

John's Vision of Christ

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 03 January 2016

Preacher: Allen Beardmore

[0 : 00] Take your Bibles and turn to Romans chapter 1.! Samuel Rutherford called the books of the Bible the love letters of the Savior to his bride, his church.

And so we turn to this one who has loved us, and we turn to his word as he speaks through his servant Paul. And we'll read the first 17 verses of Romans chapter 1.

Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God, the gospel he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures, regarding his Son, who as to his human nature was a descendant of David, and who through the Spirit of holiness was declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Through him and for his namesake we receive grace and apostleship to call people from among all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith.

And you also are among those who are called to belong to Jesus Christ. To all in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints, grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.

[1 : 29] First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is being reported all over the world. God whom I serve with my whole heart in preaching the gospel of his Son is my witness, how constantly I remember you in my prayers at all times.

And I pray that now at last, by God's will, the way may be open for me to come to you. I long to see you, so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong.

That is, that you and I may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith. I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that I plan many times to come to you, but have been prevented from doing so until now, in order that I might have a harvest among you, just as I have had among the other Gentiles.

I'm obligated both to Greeks and non-Greeks, both to the wise and the foolish. That is why I am so eager to preach the gospel also to you who are at Rome, for I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes, first for the Jew, then for the Gentile.

For in the gospel, a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written, the righteous will live by faith.

[3 : 00] Amen. I ask you to take your scriptures now, please, and turn to the book of Revelation.

Revelation in chapter 1 for our text this evening. We read of Jesus Christ, declared to be the Son of God with power by His resurrection from the dead.

And this evening for our message, we will be focusing our thoughts on the risen and glorified Christ. Please follow along now as I read the entire chapter of Revelation 1.

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, who bore witness to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that He saw.

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. 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, 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, and made us a kingdom, priests to His God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

[4 : 42] Behold, He is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him, and all the tribes of the earth will wail on account of Him. Even so, Amen.

I am the Alpha and the Omega, says the Lord God, who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty. 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.

I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet 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.

Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking to me, and on turning I saw seven golden lampstands, 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.

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

[5 : 59] 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.

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 and the living one.

I died, and behold, I am alive forevermore. And I have the keys of death and Hades. Write, therefore, the things that you have seen, those that are and those that are to take place after this.

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.

Amen. The book of Revelation is, in a sense, it's a prophetic preview of church history. You'll notice in verse 1 of the chapter that we read this evening, this is a revelation given to the Apostle John, and the purpose is to show him the things that must soon take place.

[7 : 06] If you'll look over in chapter 4 and verse 1, a very similar statement is made by Christ. It says, And so John writes his book of Revelation in order to give the church a preview of what the church will experience as they wait for the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And as we look back, we see the book of Revelation as a preview of church history. Now, of course, the book of Revelation is heavily symbolic.

There is a great deal of imagery in the book, and much of the imagery is borrowed from the Old Testament. It's Old Testament language. And when we realize that, we realize that the key to interpreting the book of Revelation is to understand the Old Testament Scripture, that it needs to be interpreted in line with previous revelation given by God to his Old Testament servants, the prophets.

But when we look at chapters 2 and 3, we see the seven letters to the seven churches. And those of you who are familiar with the Scriptures would be familiar with these letters.

And we realize that these letters that are written to the churches are not only to be interpreted according to Old Testament language and Old Testament imagery, but these letters to the churches are to be interpreted according to the apostolic teaching received from the Lord Jesus Christ himself.

[8 : 34] that revelation, which we receive in the New Testament, is built on the foundation of Jesus Christ as the cornerstone of the church and the foundation of the apostles that he gave to us in the New Testament.

Now, the reason which we have this prophetic preview of history is not so that we can somehow guess the times and the dates and all the seasons and everything that's going to take place in the future.

But the reason that Christ gave this revelation to the Apostle John was to prepare the church to be able to endure to the end, to be able to persevere, to be able to remain faithful, to be able to keep our focus where it needs to be so that we will be ready when the Lord Jesus Christ returns.

And so, tonight, I want us to focus on the context of the book of Revelation. Chapter 1 is the context in which this revelation is given.

All of the images later on in the book and even the letters that John the Apostle writes to the seven churches. I want to study this context this evening. Now, very briefly, just as an introduction, you'll notice in verse 9 and 10 that one of the contexts that we have is a historical and even a geographical context.

[9 : 51] John tells us that he is on the island of Patmos because of preaching the word of God. He's there in exile. And John in the New Testament occupies a place similar to Daniel, the prophet Daniel, in the Old Testament.

The prophet Daniel in the Old Testament was a prophet sent to Israel, but he was sent to Israel in very different circumstances than normal prophets were sent to Israel.

That is to say that Daniel was a prophet to Israel while they were in exile in Babylon. He was a prophet to Israel at the end of an era. For a number of years, for over 400 years, the descendants of King David had reigned in Judah and Jerusalem.

But in 587 BC and in 586, King Nebuchadnezzar came and laid waste to Jerusalem and destroyed it. And since that time, there has never been a Davidic king physically on a throne in Jerusalem.

And there never will be because Jesus Christ, the son of David, reigns and rules on the throne of David in heaven. And since that time, we have Daniel in exile and the prophecy that he received was not to be given to Israel as she was under the kingship of David.

[11 : 16] In other words, he was given prophecies by God that were meant for the distant future. And they were very heavily symbolic. And John occupies a very similar place in New Testament revelation.

He is at the end of an era. He's at the end of the apostolic era. And just like Daniel, he didn't spend this time freely moving about God's people.

He was in exile. And the revelation which he is given is not simply just for that time period, but it concerns the times and seasons of the end.

And so the Apostle John, the context of the book of Revelation is decidedly futuristic. It's looking ahead to the future much more than the present and current situation.

Very different from Paul's epistles in the New Testament. But the greater context and the context that I want to focus tonight is the theological context of the book of Revelation.

[12:15] When we are speaking to someone, when we are trying to teach our children how to speak to someone, we often teach our little children that they need to look people directly in the eye. We tell our boys especially, when a man wants to shake your hand, you shake his hand and you look him right in the eye.

It's very disconcerting when you're trying to talk to somebody and they're sort of looking all over the place. You don't know if they're really paying attention or listening. And in Revelation chapter 1, John tells the New Testament church exactly where our eyesight needs to be focused.

He tells us where we need to look. And he tells us very plainly that the New Testament church, as we receive instruction and revelation from God from the scriptures, we need to keep our eyes firmly focused and fixed on the risen and glorified Lord Jesus Christ.

That that is where we need to be looking. Now you see this a couple places in our text. The first place is in verse 11 and 12. You'll see that John is worshiping and he hears a voice behind him and the voice says, write what you see in a book and send it to the seven churches.

Now immediately, those of us who are familiar with Revelation think, write what you see. And we sort of start to get excited about visions of dragons and bowls of judgment and sort of trumpets and things like that and the four horsemen of the apocalypse.

[13:34] And we start thinking about all of these grand visions that John is about to experience. But did you catch what is the very first thing that John sees when he turns around? In verse 12, he sees seven golden lampstands representing the churches and then in the midst of the lampstands, one like a son of man.

The very first thing that the apostle John sees is Jesus Christ himself. Write what you see to the seven churches and he turns around and he sees Jesus Christ.

The message of the apostles is the risen and glorified Lord Jesus Christ. And you see it secondly, if you'll turn over in chapters two and three, when John prefacing his letters to each one of the churches, you'll notice that he keeps referring back to this vision that he just had of Christ.

In chapter two and verse one, he describes Christ as the one who is holding the seven stars in his right hand who walks among the seven lampstands. In chapter two and verse eight, the words of the first and the last who died and came to life.

In 212, the words of him who has the sharp two-edged sword. In verse 18, the words of the son of God who has eyes like a flame of fire and whose feet are like burnished bronze.

[14:52] In chapter three and verse one, who has the seven spirits of God and the seven stars. And then again in verse 14, the words of the amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of God's creation.

John is taking the New Testament church and he is constantly pointing them back to this vision that he has of Christ at the very beginning. In order to properly receive New Testament revelation, our eyes need to be fixed on the risen Lord.

And it is not an accident that John saw Jesus Christ and received this vision of Christ on the Lord's day while he was worshiping. And so many Christians want a closer walk with the Lord.

They say, well, I want to know Jesus. I want to understand the Lord even better. And yet they neglect the worship of Christ on the Lord's day. And yet that is the very time when Jesus Christ revealed himself to the apostle John.

Write what you see. And he heard that voice speaking to him as he was worshiping on the Lord's day. And he turned and he saw the Lord. If you want your walk with Christ deepened, if you want a fresh look at Christ, if you want to know him more, commit yourself to the public gathering of God's people.

[16:08] Commit yourself to worshiping him on his own day, the first day of the week, the Lord's day. Come expectantly. Come by faith. Expect to see the Lord Jesus Christ.

Expect to hear him speak to you. When the word is preached from the scriptures, Christ is speaking to you. He is speaking to you by the power of his Holy Spirit.

If you want to hear his voice, come under the ministry of the word of God. And come expectantly. Come hoping and knowing that you will hear him speak to you. Now this evening, as we try to fix our eyes on the Lord Jesus Christ, I want very briefly to look at five titles which are given to Christ in these verses.

And then after we briefly look at each one of those titles, I want to take away five implications of how we ought to respond to each one of these titles of Christ.

How we ought to respond as a church. And this is appropriate on the first Sunday of the year to reset our focus, to make sure that we as a church, the church as a whole, are looking correctly and envisioning Christ correctly, making sure that when we measure success, measure progress as a church, we are doing so biblically.

[17:30] So the first title that I want to point out tonight from our text is in verse five. And John hears that Christ is given the title the faithful witness.

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 and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness.

In the Old Testament, the nation of Israel was to be this faithful witness. Israel, as the covenant people of God, was supposed to be the faithful witness to God.

They were supposed to display the character and the glory of God to the nations around them. They were supposed to display what a joy it is to have God as their king and their ruler.

And to this end, God gave them the temple. He gave them the Davidic kingship. He gave them priests. He gave them prophets. He gave them their own land.

[18:31] He gave them the law of Moses. God gave Israel everything they needed to be successful in being faithful witnesses to the nations around them.

And yet you know, if you study the Old Testament, that Israel completely failed in that task. God gave them everything they needed and they totally failed to be faithful witnesses to God.

They were supposed to make known the salvation of God. They were supposed to make known the holiness of God, the mercy of God. God gave them many, many gifts and they failed in their task.

And yet we find in the New Testament that when the Lord Jesus Christ came, He was given none of those external advantages and yet He faithfully did all that Israel failed to do.

Christ came to a nation that was ruled over by the Roman Empire. They didn't have their own land. They didn't have their own king. And yet the Lord Jesus Christ made known to the people of Israel God Himself.

[19:36] Imagine the weight that is on Jesus Christ. How do you make known an infinite, eternal, and unchangeable God? How do you make that God known to the people around you?

And yet Jesus Christ was the faithful witness. He that has seen me has seen the Father. That's what Christ told His disciples. Christ revealed the mercy of God the Father.

Do you as a Christian want to know your Father? Then you need to look at the Lord Jesus Christ. When Christ walked on earth, He was coming into Jericho and a crowd was with Him.

And yet He heard the voice of blind Bartimaeus call out to Him, Jesus, Thou Son of David, have mercy on me. And He stopped the crowd and He walked over to the blind man.

He had the blind man brought to Him and He healed him of his blindness. Jesus Christ was showing the mercy and the compassion of God. When Jesus Christ stayed up late at night speaking to Nicodemus, Nicodemus was a teacher in Israel.

[20 : 44] He was a Pharisee. Nicodemus should have known better. Christ was teaching Nicodemus the ABCs of religion. Some of you children that have grown up in this church know the doctrine of regeneration.

And Nicodemus had no idea what the doctrine of regeneration was. And he was supposed to be a teacher in Israel. And yet Jesus patiently, calmly explained it to him.

He gently rebuked him and He pointed him to the truth of God's Word. He was showing the patience of God the Father. He was showing the kindness and the gentleness of God the Father when He did that.

When Jesus Christ taught His disciples to pray, hallowed be thy name. Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. He was revealing the worthiness of His Father.

How wonderful it was to serve Him. When Christ was speaking to the woman at the well and the disciples came back and they were surprised to find Christ speaking to this notorious woman and they said, well, here, we've brought lunch for you, we've brought food.

[21 : 50] Christ said, my food is to do the will of Him who sent me. You see how that honors the Father, how worthy He is? Christ was saying, it is enough for me simply to be His servant.

Simply to be the Father's servant is the highest calling, the most fulfilling calling that I could ever have. That was Christ's attitude. If the Father asks me to do it, that's enough for me.

God is a worthy God of all of our devotion and Christ reveals that to us. He shows us by His own self-discipline and own self-control and self-denial in going to the cross.

If you doubt that it is worthwhile to serve God, you don't understand what Christ did when He was on earth. If you doubt that everything which you've given up for God is worth it, you need to look again at the Lord Jesus Christ and study His life.

He gave up everything because God was worth it. Because His Father was worthwhile to serve. This is the faithful witness, the Lord Jesus Christ. He showed that God is a holy God because every day of His life, every moment of every day, He kept the law of God.

[23 : 03] And that was showing us the holiness of God. He shows us the justice of God when Christ on the Sermon of the Mount talks about people coming to Him and saying, well Lord, Lord, didn't we do this in Your name?

And didn't we do that? And He talks about people saying, well you ate in our streets and you drank and you taught and we knew you. And Christ says, away from me you evildoers, I never knew you.

He is showing the justice of God. That God does not blink at sin. He doesn't just simply push it to the side and say, well I know everybody kind of messes up and we'll just sort of let that slide.

Jesus says, no. And when Christ went to the cross and died and bore the sins of God's elect in His body on the tree He was demonstrating the justice of God.

In order for Christ to be a faithful witness, in order for Him to carry out this task, He had to die to show us the justice of God. Otherwise, He would not have been a faithful witness.

[24 : 06] He would not have fully explained God's justice to us. But He was so willing to be faithful to His task and to show us the character of God that He died to show us the justice of God.

That God will never let the smallest of sins go unpunished but that He must send His Son to die for the least of those who transgress His law. This is the faithful witness, the Lord Jesus Christ.

The second title that we see is the firstborn of the dead. Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead. And this statement here is a parallel statement to others in the New Testament.

If you'll look over in chapter 3 and verse 14, we read this earlier, it's a parallel statement to when Christ writes to Laodicea, the beginning of God's creation, Him who is the beginning of God's creation.

It's a parallel statement to Paul's writing in 1 Corinthians chapter 15 and verse 20, the first fruits of those that have fallen asleep. It's a parallel statement to Colossians chapter 1 verse 15 and 18 where Christ is called the firstborn of creation, the firstborn from the dead.

[25 : 17] And this is, this phrase, this title has occasioned some stumbling and some of the cults have tried to turn this into the idea that somehow Jesus Christ was the first being that was created by God the Father.

but part of what this statement is getting at is that Jesus Christ, in Jesus Christ, the new age, the end of the age has already arrived.

When Christ is called the firstborn of the dead, obviously Christ was not the first person to have ever been raised from the grave. In the Old Testament we have accounts of people being raised from the dead.

In the New Testament we have three accounts of Christ raising someone from the dead. So chronologically speaking Christ is not the first person to be raised from the dead. But what this phrase means is that eschatologically He is the first person to be raised from the dead.

That is, He is the first one to have been raised from the dead with a glorified body. To have been raised and never experienced death again. Jesus Christ has a glorified body.

[26 : 22] And in Him, in Christ, the new age has already come. The consummate end of time has already appeared in the Lord Jesus Christ. When Christ comes again we will receive perfect bodies.

Our bodies will be glorified. They will be reunited to our souls after death. There will be no more death. Satan will have been finally and ultimately defeated. And we will be present with God in glory forever.

And Christ's kingdom will be co-extensive with the earth. He will rule over the entire world. And yet, right now, all of those things are true and present in Jesus Christ Himself.

Not in us, but in Jesus Christ. The end time has already come. History has already reached its climax and conclusion in the person, the physical body of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And so that gives us great hope for the future. That the end is already here in Christ. Though we have not experienced the new heavens and the new earth, we look by faith to the Lord Jesus Christ risen from the dead.

[27 : 29] And the new heavens and the new earth are present right now. Now, the third title which we find here is the ruler of the kings on earth. The ruler of the kings on earth.

In Exodus, we find that when Israel came out of Egypt, they called the Lord a warrior.

They said that the Lord is a man of war. A warrior God. And you remember in the Exodus event, God reveals himself to Moses and to the Israelites as the great I Am.

The warrior God. The one who redeems his people out of slavery. The one who conquers Israel's enemies. And what we are reading here in Revelation 1-5 is we are saying that Jesus Christ himself is the warrior God.

That Jesus Christ the Lord is a man of war. He is the one who redeems sinners out of the bondage of sin and out of the bondage of Satan.

[28 : 29] He is the one who has conquered Satan. And he is the ruler of kings on earth. There is no power on earth higher than the Lord Jesus Christ. And that authority has been given to Christ as a reward for his work in living a perfect life and dying a perfect death.

God the Father gave him that as a reward. All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to the Lord Jesus Christ. Now the fourth title which we find here in chapter 1-5 is not explicit but it is implied in the words to him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood.

And that is that Jesus Christ receives the title of a willing sacrifice for sinners. And we need to recapture our understanding of Christ's sacrifice his sacrificial atonement for our sins that Jesus Christ was a willing sacrifice.

He willingly died on the cross. He didn't do it out of mere duty. He did it out of joy for the joy set before him. He endured the cross. And what was that joy?

It was the joy of saving sinners. It was the joy of bringing sinners to be his friend and to know God his Father. And we know that because in John chapter 17 that was the burden of his prayer.

[29 : 56] Before Christ went to the cross what was he thinking about? He was thinking about you. He was thinking about lost sinners that would hear the truth through the apostolic testimony.

That's what Christ was thinking about in the Garden of Gethsemane. It's interesting in the Garden of Gethsemane Christ took three of his disciples to pray with him Peter and John and James and yet we know that they fell asleep and yet when Christ comes back he wakes them up and you remember what he says to those three apostles Christ who is about to experience the worst suffering that any man has ever experienced Christ who is about to receive the full wrath of God his Father.

Do you remember what Christ says to his disciples? Pray that you will not fall into temptation. Who was he thinking about? He was thinking about Peter, James, and John.

How kind is the Lord Jesus Christ? Most of us would say don't you understand what it is I'm doing? Why aren't you praying for me? I'm about to go through this horrific experience and you can't stay awake to pray for me.

And yet when Christ comes back he is concerned with their spiritual condition. And he says you need to pray so that you won't fall into temptation.

[31 : 20] And when Jesus Christ himself is praying for them as recorded in John 17, praying for those disciples and praying for us who are meeting here together tonight, for those who believed in the apostolic word.

Christ, the Christ who is the ruler of the kings on earth is also the Christ who hung on a cross and died for sinners. And we cannot divorce those two aspects of Christ.

Sometimes in our world today you get the false teaching that says well you need to live the victorious life, victorious Christianity, and you shouldn't be sad. There's the mistaken notion that when you come to a funeral nobody should be crying, it should be happy, we should all be laughing and excited.

And the gospel says no, that's not true. Jesus Christ is the ruler of the kings on earth, he is victorious, and he is also the Jesus who died on the cross. Those two things go together, victory and grief go together, victory and sorrow go together in this world.

Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount, blessed are those who mourn, happy are those who mourn. That doesn't make any sense unless you're a Christian and unless you understand that the ruler of the kings on earth is also the one who died on the cross.

[32:36] It's the same Jesus. He is a whole savior. Salvation is complete in Christ. And then we find in verse 17 the last of the titles which we'll study tonight and that is Christ speaks to John and he says I am the first and the last.

I am the first and the last. And here very simply this title is simply referring to Christ's divinity. Christ is calling himself God.

You'll notice in verse 4 John writes to the churches grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come. And then in verse five and from Jesus Christ.

So there's a distinguishing there between God the father and God the son. But when Christ speaks in verse 17 to John he says I am the first and the last.

I am God. Jesus Christ himself is the eternal unchangeable infinite God. Jesus Christ himself is God.

[33:40] And that's why John's response was to fall at his feet in worship because he was standing in the presence of God when he was standing in the presence of Christ. Now what are some of the implications of these realities?

What are the ways in which we need to respond as a church when we look at Christ and understand him in this way? And the first way is that when we see Christ as a faithful witness we need to understand that the only way in which we will reach the world around us is by focusing our attention on the Lord Jesus Christ and using him as our pattern and as our guide.

We sang about that earlier. So many people want to reach the world for Christ and that's a noble thing but as they do so they take their eyes off of the one person who is the faithful witness.

Jesus Christ has already faithfully witnessed to God the Father and we as a church are given the task of being a faithful witness to the world and we will utterly fail in that task if we take our eyes off of the Lord Jesus Christ.

He is the pattern and guide. He has shown us how to be a faithful witness to God the Father. And when the church takes her eyes off of Christ she loses her ability to be a faithful witness for God in the world.

[35:05] So often today there's the attitude of many Christians that think that the church's problem is we need more money, we need more power, we need more influence. If we could get some celebrities or well-known politicians or sports figures to promote our message then we would be able to influence the world.

Jesus Christ has already faithfully witnessed and faithfully revealed God the Father. And we need to understand that in the Old Testament Israel had all of those things.

Israel had wealth, they had land, they had a king and they failed in their task because they took their eyes off of the coming Messiah.

The people of God have already tried that experiment and it didn't work. And instead they failed and they went into exile because they prostituted themselves to false gods.

And we as a church need to keep our eyes fixed on Christ if we would be a faithful witness in the world. But secondly when we look at the firstborn of the dead and we realize that that is one of Christ's titles, as the church today we must recover the spiritual nature of the church.

[36:18] If we take our eyes off of Christ as the firstborn of the dead we lose the idea of the church as a spiritual institution and a spiritual organization.

The Lord Jesus Christ is the head of his church and only those who have been spiritually raised from the dead ought to be called members of his church.

Those who are yet unregenerate and in their sins ought not to be united to Christ in the membership of the church because Jesus Christ is part of the new creation not the old creation.

And we must have a work of the Holy Spirit done in our hearts to be united to the risen and ascended Jesus Christ. The church is a spiritual body. We are a spiritual body.

It's not a social club. It's not a political club. It is a spiritual body. And we need to understand that when we are looking for those individuals who want to join the church they must be regenerate individuals.

[37 : 24] They must have experienced the new birth. They must be part of the new creation. Not physically but spiritually united to Christ. Thirdly when we study Christ as the ruler of the kings on earth the church must respond by being able to joyfully persevere in a world that is falling apart.

We need to understand that we live in a world that is being torn apart by sin. Romans chapter 5 is very plain that death is reigning because of sin.

The only way to break the grip of sin in this world is by the work of Jesus Christ. But the church must never become depressed because Christ has already broken the power of sin and death.

Don't you find yourself swinging from one extreme to the other when you take your eyes off Christ. You become wildly excited that perhaps the church has new life and the church is going to advance. And then you hear something else in the news and you swing back to depression and discouragement because you feel that well there went that opportunity.

And I can't believe that church over here blew it and they fell apart. Or that pastor, it was, you know, he had a chance, he could have preached a good sermon to a lot of people, could have done some influence in the world and he failed.

[38 : 42] And we find ourselves swinging back and forth from one side to the other. And yet the way to joyfully persevere is to understand that Jesus Christ is ruling right now and he accomplishes his work by weak human vessels.

Both of those things are true. We are weak and yet Jesus Christ is the king of heaven and earth. And we need to understand that by faith. And the whole book of Revelation is based on the premise that Jesus Christ is the king, that he is ruling over heaven and earth.

Fourthly, when we study Christ and his willing sacrifice on the cross, we need to understand that the church will only grow in her ability to serve one another in so far as she fixes her eyes on the sacrificial atonement of Christ.

It's very interesting. Something strange has taken place in modern evangelicism. And that is that preachers go to conferences about how to wake up their slumbering churches and how to activate their members and how to have a membership that is unified and committed and full of life and vigor.

And they want to find out how to produce this. And yet all the while the doctrine of the atonement has been taken away from the pulpit. And so the pastors are wondering, well, how can I get my people to repent towards one another?

[40 : 08] How can I get my people to forgive one another? How can I get the members of the church to serve one another and to love one another? And all the while they are taking away the blood sacrifice of Christ from the pulpit.

And the atonement of Jesus Christ is not being preached. Or it's being minimized and watered down until it's a bare minimum of Jesus Christ died and we have forgiveness of sins. And that's all that's ever said about the atonement from the pulpit.

How will you as a Christian be able to serve your brothers and sisters until you grasp something of the depth of what Christ did on the cross for your soul?

How will you begin to forgive the person who has sinned grievously against you until you understand that when Judas went out to betray Jesus Christ, he left that last supper with clean feet because Jesus Christ wrapped himself in a towel and washed Judas's feet, knowing that he would betray him that very night.

When you understand that Jesus Christ has humbled himself for you and taken the lowest place as a servant, there is nothing too low for you to do to serve the person sitting next to you, to serve your spouse, to serve your parent, to serve your children, to serve a fellow church member who doesn't get it, who doesn't understand all that you've done for them.

[41 : 45] How will you as a deacon or as an elder of this church joyfully serve the people here when they just don't get it and they don't know how much time you've put in and they don't know how many extra meetings you've put in.

You don't. They don't know how long you've prayed for them and they don't see your sacrifice behind the scenes. How are you going to continue to serve the individuals of the church without grasping what Christ has done on the cross, without reading these words and saying to him who loved me and freed me from my sin.

The apostle Paul wrote the book of Galatians. He said, Jesus Christ loved me and gave himself for me. And it astonished him that the Galatians could try and add works to their salvation.

What do you mean be circumcised in order to be justified? What do you mean keep the law of Moses in order to be justified before God? That doesn't make any sense. And it didn't make any sense to Paul because he was meditating on Christ and him crucified.

Because he was meditating on how Christ had served him and loved him. This church will only grow in her ability to love and serve one another if the atonement is clearly and faithfully preached from the pulpit and the people grasp it and believe it for themselves.

[43 : 09] And then fifthly, the church of our day today will only worship God properly when they understand that Jesus Christ is God himself.

There's the attitude in our church today that Jesus Christ is sort of our buddy. He's sort of our friend. He's sort of our guy that sort of fixes things when we sort of mess things up.

Jesus Christ is God himself. Jesus Christ is God. There's all this talk and all this debate in our churches today about what instruments are we going to have and are we going to have a guitar and is that too much or should we have a team up front or should we not have a team up front?

But until you recognize that Jesus Christ is God and until you come into a church service ready to worship him as God, it doesn't matter what instruments you have or don't have up front because you will never worship him correctly until you understand who he is as God.

And we need to recover the fear of God and our worship. When John turned and saw Christ, he had laid his head on Jesus's breast at the last supper.

[44 : 26] And yet when he saw Christ risen and glorified, he fell at his feet as though dead. That's an apostle who knew Christ better than anyone in the world.

And we need to recapture the fear of God. Do you receive the words of God in an attitude of worship? Do you realize that Jesus Christ is the one who has control over your soul and your body?

And it is up to him to decide whether that soul will spend eternity in heaven or in hell. That's up to the Lord Jesus Christ. As God.

And whether or not you are a Christian, he is in total control of where your soul will spend eternity. Do you realize that that's Jesus Christ, the living God?

And that when we sing hymns about Christ and when we come to worship Christ, we are worshiping God himself. The church needs to recapture her fear of God.

[45 : 33] Do we as a church keep our eyes fixed on Christ? Will you as a church this year fix your eyes on Christ? Will you measure success not by the number of people that come or the missionaries that you support or pray for the other activities that you have?

But will you measure yourself by your ability to maintain your focus on Christ and understand who he is? When you study the word of God, do you want to see Christ in all of his fullness?

Some people are so content to simply say, well, Jesus died for my sins and now I have forgiveness and that's all I need to know. The real Christian, the one who loves Christ, wants to know everything about him.

And so when you study the word of God, do you try to see the fullness of Christ? Do you try to understand all that he is to the sinner? That will enhance your ability to worship him.

It will enhance your ability to walk closely with him as a friend. Have you committed your life to the Lord Jesus Christ? What a terrifying thing it would be for John to have turned around and stood face to face with Christ after having rejected him and turned away from him.

[46 : 52] And yet this is the Christ that we will see on judgment day. And the reason that he could fall at his feet and worship him is because he'd been washed by his blood.

And unless you've been washed by the blood of Christ, when you come to face this Christ, you will be faced with his justice. You will be faced with the sharp two-edged sword that comes out of his mouth.

And you will be faced with the reality that you have rejected this Jesus. Do not make the mistake of turning away and rejecting this Jesus. This is the one that you're denying when you deny Christ.

This is the one you're turning your back on when you turn your back on Christ. Yes, he came in weakness, but he is almighty God and he rose in power.

And this right now is the Jesus Christ who sits in heaven. And when you walk away from Christ and when you say, well, I just don't feel like reading God's word.

[47 : 50] I just it just doesn't really do it for me. You know, I just don't believe the scripture. It's just I need more proof. It's just not really where I'm at right now in life.

This is the Jesus that you're refusing. The one who died and rose again from the dead. But as a church, this is the Christ that we worship each Lord's Day.

What a privilege. What a joy to worship this Christ. Let's pray. Our Heavenly Father, we confess that we have not honored the Son as you have honored him.

But we thank you that you have honored him. We thank you that he has received his full reward from you as his father. Father, we pray that this church here would be able in the coming year to keep her eyes fixed on Christ.

And to not give up any one of these precious titles, but be able to worship Christ as he truly is. We pray that this Christ would be preached among the nations and this Christ would be honored among the nations.

[48 : 55] And we know that for those of us who love him, for those of us who have been bought by his blood, we know by faith that this is the Jesus we will see when we enter into heaven.

Thank God for that. In Christ's name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.