

Imagine in your mind what Jesus looks like. When you think of Jesus, what sort of picture comes to your mind? Is he walking the streets of Galilee with a group of disciples close behind him? Is he preaching in a synagogue? Is he touching a leper and healing his skin? Is he sitting at the table for the last supper, is he washing his disciples' feet, is he hanging on a cross, suffering for the sins of the world? You might think of an image such as Jim Caviezel in *The Passion of the Christ* or Jonathan Roumie from *The Chosen*. This week, historians who study the Shroud of Turin released an AI-generated image of what they think Jesus might have looked like. [View the online sermon to see these images.]

Almost always, when we try to imagine Jesus, we think about him in his earthly, incarnate state, what he was like when he walked among us. But the book of Revelation, instead of showing us who Jesus was, pulls the curtain back to give us an awe-inspiring glimpse of who Jesus is. Let's take a look at Revelation 1:10-18.

On the Lord's Day I was in the Spirit, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet, which said: "Write on a scroll what you see and send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea." I turned around to see the voice that was speaking to me. And when I turned I saw seven golden lampstands, and among the lampstands was someone like a son of man [a phrase Jesus used eighty times in the gospels to refer to himself, so we are clearly talking about Jesus here], dressed in a robe reaching down to his feet and with a golden sash around his chest. The hair on his head was white like wool, as white as snow, and his eyes were like blazing fire. His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of rushing waters. In his right hand he held seven stars, and coming out of his mouth was a sharp, double-edged sword. His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance. When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. Then he placed his right hand on me and said: "Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. I am the Living One; I was dead, and now look, I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades."

This is one of the most powerful and profound pictures of Jesus found anywhere in the Bible. To unpack it, I want us to zoom in on four key aspects: **Jesus' appearance, Jesus' location, Jesus' clothing, and Jesus' message.**

First let's look at **Jesus' appearance.**

- **His hair was white like wool.** When I meet with the leadership teams of other churches, one of the things I always look for is how much white hair is in the room. You typically don't want a bunch of twenty-year-olds running a church; you want at least some people with life experience and wisdom helping to make decisions. As in our culture, in the ancient world white hair was a sign not only of age, but also of dignity and honor. With age comes knowledge and experience. Jesus' white hair is a sign of **divine wisdom.**
- **His eyes were like blazing fire.** For most of the time I was growing up, it was just my mom in the house with five kids. Sometimes I thought my mom was distracted so I could get away with things. I would sneak off quietly into the kitchen and try to grab a soda. I'd be tiptoeing to the fridge and from the other room my mom would say, "Don't you dare drink another Dr. Pepper!" It seemed like she could see everything. In this picture of Jesus, his eyes are like blazing fire, which not only means he can see everything, but it means his gaze can pierce through any veil that we put up. There is no gas-lighting Jesus. His eyes burn straight through and eviscerate any mask,

any facade we might put up to conceal the truth. Jesus always sees the complete totality of every situation. His eyes are a sign of **divine perception**.

- **His feet were like glowing bronze.** In the Old Testament, the King of Babylon had a dream about a statue that had a golden head, a chest and midsection of precious metals, but feet that were a mixture of iron and clay—with each different part of the body representing a different historical kingdom that ruled the world, like the Babylonians, the Greeks, and the Romans. The precious metals indicated that certain kingdoms were strong, but the clay feet indicated that the kingdom was weak and brittle. Jesus' feet aren't made of clay! His feet aren't delicate and fragile. They are like glowing bronze. This is a sign of **divine strength**.
- **His voice was like rushing waters.** Sometimes at home Keren will try to communicate with me when we are in different parts of the house. I'll be playing with the kids in their room, and she'll say something, but the door is closed so I can't make it out. I'll open the door and say, "What?" She'll say it again, but the moment she starts talking, a kid starts yelling. I can't make her out, so I have to say, "Kids, be quiet. What did you say, Keren?" Then she'll speak again, but this time a kid hit the button on a toy and it starts singing the ABC's, so I can't hear it again. This happens in our house multiple times a day. I've had my hearing checked by doctors. Apparently my ears still work, but when there are competing sounds or I'm too far away, I just can't make it out. No one ever has that problem when Jesus speaks. His voice is like rushing waters: when he speaks, it's like being at the bottom of Niagara Falls. The gravity of his words drowns out every other voice. Jesus' voice is a sign of **divine gravitas**.
- **He held seven stars in his hand.** Jesus tells us later in this chapter that the seven stars represent the leaders of the seven churches. This shows us Jesus is in control of the churches, but there's likely a meaning beyond just that. In the ancient world, prior to telescopes, space travel, and modern cosmology, people looked up at the sky and with their naked eye could see seven celestial bodies. They assumed Earth was at the center of everything, and that the sun, the moon, and the five closest planets to us—Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn—revolve around our planet. These were considered the seven stars. Ancient depictions of Roman rulers show the Emperor holding seven stars in his hand. It was a claim of ruling not only the world, but also the galaxies. To many people living in the first century, that seemed to be right. But Revelation pulls back the curtain and helpfully reorients our perspective, Jesus, not Caesar, is Lord of heaven and earth. He rules over not only the church, but the cosmos as well. He holds the solar system in his hand. Jesus reigns supreme over all the universe. This is a picture of **divine dominion**.
- **He had a sharp sword in his mouth.** The purpose of this image is not that when we think about Jesus, we would imagine him with a four-foot-long sword protruding from his mouth, making it awkward for him to turn around and walk into rooms. Rather, just like a sharp, two-edged sword is able in battle to penetrate armor and slice through flesh, when Jesus speaks, his words have power. They cut us to the core, they pierce our souls, they tear down whatever weak excuses and lies we've been using to defend ourselves and they convict us. When a judge drops a gavel in the courtroom and makes a pronouncement, that's the verdict, that's the final word. There is no more debating or arguing; that's it. This is a picture of **divine judgment**.
- **His face radiated like the sun.** This is the seventh and final description of Jesus. He glows like the sun in all its brilliance. The ancient world understood how essential the sun was for life. Most of them worshiped the sun because it illuminates our world and brings us warmth and life. The book of Revelation says that when God remakes the world, there won't have to be any sun,

because God himself will give light to everything. Jesus is the ultimate source of warmth, light, and life. His face radiates not only beauty, but majesty. This image points to **divine glory**.

Every one of these images is powerful and profound, but what John really wants us to do is take them all together. When you look at them all at once, what you cannot mistake is that Jesus is fully **divine**. Every one of these attributes highlights the fact that Jesus is fully, unquestionably, without any doubt or question, God. Pastor and scholar Tim Keller has said, “There’s no place in the Bible making a stronger claim of the absolute supreme deity of Jesus Christ than these verses.”

When we look at Jesus’ appearance, we learn **he is fully divine**. In addition to his divinity, John also points out **Jesus’ location**, his whereabouts. In Revelation 1:12 John tells us, “When I turned I saw seven golden lampstands, and among the lampstands was someone like a son of man.” Where is Jesus standing? Among the lampstands. This is one of those times in Revelation where no one has to guess at the meaning of an image, because Revelation 1:20 tells us what this means: “The seven lampstands are the seven churches.” Where is Jesus, the Son of Man, who is fully God, standing? He is standing among the churches. Jesus, the one who shines the glory of God and sovereignly reigns over the galaxy is standing in our presence.

There are two key takeaways from this. **Jesus is with us**. Our God is not far off and distant; he is up close and personal. Other religions are like distance learning, like getting an online degree. Your teacher lives far away. You never meet in person but they send you messages and instruct you, and hopefully you gain mastery of the subject. Christianity is not an online degree. It is personal, relational, and intimate. Our God has come near. In the gospel of Matthew, when the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream to tell him about the son who was going to be born, he said, “They will call him Immanuel, which means God with us” (Matthew 1:23). Then to end the book, Jesus, right before being taken up to heaven, said to his disciples, “Surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age” (Matthew 28:20). Through Jesus, God comes near to us. He is among us, in our midst. When you go through that unexpected break-up, he is with you. When you get let go from your job, when you get the call from the doctor that no one wants, when you are feeling alone, when you are standing at the graveside, he is with you. No matter what we go through in life, we can know **Jesus is with us**.

But it’s more than simply that Jesus is with us. **Jesus is with us in the church**. Yes, Jesus is among his people, but the emphasis isn’t so much that he is standing next to us individually, but rather standing in the churches. Which means if we want to experience the fullness of his presence, where do we need to be? In the church. I understand there are times that coming to church may be infeasible, such as when you’re sick or you have a work or family emergency. I’m not trying to be hyper-legalistic; rather, I want to be logical: if you want to grow closer to Jesus, prioritize church where the presence of Jesus is palpable. Don’t let the Colts games or travel ball or the campsite or laziness keep you from experiencing the presence of Jesus. Show up where Jesus shows up. Make church the most important part of your week, which all your other commitments are built around.

What have we seen so far? **Jesus’s appearance—he is fully divine. Jesus’ location—he is with us (in the church)**.

Now let’s talk about **Jesus’ clothing**. When John saw Jesus, Jesus was wearing very specific clothes. “Jesus was dressed in a robe reaching down to his feet and with a golden sash around his chest” (Revelation 1:13). This outfit, the robe reaching to the feet and the golden sash, is exactly what a priest would wear. The Latin word used by the Romans for a priest was “pontifex,” a compound word that means “bridge builder.” A priest is someone who can stand with one leg on either side of the divide and build a bridge between sinful humanity and holy divinity. Jesus was perfectly qualified to serve as the ultimate high priest because he is fully God and fully man. He comes from heaven to show us what God

is like, and his cross becomes a bridge that connects earth to heaven; his sacrifice allows us to be presented as spotless and blameless in the presence of a holy God. Listen to how the book of Hebrews describes this:

Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin. Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need. (Hebrews 4:14-16)

Jesus is the perfect priest, the ultimate bridge builder. He came from heaven to earth so that he could take us from earth to heaven. He can relate to us, understand us, and intercede for us. He offers himself as a sacrifice for our sins so we can be forgiven. Listen to Hebrews 10:11-12, 14.

Day after day every priest stands and performs his religious duties; again and again he offers the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God... For by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy.

This was all a part of the Revelation John saw: Jesus is our ultimate high priest. Now we have seen **Jesus' appearance—fully divine. Jesus' location—among us (in the church). Jesus' clothing—ultimate priest.**

That leaves just one more aspect: **Jesus' message.** When John sees Jesus, fully divine, dwelling among his people as our perfect high priest, he falls down dead. He is not only awestruck, but also terrified into absolute paralysis. But as he is lying there, unable to move, not sure he would be able to take another breath, knowing that those who see the fullness of God's glory cannot live, "Jesus placed his right hand on me and said: 'Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. I am the Living One; I was dead, and now look, I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades'" (Revelation 1:17-18). Jesus touches him. Jesus tells him not to be afraid. And the reason he gives is so important. He doesn't say don't be afraid of the sword coming out of my mouth, don't be afraid of the fire in my eyes, or don't be afraid of my face that is glowing like the sun in all its brilliance. Rather, he speaks to what should be the ultimate source of fear in every human being: the fear of death and eternal judgment. Because our focus is on temporary things, we are afraid of the outcome of an election, afraid of not finding a spouse, afraid of not getting the job, afraid of not being financially secure for retirement, afraid that this new round of treatment from the doctors won't help us feel any better. I'm not saying those things don't matter. All those things matter, and they matter a lot. But in the grand scheme of things, in an eternal scheme of things, they don't really matter at all. What really matters is that one day, whether that is tomorrow or ninety years from now, you are going to die. You will take your last breath. That is terrifying. On that last day, you will be a sinful human being standing in the presence of a perfect and holy God. If we truly understood the weight of sin and judgment, death and eternity, that is the most terrifying thought anyone could ever conceive of. That is true fear, ultimate fear, paralyzing fear, if we were thinking appropriately, a universal fear. But Jesus comes to us in that fear and says what? "Do not be afraid." Why not? Because "I am the Living One; I was dead, and now look, I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades." The reason we don't have to be afraid is because Jesus died, then rose from the dead, and is now alive for ever and ever. His resurrection calms our greatest fear because it's not only that he rose from the dead; he says he has the keys to death and Hades. Hades was the realm of the dead, where dead people went to spend the rest of eternity. Jesus says, "Guess what? I broke out. I'm back." His return from the dead wasn't like one man breaking out of prison to live as a free man again. He holds the keys to the prison, which means he can come back and bring out anyone he wants. One day you will die. I will die. Every person we love and care about in this world is going to die, which is terrifying. But Jesus has

the keys to death, and he will bring eternal life to everyone who places their faith in him. In John 11:25-26 Jesus says: “I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die.”

So what do we see in Revelation 1 as the curtain is pulled back on the identity of Jesus? **Jesus’ appearance—fully divine. Jesus’ location—among us (in the church). Jesus’ clothing—ultimate priest. Jesus’ message—eternal life for all who believe.**

What was the picture of Jesus you had in your mind earlier today? How does it compare with this? One of the blessings that Revelation gives us is the ability to see Jesus not for who he was, but for who he is. Revelation pulls back the curtain on his identity so we can see him in all his glory and majesty.

Matt Proctor said,

For those in the church, the problem isn’t necessarily that we don’t think about Jesus; the problem is that we don’t think big enough about Jesus. It’s like we’re seeing him through the wrong end of the telescope...It seems that the churches in Asia Minor were not the least bit uncomfortable in Jesus’ presence. Their Jesus was tame and safe. They had declawed the Lion of Judah and turned him into a warm and fuzzy household pet. When you no longer see Christ in his terrifying, soul-exploding holiness—you’re only one step away from sin. The Jesus John sees in Revelation is not the gentle Jesus with children on his lap. This Jesus speaks in Niagara thunder. This Jesus blazes with supernova brilliance. This Jesus could play kickball with our planet. This Jesus is clothed in glory and splendor, strength and majesty, power and authority. He reigns supreme, and he will tolerate no rivals.

This is the Jesus we will continue to get to know as we study this book together.