

Introduction

Good morning, Church. How are we doing today? Who's ready to jump into Revelation? (Clapping) Alright; here we go. If you have your Bible, go ahead and take it out and open it up. Let's go to the last Book of the Bible, the Book of Revelation. We'll start in Revelation, chapter 1, verse 8 here in just a minute. As you're headed over there, I just want to say "Welcome" to any guests who may be with us today. Guests, we are certainly glad that you have decided to join us this morning. I hope that you sense God's presence in this place... hope you are challenged and you're encouraged and that you meet with the Lord. If you are our guest today, would you do us a favor and just let us know that you're here? There's a QR code on the seat in front of you. You can just take your phone and scan that QR code; it will take you straight to a digital Connection Card and you can fill it out. Let us know about yourself. We're not going to spam you; we're not looking to do that, but we do want to welcome you. We're glad that you're here and want to encourage you on your journey as you come to know who it is that God wants you to be. We're a Church that believes that Houston needs to look more like heaven, and we think that happens when we look more like Jesus. We would love to invite you into that journey as we go into 2022. If you are not a digital person but prefer analog... we have that same Connect Card in the seat pocket right in front of you. Take that out and use a pen there that's in the seat pocket, fill that out, and drop it in one of the boxes on your way out. We don't care if you prefer analog or digital; either one is fine with us, but we do want you to let us know that you're here today.

As you're headed over to Revelation chapter 1, starting in verse 8, I'm just going to give a brief introduction to the Bible this morning. The Bible is divided into two parts: The Old Testament and the New Testament. The Old Testament gives us a record of God's chosen people. That's the nation of Israel... the people of God that we read about their journey all throughout the Old Testament. As we go through the Old Testament, we find out that those people, the Jewish people, are waiting on a Rescuer... a Redeemer. They use the word "Messiah" to describe this Person. When we get to the second part of the Bible, the New Testament, we find out who this Rescuer/Redeemer is. We discover that His name is Jesus, that He is born of a virgin, that He lives a sinless human life, that He shows us the way that we have been created to live. Jesus teaches that way of life... the way that He calls the Kingdom of God. He gives His life as a sacrificial death for our sin on a cross, and then three days later surprises the world by coming back to life. As He conquers death... comes back to life... the people who followed Him were so blown away that they went and they proclaimed to anyone and everyone who would believe them or listen to them, that Jesus was indeed the long-awaited Messiah, and that we ought to live the life that He taught, not the way of the world. They called this the Kingdom of God. Those people who followed after Jesus were known as the Church. That's why we're called the Church two thousand years later. In a very real way, those of us in this room are the spiritual inheritors of that which was proclaimed two thousand years ago. One of the followers of Jesus was a young man named John... who became an old man. Somewhere around 90-95 AD, he wrote about a vision that he received from God. That's what the Book of Revelation is. So, the Book of Revelation is the revelation of Jesus to John. We are going to read through that, and today we're going to be in chapter 1, starting in verse 8. So let me pray over us, and then we'll jump into the Word of God here today.

"Father, we thank You that You would give us a Book as mysterious and as powerful as Revelation; it's a good thing. So Lord today we pray... we ask... that You would speak to us, that You would move among us. Lord, we already know that You're here, but Father, our prayer today is that You would do work. My hunch is that there are some people here who are wondering if they can come to faith. Lord, my prayer is that they would. Father, my hunch is that there are some people who are here who are discouraged, so

God, my prayer is that You would encourage them today. Father, we pray that Your Word, somehow as I speak, would do hundreds of miracles in hundreds of hearts across this room today. So, Lord, speak; do Your work... do what needs to be done. Father, if there's anybody here who has yet to say 'Yes' to You, I pray that this sermon would be a moment where they would hear Your Words, and they would be so moved that they would say 'Yes' to You today. I pray this in the name of Jesus. Amen."

Revelation chapter 1, Starting in verse 8: *"I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "the One who is, who was, and who is to come, the Almighty." I, John, your brother and partner in the affliction, kingdom, and endurance that are in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos because of the Word of God and the testimony of Jesus. I was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day, and I heard a loud voice behind me like a trumpet saying, "Write on a scroll what you see and send it to the seven churches: Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea."*

"I turned to see whose voice it was that spoke to me. When I turned, I saw seven golden lampstands, and among the lampstands was One like the Son of Man, dressed in a robe with a golden sash wrapped around His chest. The hair of His head was white as wool—white as snow, His eyes like a fiery flame; His feet were like fine bronze as it is fired in a furnace, and His voice like the sound of cascading waters. He had seven stars in His right hand; a sharp double-edged sword came from His mouth, and His face was shining like the sun at full strength.

"When I saw Him, I fell at His feet like a dead man. He laid His right hand on me and said, 'Don't be afraid! I am the First and the Last, and the Living One. I was dead, but look—I am alive forever and ever, and I hold the keys of death and Hades. Therefore write what you have seen, what is, and what will take place after this. The mystery of the seven stars you saw in My right hand and of the golden lampstands is this: the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches.'" This is the Word of the Lord.

There's this book that came out maybe 25 years ago called "The Bible Code." I don't know if you've read this or you've ever heard of this book. The premise of the book was that if we took the original Hebrew manuscripts of the Old Testament and we applied a mathematical formula to them, we would find these hidden crossword/acrostics, and we could have secret prophesies that had been unlocked for hundreds of years. I'm not really here to talk about whether "The Bible Code" is or isn't a thing. Personally, I don't think it's a thing... but here's the thing: I think that in that book we saw the fulfillment of what people want whenever we come to Revelation and oftentimes even just to Scripture. What we want is to find something mysterious and secretive... something that no one else has ever been able to understand when, honestly, much of what happens in the Bible is very easy to understand... we just don't like it. Right?

That's not necessarily the case with the Book of Revelation. Darrel Johnson has accurately said, in my opinion, that the Book of Revelation is the most read Book of the Bible and the least understood. I think that's probably true too. I don't know about you, but I grew up in an era whenever there were a lot of books written about the Book of Revelation. Does anybody remember "Late Great Planet Earth"? I read "Eighty-eight reasons the world is going to end in 1988." Like that will not scar you when you're eleven years old... can you imagine reading that? (Laughter) Over and over there would be people who would stand up and they would teach, and they would say, "You know, Mikhail Gorbachev is the antichrist." After that, "Barrack Obama is the antichrist." They would take whatever current event was happening in the political or opponent or world event that they didn't like or scared them, and they would land on top of the Book of Revelation, and that's how you end up saying that the locusts represent Saddam Hussein's helicopters. News flash: I'm not going to read Revelation like that. If that disappoints you, you can go

ahead and quietly leave now; it's okay... I won't be offended. But if you stay, I will tell you that I think that what the Book of Revelation has to say is much more encouraging than any of that anyway. I don't think that the Book of Revelation was written to scare us. I think the Book of Revelation was written to encourage the Church, and it has been misunderstood, I think, because we have approached it sort of like a kid getting a Dakota ring at the bottom of a box of Lucky Charms. We are trying to read it as something for which it was never intended. But this is an important Book and a very good Book, and I'm excited to talk about it today. This Book, we read in verse 10, was written by John when he is in the Spirit, so it is from the Lord. I think that there are some very real and good things about this Book which we can just know immediately.

Number one: John is a real person writing to real churches in a very real pastoral sense. I would say, number one, this Book is a letter that goes straight to the pastoral heart of believers two thousand years ago and, like all of Scripture, goes straight to the heart of believers today. Just like Paul would write letters and John wrote letters in other places, this Book is speaking straight to our heart. Number two: It is a prophecy. If I was to read the prophet Isaiah hundreds of years ago, I would read it and I would recognize that it dealt with particular events that were happening at the moment it was written but then also that it predicted the coming of Messiah... which we know today, reading back, was the birth of Jesus. I'm going to read parts of Revelation like that, as a prophecy that dealt straight with historical events that were happening in that day and yet also, at the same time, as looking forward to things that have yet to come. I think that's the beauty of biblical prophecy. It speaks the truth about things that are timeless and yet then also can have an eye to the future. But then third, the Book of Revelation is known as apocalyptic literature. Now that sounds frightening, but apocalyptic basically just means "that which is hidden." So here we have this apocalypse which is an unveiling of what is hidden. Apocalyptic literature, for instance Ezekiel chapters 38 and 39, is simply intended for us to understand what is happening, hidden from human eyes. As a believer, I believe that God is up to things right now that I cannot see. I believe in things like angels and demons. I believe that there is a spiritual realm which somehow we are not able to lay our eyes upon. For whatever reason, in this Book, I believe we get a moment where the Lord pulls back that barrier and allows John to see into the spiritual realm certain things, and in doing so, he communicates them. So, it's a letter, and that helps us in the here-and-now because all of Scripture helps us in our here-and-now. Number two, it's a prophecy. That helps us in our here-and-now because we will be encouraged to see what it is that God wants to tell us. Number three, it's an apocalypse that's showing us some hidden things and that's good, so we get a view into the spiritual world. I'm excited to jump into this today. I hope it encourages you. I just want you to know, I think this Book is pastoral, prophetic, and apocalyptic in a good way. My goal is to move away from speculation and toward specific application. That's my goal as we go through Revelation over the next several weeks. We are going to read it pastorally with an eye to the prophetic, and I think it will be a massive encouragement to us. It has been encouraging believers for two thousand years, and I anticipate that it will continue to encourage them until the Lord finally returns. Are you guys ready to jump in? Here we go.

1. Jesus Is Among Us. (v. 13)

So what is it that we're reading here at the beginning? The first thing that I noticed as I was reading this opening passage, I want to just point out verse 13... that Jesus is among us. Jesus is among us. John tells us in the opening of this that he is writing from the isle of Patmos. Patmos is a small island off the coast of Turkey and was used by the Roman government to send convicts and rabble-rousers away. So John has been placed in exile. They probably did not execute John because he is an old man. At this point, he is 90 to 95 years old. They don't want to cause trouble by publicly executing an old man, so they just think, "Let's

just push the old man out to a place where he can't cause any more issues." And they send him to Patmos. He lives there on the craggy rock for the rest of his days. Most people think he lived there about ten years before he finally passed away. As he is there, he gets a vision. He gets this vision, and we notice in the opening of the passage we read that he hears a voice that tells him to write these things down and to send it to the seven churches. These are seven real historical churches, and we'll jump into those starting next week. He gets this voice that tells him, *"Write this down and send it to the seven churches."* So he turns to look and see from where this voice comes. He turns and he sees the One standing, the Bible says, *"...among seven lampstands."* If we go to the end of the passage that we read today, in verse 20 we read, *"the seven lampstands represent the seven churches."* Why does that matter? John has been exiled. He is out here by himself. Domitian, the emperor at the time, is shutting down churches, killing Christians, throwing them into the Coliseum so that the lions can eat them publicly. Christians are probably thinking, "God, where are You right now? It feels like we've been faithful to You, and for whatever reason, You are choosing to fail us right now." And as they are feeling overwhelmed and overcome, God gives John a vision, and the first thing that he notices is this: Jesus is in the middle of His churches. It's the very first thing that he sees. "You feel like you're overwhelmed, you feel like things are falling apart, but John... the first thing I want you to tell them is that I am among them."

One of the great dangers of the Christian life, I truly believe, is that we can think if we come to faith in Jesus, we will no longer have difficulty. That's certainly not the case. Jesus Himself tells us, "In this life, you will have trouble." We can read the pages of the Bible and see over and over people who had deep faith in Jesus yet walked through deep, difficult valleys of tribulation and trial; and yet at the same time the message is clear. It's that Jesus never abandons us no matter how dark our days. Today, what I want you to hear is this: if you're in a difficult season and you're wondering, "God... where are You?" ...here is the answer: Jesus is in the middle of it. Jesus never left and He is right here in the middle of it. Are you in the middle of a mess? Jesus is in the middle of it with you. Are you feeling like you're in a problem professionally? Jesus is in the middle of it. Is your marriage on the rocks? Jesus is in the middle of it. Do you feel isolated and alone? Jesus is right there in the middle of it. Do you have a diagnosis or a disease that's confronting you or a family member? Jesus is in the middle of it. Depression, anxiety, feel like a personal failure? Jesus Christ is in the middle of whatever you are walking through. Hear me today, Church. Much of the world wants to try to proclaim that God is a "fix-it" God, but what the Bible says is that God is a faithful God. I want to be clear. Sometimes we throw our hands up and we say, "Fix it, Jesus" and sometimes He does. But I want you to hear me today. There is brokenness in this world, and there are trials and troubles that you may carry from this day until the day that you step into glory, and that does not mean that God has abandoned you. Jesus never leaves. People may turn their back on you... you may have people who say that they will never, ever, ever leave and yet they still may, but you can know this... Jesus is always faithful. The first message that God chooses to give John to give to the Church... "You may feel like things are falling apart, but you should hear this: I am in the middle of wherever you are." This is the beauty of the cross. The cross is our God demonstrating His willingness to come among us. Jesus Christ, dying a sacrificial death on the cross, is a pretty beautiful portrayal of our God's love for us. God comes right into the mess and says, "I will do whatever it takes so that I can never be separated from you." Jesus died because He so badly wanted to be with you.

If today you're here... you feel isolated or you feel alone... I want you to know this. Jesus stands with you in your darkest valley. No matter what you're going through, you can hold tight to this. He is always faithful. If you have yet to place your faith in Jesus, I want you to hear this today. He will never abandon you. I can think of no comfort in this world greater than this... that I always have Jesus and He will never be taken from me. He is my faithful God. Jesus is among us.

2. Jesus Is Over Us. (vv. 13-17)

Next, Jesus is over us. Look at verse 13. He is among the lampstands and John turns to look, and then he sees One, who the Bible says... and John tells us *"...is like the Son of Man."* You're going to notice, as we go through the Book of Revelation, that John uses the word "like" a great deal. To be clear, he doesn't use it like a Valley Girl uses "like." It's not, "Like... totally awesome." That's not what John is doing. He uses "like" in the same way that you remember in grammar school: to give a comparison... a simile using "like" or "as." He does that so that we will recognize that he is doing his best to describe something that he doesn't totally have words to describe. So John hears this voice behind him, and this voice says, "Write these things down and send it to the churches." And John turns to look and then he says, "Whoa... how do I write this down?" So, he begins to write and the first thing he says is that he sees One *"like a Son of Man."*

Daniel 7:13-14 give reference to this Son of Man. Daniel 7:13-14 says this, *"I continued watching in the night visions and suddenly One, like a Son of Man, was coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was escorted before Him. He was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, so that those of every people, nation, and language should serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and His Kingdom is one that will not be destroyed."* What is it that John is attempting to communicate? He says, "Hey, remember that prophecy of the One who was brought before the Ancient of Days, who was given authority to establish a Kingdom? I saw Him." That's who this Jesus is. If there's been any doubt for you, John lays it to rest. Jesus is indeed the Son of Man... the One whom Daniel prophesied hundreds of years earlier. He is the One who gets dominion that lasts forevermore.

And what does John notice first about this Son of Man? His clothes... I always thought that was kind of weird. Like the first thing you notice, "Ooh... looking sharp, Jesus. Alright." (Laughter) The first thing He has on... he notices He has on a robe. Now why does he notice the robe? ...Because the robe is a uniform; it's the uniform of a priest and a king. He notices that his Jesus... his High Priest... is wearing a robe, and He has on a golden belt or a sash. And where is the belt? Around His chest. Why? The golden belt... the golden sash... would be worn by a priest around his waist when he was working. But when he was done, he would signify his work was completed by moving the belt from around his waist to up around his chest. Jesus says, "I am your Priest, and My work is done." Do you remember what He said on the cross? "It is finished." The work of Jesus is the Son of Man... the One receiving great dominion... and He has on His robe and His belt and saying "My work has been completely completed. I have done all that needs to be done for you to be with Me." Amen and amen to that.

And then John continues on describing Him. He then says that His hair is white. I have yet to see a picture of Jesus portrayed with white hair. A lot of people have theorized what this means. Probably it's the idea of timelessness... that Jesus is older than we have ever imagined... that He is eternal, and that He possesses and qualities of wisdom belonging only to God. And then fiery eyes... remember Jesus said that the eyes are the window to the soul. For me it brought back images of the Book of Hebrews: *"Our God is an all-consuming fire."* John looks and he now sees the Son of Man... the One who has been prophesied... who gets dominion. His work has been finished as a Priest. He is timeless and wise... white hair like a God and His eyes are fire, saying "I can consume all sin." And His feet are like bronze... burnished bronze which has just come from the furnace. This is, in my opinion, in another reference back to Daniel. You may remember from the Book of Daniel that King Nebuchadnezzar has a dream, and in that dream, he sees a statue of a kingdom that is to come that has feet made of clay mixed with iron. Now what was the point of Nebuchadnezzar's dream? Daniel told him, "You're seeing a kingdom that will pass away because clay

and iron mixed together will not bond. They will fall apart. But that's not the Kingdom that we see of the Son of Man, is it? No, this is burnished bronze as straight from the furnace. This is a Kingdom that cannot fail. This is a Kingdom that will last forever. That's what we see here through the eyes of John.

Next: "...a voice like cascading waters." Have you ever tried to talk to somebody when you're in the shower? You can't hear. Have you ever tried to talk to someone while you're standing next to a waterfall? You've got to scream. The voice of Jesus is so loud, John says, it drowns out everything else. That's how powerful this God truly is.

Now this next one I loved: "*In His right hand He holds the seven stars...*" Now we know in verse 20 that the seven stars are the seven angels of the Church. I like that image... the sense that Jesus is holding and has control over the angels. We read that it's the seven angels of the churches. I love the idea that Houston Northwest has an angel assigned to her... that our Church has an angel. I think there are plenty of references through the New Testament where we see people who have angels assigned to them. I love the idea that our God sees us and protects us through His messengers. I ran across something else in a commentary which was too good to not share, so I want to share this too. Ancient astronomy, at the time that John wrote, only knew of seven planets in the solar system. They had this idea of seven planets representing the universe. I don't know that we can completely prove this, but I wonder if through this vision God was communicating to John that Jesus is holding seven stars in His hand because He is holding the universe. Did you ever sing that song when you were a kid, "He's got the whole world in His hands...?" There He is... this Jesus, this Son of Man... whose work has been finished and is eternal, who has an all-consuming fire and has the quality of a Deity... holds the universe in His right hand, and He says, "I have everything."

And then from His mouth, a sword... a double-edged sword... comes out. Hebrews 4:12 says this: "*For the Word of God is living and effective and sharper than any double-edged sword, penetrating as far as the separation of soul and spirit, joints and marrow.*" Why does Jesus have a sword coming out of His mouth? ...Because when He opens His mouth, the Word of God comes out and it is unstoppable. When Jesus speaks, His Word comes to pass. It's the Word of God. "*And His face,*" John says, "*is shining like the sun at full strength.*" You can't even look at Him, is what John seems to say. He is that powerful; He is that strong. So what does John do in this moment when he finally sees Jesus in all of His glory? What does he do? The Scripture says he falls down like he is dead... like he is dead.

Do you guys remember the first time you saw "The Wizard of Oz"? You see "The Wizard of Oz"... here's the wizard and finally we see at the end that they pull back the curtain and it's just this little guy back there pulling levers and pressing buttons... right? There was this show that came on for many years where it was basically a guy revealing the tricks of magicians. Do you remember that one? Basically, they would do whatever the trick was publicly, and then once they had done the trick, then they would reveal how the trick was done. It looked really cool, and then you found out it was really some sleight of hand. Or, even beyond that, you may just have watched a TV show where they show how they did certain special effects or stunts or tricks in movies. Again, the effect is very real in the moment, but once you find out what it's like behind the scenes, some of the "magic" is taken away.

This is an opposite. For a certain time, John had only known Jesus... the Man. And it's here as if the opposite of "The Wizard of Oz" happens. God rips back the veil and says, "This is who Jesus really is." It's so overwhelming that John can't find the words to describe Him and then falls down like he is dead because he is so overwhelmed. That's the God that's ruling over the universe; that's who your Jesus is. I think that many of us, as we follow Jesus, sometimes we are ashamed of the idea of turning the other

cheek. We feel like Jesus is a little weak. I believe that what John is doing and what God is revealing to John specifically... He is communicating to each of us, "It may feel weak to follow Jesus today, but trust Me... this Jesus is more powerful than you could ever imagine." That's the Jesus you follow. Yes, you forgive... yes, you show love... you demonstrate peace... you work toward peace... you do those things, and the world may steamroll you in the process. You know that's what they had to be thinking, right? "John, we're getting murdered here... we're getting wiped out here. What are we supposed to do? Is our God really all that powerful?" And the message of John is clear: Jesus is not just in the middle of what you're in... He is over you, and He is bigger than you could ever imagine. This is the God who rules the universe; this Jesus is bigger than we could ever picture. This is what I want you to hear. Your Jesus is not only good... He is strong... He is strong.

There was a time when I was stronger than both of my sons... and they thought I was the strongest guy around... and they would trust me to handle anything that seemed heavy to them. I believe that what John is doing is a very, almost fatherly picture, of revealing to them and to us: "Do not lose heart in trusting your strong Jesus, because He is stronger than anyone would ever imagine."

It can be tough, right? You follow after Jesus, and it feels sometimes like the rest of the world gets exactly what they want... and you don't. And you wonder, "God, are You actually doing anything?" When God rips back the veil and shows John, John is, I think, excited to tell us: "This Jesus... He may appear meek and mild to many, but He is King... He is powerful... He is mighty... and you can live assuredly trusting in Him. This God rules over everything."

3. Jesus is guiding Us. (v. 8)

And then... this is beautiful to me: He is not just among us and over us, Jesus is guiding us. Look at verse 8... where we started today in verse 8. Jesus says, "*I am the Alpha and the Omega...*" The Alpha and Omega being the first and the last letters of the Greek alphabet... the beginning and the end. And then later, Jesus says the same thing... similar... again, right after John falls down as dead. He says, "*I am the First and the Last...*" The Greek word there "first" is "arche"...like "archetype." I am the way that you're supposed to be. But then the word for "last": the Greek word there... it's really not best translated "last"; it's the word "telos". And "telos" means "goal." What does it mean to have a goal? What is it that he is attempting to communicate to us? This is what He says with regard to the goal.

I don't know about your yard, but my yard right now has all sorts of acorns in it. Anybody else? Or where I grew up... "a—kerns." We've got all these acorns out there. The "telos" of an acorn is simple; the goal of an acorn is to grow into a massive oak tree. That's what its purpose is. That is what God intends to do with an acorn. It is to take it from this... and to grow it into a mighty oak tree. What does Jesus say? Jesus says, "I am the First, and I am the 'Telos.'" What's the point? Jesus says, "Your life purpose... the reason for which you have been created... is to return to Me and to bring Me glory." "All creation came from Me," He says, "and all creation will return to Me." Colossians 1:16-17... "*Everything was created by Him, in heaven and on earth, the visible and the invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities...*" Jesus says, "It doesn't matter who's on whatever throne, running whatever government... I am the One who has established all of this..." and then what things have been created through Him? "*All things have been created through Him and for Him. He is before...*" (what things?) "...*all things...*" (and what things are held together by Him?) "*All things.*" Creation is held together because Jesus wills it to be so. The goal of all Creation is to go back to Jesus. Your purpose... your destiny... is that you would one day be formed into the likeness of Jesus and to bring Him glory. God's design for you is that you, as an acorn, would one day sprout into a massive oak giving great glory back to the purpose of Jesus. Jesus is the wellspring of

Creation, and He has determined your destination... and that destination is... your destiny is to be drawn back in and to give glory to Jesus for all of eternity. Amen and amen. Creation sprung from Jesus, and Creation has one goal... it is headed right back to Him.

Have you ever been in the car with somebody who didn't have a good sense of direction? You don't need to elbow anybody right now. Just asking if you've ever been there... and you wonder if you're ever going to get there. Even worse... have you ever been hiking with someone who doesn't have a good sense of direction? "It's just over this hill... I'm pretty sure." There is no confusion about where Creation is headed. Jesus is driving the freight train of Creation, and it is headed full speed straight toward Him. He is the goal of Creation. In 2 Corinthians 5, it tells us that all things are intended to be reconciled back unto Him. God is reconciling all things back unto Him through Jesus, and Jesus will get all the glory. Period... end of story.

So let's go back to the beginning of this passage. For the people who are suffering and for the people who are walking in those valleys... why is this encouraging? Because if you're in a valley today, you can know this... your goal is still to become an oak reflecting Jesus, whether you're in the valley or not. The strongest oaks grow in the deepest valleys. And wherever you are, God will not abandon you; He will walk with you, He is ruling over, and He has a specific destination for you, and it's to drive you straight into the pinnacle of Creation... the goal of which is Jesus.

Now hear this... if you thought that was good... hold onto your hats. Look at this: Jesus says, "I was dead..." (hello...) "but look... I'm alive forever and ever." And I love this... I love this, you guys: "I hold the keys of death and Hades." Why does Jesus say, "I was dead but now I'm alive"? He said, "Hey, so you remember whenever they killed Me, and you wondered where I went for those three days? I went and I took the keys away from the devil. He didn't get them anymore. I now have the keys to death and Hades. And if you want to know how it is that I can control your destiny and your future? This is the case: "I rule all of Creation, including death." It's almost like He is jangling the keys in front of our face, and He says, "If you want to be with Me, put your faith in Me because I've got all the power."

First John 3:2 says this... the same man who wrote Revelation wrote these words: *"We know that when He appears we will be like Him because we will see Him as He is."* Your destiny... your goal... the purpose for which God created you is to make you like Jesus. That is the acorn oak... you're intended to grow into an oak like Jesus. Hell itself cannot keep you away because now death and Hades' keys are in the hand of Jesus Christ. All you have to do is say "Yes" to Him.

This is the message: No matter how painful your life may be, Jesus is among you. No matter how crazy life seems, Jesus is over it, ruling with a good hand because He is a good God. And no matter what you believe, there is a purpose that Jesus has a direction that He is driving us straight there because He is the goal of all Creation. This is the supremacy of our Christ, and this is the beauty of our God. So today, here is my question: Have you placed your faith in this Jesus? If you have, praise God, because today this is a massive encouragement to you. If you have placed your faith in Jesus, today this message encourages you: He is with you... He is over you... He is guiding you.

But if you haven't, what does this message do for you? If you haven't placed your faith in Jesus, you hear this today and you hear, "Who is with me in my darkest times?" Maybe family, maybe friends... but what if you don't have those things? What if they turn their back on you? If you believe in Jesus today, you hear this and you know that God is ruling and reigning, even whenever the world feels whacky, you can put your trust and faith in God. But what if you don't have that? If you're here today and you believe in Jesus, you say, "There is a purpose to all this, and Jesus is driving the train, and I trust Him to take it straight back

to where He is as the goal of Creation." But what if you don't? Life feels meaningless or purposeless. Today, if you are a person of faith, I hope that you have been encouraged hearing this. But if you're not a person of faith, this is what I want you to hear: Jesus gives life purpose, meaning, and He is faithful. Jesus holds the keys to death and wants to bring you and usher you into life. Jesus has all these things because He is the supreme One whom God has appointed, and He wants everyone to be with Him. He wants you... no matter how broken you are, no matter how far away, no matter how much doubt you've had... He wants to bring you into faith, and He invites you there today.

So this morning, this is my invitation to you: God wants to make you into who He is in His Son Jesus, and that's a message that doesn't need a special decoder ring. That's a message that isn't confusing... very, very clear... if you'll choose to come to Him. Would you bow your head with me?

If you've heard these things today and you're already a believer, my prayer is that you've been encouraged... God has spoken to you. If you're here today and you're not a believer, this is your moment to decide if you're ready... for you to say, "I am ready now to place my faith in Jesus." You're believing some very concrete things. You're believing that He indeed is the One who died for your sin... you're believing that He is indeed God's Son... you're believing that He conquered death, and you're believing that He is the Son of God, ruling Creation, that you're to come back to Him. If you have yet to place your faith in Him, this is your moment to do that. I'm just going to give you that opportunity to let us know. We want to pray for you if that's you. If that's you and you're saying "Yes" to Jesus today, would you do me a favor? Just look at me so I can see you; just make eye contact with me and say, "Yep, I'm ready to place my faith in Jesus Christ here today." Okay; anybody else? Okay. Who else? Look at me; I want to see you. Okay. Anybody else? Okay.

"Father, we thank You for these who have said 'Yes' to You. Lord, we pray and we ask that they would respond. Father, we thank You for the goodness of Your Son; we thank You, Lord, that You've spoken clearly today, and You've shown us His power, You've shown us His strength. And Lord, today, we pray that these who have said 'Yes' to You would take the next step... they would say they are ready to follow after this Jesus, 'to give Him my life... to know Him as my King,' and to recognize Him as ruler over Creation. We pray this and we ask it in the name of Your Son Jesus Christ. Amen and amen."

Could we give the Lord a round of applause... just thank Him for His goodness? (Clapping) God is so good.

We are going to be spending several weeks walking through the Book of Revelation, recognizing this beautiful and encouraging message. If God has spoken to you, we would love to hear from you today. Would you do me a favor and just text in and let us know what God is doing? There's a number up on the screen. If you've come to faith today... you've placed your faith in Jesus for the first time... text the word "Jesus" to us. Just say, "Okay, I'm ready to follow Jesus." Text that in. Maybe there's something else. Maybe you need to get baptized or maybe you have questions or maybe you need to find a group. I don't know what it is that God is doing in your heart and life. That's okay but just text in. We've got real people on the other end of this. They are going to respond to you; they are going to help you, and they are going to walk you through those steps. If, for whatever reason, that doesn't work for you, then use one of these cards in that seat pocket... fill it out and drop it into the box on your way out today. Church, we serve a good God who rules over Creation and wants to bring us into fellowship with Him through His Son Jesus; we give Him thanks and praise for that. Amen and amen.