jesus. We can hide things from each other, but we can’t hide anything from him. The one to whom we are accountable sees everything. “*His feet were like burnished bronze, refined in a furnace*” indicating the stability and strength of Jesus. “*And his voice was like the roar of many waters.*” This is a phrase used in the Old Testament to speak of God’s voice and it points to the power of his word.

Then it says “*in his right hand he held seven stars.*” At the end of the chapter the *seven stars* are identified as the *angels of the seven churches*. The word for *angel* is the same word for the word *messenger*. When the churches are addressed in Revelation 2-3 they are addressed to “*the angel of the church in Ephesus.*” This leads some to believe that it is a reference to the elders of the church that are represented by the seven stars, the leaders of the church. Either way, the message being conveyed is that Jesus holds the churches in his right hand. He holds WEFC in his right hand. It is the hand of authority. He is the ruler of the church.

*From his mouth comes a sharp two-edged sword.* This speaks to the idea of judgment. When he comes again, he will bring judgment upon those who oppose his church. He even holds the church accountable, threatening to remove their lampstand if they do not endure with patience. Finally, *his face was like the sun shining in full strength.* This is a

picture of the glory of Christ, the deity of Christ.

Putting it all together, you discover that this “*son of man*” who has all authority over all things is dignified, all-wise, all-knowing, all-powerful, in complete control, the judge of all and full of glory. It is any wonder why John said, “*when I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead.*” He is Lord of all!

And yet, look what it says next about Jesus. “*But he laid his right hand on me, saying, ‘Fear not, 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.’*” What a great word of comfort for the church in the midst of *tribulation*. This glorious Son of Man is found walking among *the seven lampstands*—among the church. Jesus is present. The image of the lampstand is taken out of the Old Testament. It signified God’s presence in the temple. In fact, the *menorah* became the symbol for Israel, the people of God’s presence in the world. In fact, Zechariah, like John in Revelation, had a vision of a golden lampstand and it too represented the presence of the Spirit of the Lord with his people during a time of trial. This is where that famous verse is found, “*not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit says the LORD of hosts.*” But then Zechariah says to the people of Israel what John is saying in the book of Revelation. He says in Zechariah 4:10, “*For whoever has despised the day of small things, shall rejoice.*” Sometimes it seems like your testimony or your faithfulness—your patient endurance—amounts to little. But what may seem like *the day of small things* the glorious Son of Man is using to accomplish his purposes. He is the one in our midst. It is *not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit says the LORD of hosts*. It has always been that way and it will continue to be that way until Jesus returns. In our weakness, he is strong.

## Conclusion

Keep your eyes on Jesus! This week, take a good long peek behind the curtain that John has opened for us. Read Revelation 1. Or read as much of it as you want. But read it with the intent of what it reveals to us about Jesus. That is John’s intent in writing this letter. He is a *brother and a partner in the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance that is in Jesus*.

If you find yourself in need of *patient endurance* during this “difficult days” turn your gaze upon Jesus.

- Jesus is the Faithful Witness who himself endured the cross.

- Jesus is the Victor who has overcome the world.
- Jesus is the Glorious Son of Man who is present with his church.

Be faithful! Be a follower! Be fearless!

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<sup>1</sup>David Palmer *CASKET EMPTY New Testament* (Casket Empty Media,2016) 274

<sup>2</sup>Kevin DeYoung “Our Present Moment: Why is it so hard?” [thegospelcoalition.org](http://thegospelcoalition.org) June 9, 2020

<sup>3</sup>Kevin DeYoung “Revelation, Coronavirus, and the Mark of the Beast: How Should Christians Read the Bible’s Most Fascinating Book?” [www.thegospelcoalition.org](http://www.thegospelcoalition.org) May 26, 2020

<sup>4</sup>Ibid

<sup>5</sup>Graeme Goldsworthy *The Goldsworthy Trilogy: The Gospel in Revelation* (Waynesboro, GA: Paternoster Press, 1984) 188

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., 241

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COMMUNITY  
**GROUPS**

## Getting To Know Me Questions

1. Share something you are looking forward to this coming summer.
2. Which of these emotions best describe where you are currently at and why?  
Sad    Angry    Scared    Happy    Excited    Tender

## Diving Into The Word

3. Read Revelation 1:9. How would you describe “these difficult days?” How do you think these “difficult days” compare to John’s “difficult days”?
4. What do you think “patient endurance” looks like? What does it tell you about living a life of faith?
5. Read Revelation 1:1-20. As a group, look for some specific things John says about Jesus. What do you find? How does this truth help you with “patient endurance.”
6. Read Zechariah 4:10 and Matthew 13:31-32. What do these passages have in common and what comfort do they bring? How do they help you endure with patience?

## Taking It Home

7. How can you be “a brother/sister and a partner” to someone who is suffering?
8. What vision of Jesus can you focus on this week that can help you endure with patience?