

## 02-07-14b Revelation

Let's resume our study in the book of Revelation. We're in chapter 1 and we are in the introductory section leading up to the message that the Lord Jesus Christ gave to the Apostle John to deliver to these seven churches, which as we have already noted are representative and stand in for us, for all of the believers in every generation of the church age. The Lord Jesus Christ introduces himself with a loud voice as a trumpet.

We know that the trumpet was used to call people to assembly. It was a sound of alarm. It was a sound of alert.

And this is not a call to reflection and meditation so much as a call to action. A whispered voice or a conversational voice or a gentle presentation might be a call to meditate and reflect and think on these things and so on. But when you have a loud voice like a trumpet, this implies action.

It is abrupt. It is loud. It causes an action in John because he's going to turn to see the voice that spoke with him.

But in verses 7 and 8 of Revelation chapter 1, having introduced himself from the standpoint of his divine nature as Alpha and Omega, the first and the last, and having given the commissioning command to deliver this message written in a book and delivered to the seven churches, it's going to have to be sent because God does not deliver John from his exile even after he has this wonderful vision and writes this book. It's not like Peter where the chains fall away and the prison bars part and the doors open and out he walks to go deliver his written message. John is just as much in isolation and exile after writing this book as he was before.

His circumstance does not change but this incalculably valuable message and the ministry and service that John renders here is done while in those very difficult and I would imagine oppressive circumstances. But nevertheless, out of that challenging period of trial comes this message. It is addressed in verse 8 to the seven churches which are in Asia, Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea.

Now, the question we remarked on in our first session this morning, why these seven? There were other churches in Asia Minor that were very well known and well established at this time. Paul himself established a church in Troas. Remember that? T-R-O-A-S.

It was a thriving church in that region. Magnesia, I already mentioned. Trella was another town that had one.

There were several other churches in Asia Minor that were large and well known at this time and yet they are not part of the address list. Well, the answer to this question I think lies in geography. Remember again that just like my great great grandfather, he was a circuit riding primitive Baptist preacher and traveled all over the south.

Actually, at one time or another, he ministered in Arkansas and in Texas and down in Alabama. Many churches could not afford or sustain a full-time pastor, even in the last century. In researching the early days of W.A. Criswell, where I work now, they had what they called quarter-time churches where they would have a pastor once every four Sundays.

One out of every four Sundays would be there to preach because they couldn't pay or afford a full-time pastor. This is where the circuit riding groups would receive the ministry of someone who would travel. That's what John did in the region of Asia.

This also argues for a little bit earlier date for the book because there had not been time for there to be the number of trained pastors. There were far more groups than there were people who were qualified to teach and preach and communicate the truth of God. So the apostles engaged in itinerant ministries and would go.

You see the second generation addressed in Paul's letters to Timothy and Titus where they are to go and raise up elders in every town. Those would be trained and cultivated as potential pastors. But if you look on a map, particularly a topographical map of the region, and look at the road system that existed back in the first century A.D., you find that Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea lie along major thoroughfares, major roads where it was easy to form a circular pattern.

You cover the region in a central way by making the circuit through these seven towns. And from these, the outlying churches could be reached by messengers. So if a messenger goes to Ephesus, for example, then he might be able to move on to Troas and to some of the other churches that would be off the beaten track, so to speak.

So if you are going to cover these effectively, you go to these central locations that are on the major interstate, if you will, and then let messengers from there carry copies of sermons or copies of letters to the outlying churches. Part of the reason for the choice of these churches is geographical. They form a circuit and they are centrally accessible to all of the other churches in Asia Minor.

I think a second reason is that they are representative of their regions, their areas in Asia Minor. And circumstances in Troas are not going to be that different than those in Ephesus. And Laodicea is not going to be that different from Colossae, for example.

You remember when Paul wrote Colossians and also wrote the Laodicean letter, which has come down to us as Ephesians, those letters were carried in the same pouch by the same messenger. And each letter was to be read to the other church because their circumstances were very similar. And indeed the content of Colossians is kind of a Reader's Digest condensed version of Ephesians.

So by sending a letter to Laodicea, you have in essence sent to Colossae as well and addressed

the issues in Colossae. And the same is true, I could remark on others at Philadelphia and Thyatira and so on. But that is why, and the fact that there are seven, of course, is resonant.

It talks about the entirety of the church community in Asia. And this was the particular area of John's ministry. These are not sent, for example, back to Jerusalem.

There is not one of these letters addressed to Jerusalem. The cradle of Christianity is Jerusalem. Remember Jesus said, you shall be witness to me in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and in the uttermost parts of the world.

Well, this actually falls under the uttermost parts because it is not Samaria. None of these are in Israel. And we might wonder, well, why is the Jerusalem church not listed or not mentioned or any other churches at Antioch or any of the other prominent places? Once again, this region is known to John.

These seven churches are representative not only of all of Asia Minor, but indeed of all of the believers who are in the diaspora, the scattering that took place at the latter part of the first century AD. And it is written in Greek. The letter, the message is in Greek.

It is to the Greek speaking world. Things have changed. Jerusalem has been destroyed by the legions of Titus.

The prediction that Jesus made that there would not be one stone upon another at the temple has come true. The time, the setting for this book is very near the end of the first century. It is generally ascribed the date of 95 AD.

And this, of course, would make John very elderly. But it is within the realm of not only possibility, but of certainty that John, I think, was the author of this book, even at that late date. But it could be anywhere after the fall of Jerusalem.

And the opportunity has already come and gone for Jerusalem and Judea and Samaria. The Lord Jesus began by addressing those people. And their window of opportunity has opened and closed.

They made their response. And the Jews have been scattered from the nation of Israel. And so you are going to find a mixture of not only Greek and the uncircumcised, the Gentiles, but also Jewish communities in these towns.

And there is going to be a dynamic going on here that explains some of the other circumstances we have. Each of these churches within these regions has a unique set of circumstances. There are particular problems.

There are particular challenges that face them. And that is going to form the substance of the message that is delivered to each one. But we are going to find that having addressed the seven,

the Lord Jesus Christ has essentially addressed all of the major types of challenges that face the church, and have faced the church all the way down through the centuries.

So then in verse 12, John turns to see the voice that was speaking. Having turned, I saw seven golden lampstands. And in the midst of the seven lampstands, one like the Son of Man, clothed with a garment down to the feet, girded about the chest with a golden band.

His head and hair were white like wool as white as snow, and his eyes like a flame of fire. His feet were like fine brass as if refined in a furnace, and his voice as the sound of many waters. He had in his right hand seven stars.

Out of his mouth went a sharp two-edged sword, and his countenance was like the sun, shining in its strength. When I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead. And I want to remark on that last observation first.

Because we asked the question earlier, why did the Lord Jesus speak from behind John? Because Jesus wants him to hear and understand and digest the first message, the message of verse 7 and 8, before he collapses. If he had appeared in front of John, John would have fainted, and the whole Alpha and Omega speech would have sort of been lost on him. This way he understands clearly that the Alpha and the Omega is the one speaking, and that he has a message to deliver to his seven churches.

He had no trouble remembering the list. This was his old circuit with which he is familiar. And of course there is no better one to address them than the apostle who served them for so many years.

And when he turns, he is expecting to see Jesus as he saw him on the shores of Galilee, as he saw him throughout his earthly ministry. And instead he sees this vision of the Divine Christ. The first thing he sees are the seven golden lampstands.

You have to think of a lampstand in terms of what life was like in the first century. They didn't have light switches, they didn't have lights hanging from the overhead. If you've ever seen in a museum the types of lamps that were in use, they are a little round about the size of a sugar bowl or a creamer, flat with a handle on one side and a little bit of a lip almost as though you would pour out of it on the other.

They would be filled with oil, and there would be a wick extending from the little spout or pouring area, and they would be lit on that end. Well, that's not going to provide much more light than a candle. So what we do with candles when we want them to provide light, we try to elevate them, we put them up high.

And that's the same thing they would do with these lamps. And so a lampstand would be a portable, tall thing, not unlike what we have by way of floor lamps. Now, when you look at a floor

lamp, you see a tall vertical post and the light is up at the top.

Well, this actually harks back to what the lampstands did. And so these have some sort of maybe a tripod type of base or a round base and a stick up, and then at a certain height, probably at about eye level or so, you set this lamp. It can't be too high or it's going to cast its own shadow.

It can't be too low or it's not going to sufficiently illuminate. So the first thing John sees are these seven golden lampstands. They're ornate.

When they're golden, that means they have great value. These are not wooden. They're not wicker.

They're not bronze or brass. They are golden lampstands. And, of course, the gold is going to reflect any light that is given off by the lamps themselves.

The other six lights are going to reflect off any given lampstand. In the midst of the seven lampstands, one like the Son of Man. Now, we know from the following context, it tells us down in verse 20, the mystery of the seven stars, which 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 which you saw are the seven churches. So we don't have any interpretive difficulties here. The Lord Jesus Christ tells us that these seven golden lampstands are the seven churches.

And the first thing we want to note here is Christ is standing in the midst. He's not at the opposite end of the room. He's not in a different room.

They don't stand by themselves. He is in their midst. They surround him.

He can turn his head slightly and see any one of the seven lampstands. Now, if you are in the first century, and you're a member of the church at Smyrna, for example, what does this communicate to you? Your church at Smyrna is known to the Lord Jesus Christ. He is standing in the midst of the lampstands.

He is near at hand. He is paying close attention. He has the stars in his hand, and the lampstands are in his presence.

And this would be a source of comfort. You know how it is when you look at challenges and difficulties and the circumstances that tend to get us immersed in the things of the world. It's easy to lose track of the eminence and the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And this is a visible, symbolic reminder of the fact that the Lord Jesus Christ is near. He is near at hand to the churches, and not just these churches, but he is near at hand to us. We can sometimes distance ourselves from the Lord Jesus.

I don't think he leaves us so much as we leave him. And it's helpful to remember that even as his eye is on the sparrow, we know that he is aware of every hair on our heads. He knows every detail of our lives.

He knows our innermost thoughts and intents. And he is near at hand. And it is a wonderful truth that's worth remembering.

It's worth thinking about when we pray in the morning, or hopefully at noon and at night. When we pause and reflect and meditate on the Word of God, we shouldn't just meditate on the power of the truth in our souls, but also on the presence. There is power in God's Word, but there is also a presence in God's Word.

Again, John himself says, the Word was in the beginning. The Word was with God. The Word was God.

The Word became flesh and dwelt among us. We beheld his glory. John is a witness of that glory.

But the power of the presence of Jesus Christ is there in his Word. And to the one who has his words and keeps them, Jesus said in John's Gospel, that he would come and make his home there. He says, I stand at the door and knock.

If you open the door, I will come in. There is a sense of presence. And I don't think sometimes we spend enough time thinking about the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ.

It ought to be a life-changing thought. If the Lord Jesus Christ is present, then what does that do to our thinking? What does that do to our perspective? What does that do to our priorities and the objectives that we have, the goals that we set in life? In our daily organizing of our day and of our time, when we think about the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ, it ought to change us. It certainly changed John's day when he turned to see the voice that spoke with him.

He saw the seven golden lampstands, and in the midst of the seven lampstands, one like the Son of Man. The Son of Man was Jesus' favorite title for Himself. And it is a reminder of His humanity.

We've seen the emphasis on His divinity in the Alpha and the Omega. And we see in this vision, this garment and the flame and the whiteness and the glowing that is impossible to look directly at, all of the manifestations of Christ in His glory. And yet, His title here is Son of Man.

And it is a reminder that He has partaken of our flesh. That whole doctrine of kenosis, He did not think equality with God a thing to be grasped. He emptied Himself, took on the form of a servant.

As John himself said, He became flesh and dwelt among us. So this Son of Man reference is a reminder that when He stands in the midst of the lampstands, even though His appearance is a reminder of judgment, fire is always a reminder of judgment, yet it is also a reminder of sympathy and of likeness and of partaking of our nature. It says He's clothed with a garment down to the

feet and girded about the chest with a golden band.

Among other things, this is an argument for simplicity in dress. You look around at some of the Christian television sets and the way people dress, and it's astonishing how gaudy and overworked everything can be. This is simplicity itself.

It reminds us of the garment that they cast lots for at the foot of the cross. It was a single piece, woven as a single piece. And here He has a single garment down to the feet and one wide band of gold about the chest.

And of course gold, whenever you see gold, this is the highest value. It speaks of divinity once again. This is Christ's divine authority that is in view.

You think of the gold that was used in the tabernacle and later in the temple, the golden lampstand, the golden candlestick, the golden altar of incense, the table of showbread overlaid with gold, the Ark of the Covenant itself was wood overlaid with gold, the wood speaking of humanity, the gold speaking of deity. It is the highest metal in terms of value when you look at things from a biblical point of view. And the lampstands are made of gold and this band is made of gold.

And once again you see that there is an association between Christ Himself and the churches. They both are characterized by gold. And what that tells us is that the church is to reflect and partake of the divine righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Gold is reflective, polished gold. There is nothing that is more beautiful than polished gold and its beauty comes from what it does with light, the light that is reflected and emanates from it. And even as the Lord Jesus Christ has this glory that is reflected and enhanced in this golden band around His chest, the golden lampstands are supposed to do the same thing.

They are supposed to reflect the glory of Christ. That is our mission. And it sounds kind of abstract and abstruse, well we reflect the glory of God, but it is something that can be applied.

Stop and think. When we are trying to make a decision, we are analyzing, well I've got two or three different courses of action here. One question we can always ask ourselves is who is going to be at issue when this is all said and done? Who is going to be made the most visible? Is this going to elevate me? Is this going to make an issue out of me or my abilities or my accomplishments or whatever it might be? Or is this something that is going to reflect the glory of God? In what way can this be done so that God is glorified? And not in a superficial glory to God hand-waving kind of way, but in a genuine way.

Not necessarily on the lips of people or even in the eyes of people, but in the genuine sense of this is what most closely comports with the will of God. This is what would please God most. This is what would reflect God's glory in the eyes of the angelic observers.

This is what will reflect the glory of God in an objective, historic measure. Not necessarily who is watching and who is speaking. So that is part and parcel of the reason that churches exist.

It is to reflect the glory of God. They are golden candlesticks that partake of the very same element that surrounds the chest of the Lord Jesus Christ. Girded about the chest with a golden band.

This of course is also a badge of authority, divine authority. His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and his eyes like a flame of fire. Of course we imagine that the Lord Jesus Christ was not white-headed when he was engaged in his earthly ministry here.

He was no doubt dark-headed as most of the Jewish people were. So why does it say his hair is white like wool, as white as snow? Well, white as snow is an Old Testament figure. We have it even in our hymns.

Wash me and I shall be whiter than snow. Whiteness is a symbol for purity. It is a symbol for righteousness.

Wool and snow were both symbols of whiteness in the ancient world. Wool was common. Snow was rare.

The fact that both are mentioned here is not an accident. His head and hair, this of course is where you look for glory. The woman's glory is on her head.

It's her hair and she is the glory of the man. You have a thinking back to the picture that Paul talks about where the head of every man is Christ and Christ's head is white like wool, as white as snow. His head and hair.

And his eyes are like a flame of fire. The effect we get here is that this is not just white in the sense of color, but it is white in the sense of an incandescent glow. It is bright like trying to look at the sun.

And his eyes are like a flame of fire. Not only is he himself characterized by purity and righteousness, but his eyes being like a flame of fire, this is a reference to the fact that what he sees, he judges. The flame of fire refers to the fact that the superficialities, the wood, hay and stubble effect is burned away and only what is valuable can endure that gaze.

Only what is worthy and what is righteous and what partakes of the character of God is going to survive that scrutiny. His eyes penetrate and burn away everything that is inconsequential and everything that is sinful and everything that is human in its origin and human in its purpose. His feet are like fine brass as if refined in a furnace and his voice as the sound of many waters.

Now why would you have feet like fine brass? Well, there is a lot we could say about this, but once again, brass is reflective. Fine brass, highly polished, is going to reflect. But feet always

speak of walking, of movement, and figuratively of lifestyle and of pattern of behavior.

We talk about the Christian walk. Well, Christ's feet are of fine brass. One of the characteristics of fine brass is that it is very durable.

A lot of military equipment that needs to endure in all kinds of conditions will be made of brass because brass is easy to maintain. You have brass fittings on a ship. They are easily restored when they come in contact with the elements or with dirt and other forms of impurity.

Brass is easily restored to its original luster with polishing. It is harder than gold. It is more durable for coming in contact with other things.

Why are His feet not gold, like the chest band? Because when Jesus walks, He is going to be walking on the earth. The earth, of course, has fallen, and creation has fallen and is under a curse. He is going to be traveling about.

In the ancient world, they had to wash their feet. One of the ablutions that would occur when you would go into a home for a meal would be that servants would gird themselves and wash your feet, wash off the road dirt. Jesus Himself washed the feet of the disciples.

He says, you have need for me to do this. It was a picture of forgiveness and of removing the dirt that accumulates by contact with the things of the world. The feet come in contact with the world, and there are pollutions.

But these feet of fine brass are not easily soiled, and they are easily restored. It talks about the fact that the Lord Jesus Christ is pure. He is pure from head to toe.

There is the picture of durability and of restoration involved in the fine brass of the feet. And, of course, we are to be the same way. We are in the world but not of it.

We should keep short accounts. We should note when we have... I've mentioned this before, but it always occurs to me in this context. When we were studying Leviticus with Dr. Ross, he talked about the fact that we are not always thinking of the types of ritual defilement that could occur in Israel.

From a Levitical point of view, there was a lot of defilement that would occur that was not volitional. It wasn't the person's fault. Through no fault of their own, they might come in contact with something that was dead, or they might find a spot of mildew on their clothing or whatever, and they might have a sore or something that ran, and it would render them ritually unclean.

It wasn't a decision that they made. It was just a happenstance of life. But they were nevertheless to go through the rituals for purification.

How often do we, when we go to God in prayer and we think about our known sins and we

confess our anger or our impatience or our worry or our sins of the tongue or whatever they might be, but how often do we stop and confess before God the sinfulness of our culture, the sinfulness of our surroundings, and the fact that as we travel through we are inevitably picking up pollution and we are in a sense rendered ceremonially unclean just by moving through the world with its defilements and by possessing fallen flesh. This is something good to acknowledge and to recognize that we move through an environment that requires us to be cleansed. And even the feet of the Lord Jesus Christ here are like fine brass, something that can endure pollution and be quickly restored, as if refined in a furnace.

And his voice as the sound of many waters. Now this is the second time Jesus' voice is described. The first time was like a trumpet.

This is the alarm, the alert, the call to attention. Now his voice is as the sound of many waters. And this is a reference to its volume, one of the loudest, they didn't have sonic booms, they didn't have jet engines.

What was the noisiest thing you could think of? What was the overwhelming sound that you could hear in the ancient world? And where would you hear many waters? Well you would hear it at the seashore. We think the sound of many waters, I think of Niagara Falls, but they didn't typically have waterfalls in the ancient Near East. But they had large rivers that would cascade, and they had waves at the seashore there in the Mediterranean Sea, which can sometimes be quite agitated.

The Sea of Galilee, we know, had large storms. And the sound of many waters is the crashing of waves, it is the crashing of water into itself. And so this is a supernatural voice.

Normal human voices cannot reproduce this effect. But his voice is as the sound of many waters. Normally when we think of many waters, we think of the troubled sea, which is a picture of the chaotic forces of darkness and evil in the Old Testament.

God establishes his throne upon them, and you see that coming out in symbolic terms in the book of Jonah and elsewhere, the stilling of the storm by the Lord Jesus. And it tells us, it harks back in a way to that episode of the stilling of the storm, because the voice of the Lord Jesus is equal to the greatest that the evil chaotic forces of darkness can come up with. His voice is as loud as any storm.

And in the same way that his voice stilled the storm, when he speaks, he will bring every chaotic force into subjection. His voice is the equal of the loudest and most chaotic thunderstorm or cascade of water that could be known. His voice is as the sound of many waters.

It's a symbol of his power and his authority over any seemingly uncontrollable force in the world. He had in his right hand seven stars. Out of his mouth went a sharp two-edged sword.

We're able to tell pretty quickly what the sharp two-edged sword is. We have the word of God described in that way elsewhere. In his right hand are seven stars, and his countenance was like the sun, shining in his strength.

This is once again a reference to his head and to his face. This means that he is very close to being impossible to look at. John takes a glance and he has to fall on his face as though dead.

But he laid his right hand on me, saying to me, Do not be afraid. We're going to say more about the seven stars here in a moment. We've already talked about the sun shining in his strength.

This is the Lord Jesus Christ with his divine authority in the role of judgment. All of this shining, all of this glory, this whole book is going to address itself to the period of Christ's glory. Both his glory reflected in the church now, and his glory that will be revealed in the end times.

It is a time of judgment. The sun shining in his strength, this flame of fire motif, has the idea of burning away that which is not gold and silver and precious stones. We begin and end with this idea of gold and light and fire.

Out of his mouth, a sharp two-edged sword. Obviously, this is symbolic. It would be kind of grotesque to actually see some sort of two-edged sword and trying to speak with it would be unhandy.

This vision is sort of a snapshot for John. John turns around, he glances, he takes this all in, but the brightness of it overwhelms him and he falls on his face. The effect of the candlesticks and the stars and the sword and all of this immediately disappears because it says that he had in his right hand seven stars, but what does he do with his right hand in verse 17? He laid his right hand on me.

Now, you can't have a handful of stars and lay that hand on someone at the same time. So, this is a snapshot. This is an image full of symbolism and of significance, but it isn't sustained throughout the conversation.

John goes to the ground and the Lord Jesus lays his right hand on John and says, do not be afraid. I am the first and the last, and now his voice is no longer the trumpet and the sound of many waters. He's speaking to John in more familiar terms to comfort him.

He says, I am the first and the last. He says, I am he who lives and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore. And he reminds John, I'm the same Jesus that you saw crucified, buried, raised, and who ascended.

I live, I was dead, I am alive forevermore. Not only did you see me 50, 60 years ago, but you're seeing me again now. It wasn't just a temporary resuscitation.

I'm still alive and will be forevermore. And I have the keys of Hades and death. The proof of the

conquering of death is the fact that the Lord Jesus Christ is raised and stays raised.

And God has given him the keys of Hades and of death. And we'll have more to say about Hades and death before long. But the thing to note here is in verse 19, he says, write the things which you have seen, that's everything he's seen up to this point, which we have just read in the first 18 verses, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after this.

The mystery of the seven stars which you saw in my right hand, past tense, they're not there anymore, and the seven golden lampstands, the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands which you saw are the seven churches. So there is a distinction made between the angels and the churches. There are some people who try to say they're all the same thing.

And the identity of these seven stars, and what it means that they are called angelos, angeloi, angels, is something we're going to need to spend some time on. It's exceedingly important because the letters we're going to study are addressed specifically to these seven angels. To the angel of the church at Ephesus, write.

To the angel of the church at Sardis, write. To the angel of the church at Thyatira, write. And there are several schools of thought about who these angels are.

Some say they are literal angels who are assigned in sort of a guardianship kind of way to each church, much as the angel Michael was assigned to the nation of Israel in the Old Testament. There are those who think the angels are the human representatives or leaders at those churches, the pastor, if you will, the head elder. There are others who think that they are literal messengers who are there to carry these letters to the churches.

And there are those who think that the angel is really a symbolic representation of the church itself, and that it's a figure, that there's not a literal angel or a literal person, but that it is a personification of the church as an angel for the purposes of instruction and for the purposes of argument. But we'll take a look at each of those four ideas next time. But as we conclude Chapter 1 this morning, the two things we want to remember are, first of all, the Lord Jesus Christ is imminent.

I-M-M-A-N-E-N-T. Imminent means He is near. He is standing in the midst of the seven golden lampstands, and we want to remember the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ.

That should be both a comfort and encouragement as well as a convicting and a motivating presence. The comfort and encouragement side, He knows our trials. He knows our weaknesses.

He knows our challenges and our fears and our tribulations. At the same time, He has partaken of flesh, and He has made provision for us of the Holy Spirit. He has given us the Spirit to lead us into all truth.

He had faithful witnesses record His teaching and His word for us and has preserved it down through history so that we have the resources. And under His gaze and under His watchfulness, not only does He know where we are tested and how we are tested, but He knows exactly what it takes to meet that test and what it takes to sustain us in those challenges. And it's sort of like, I remember being in class, and the teacher would walk by as you're taking a test or fulfilling an assignment, and as they look over your shoulder, you know, you really want to do your work neatly.

And when you're under observation, you try to do things according to Hoyle. You do them the very best you can. And when someone's looking, you take pains to make sure you're doing it exactly right and that you're exemplary in all respects.

And it ought to be not only a comfort and encouragement but also a motivation that just as we saw in Psalm 53 this morning, the Lord looks down from heaven on the sons of men, and He's looking to see if there are any who seek after Him or if there are any who are doing what is right. And we don't want to be in the group that He looks at, and He doesn't find anyone doing that. We want to be in the group that is called God's people.

We want to be in those who are called according to His purpose, who find the presence of Christ not intimidating and not probrious or uncomfortable, but who find in it not only comfort and encouragement but also motivation. Children, when their parents are watching, you know, you find this out as a parent, I watched my girls at the swimming pool, and I was waiting to pick them up there, and they had a few more minutes to swim, and they would go to the diving board, and they would look over to see if I was watching before they dived because they wanted me to see. They wanted to show me what they had learned and what they could do.

You know, you'll still dive and jump into the pool, but if you know your mom or dad is watching, well, you really try to do a good job, and you want to show the best that you can do. And it's not onerous. It's not a bad thing.

It's a happy thing, and you want to please, and you want your parents to be proud. And we should be encouraged and motivated by the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ, even as He stands in the midst of these lampstands. If we are asking, and if we are seeking, and if we are knocking on the door, if we are trying to walk down the narrow road through the straight gate that leads to life, then the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ in our life ought to be a great encouragement and a great motivation in every small detail, every task, every undertaking, to do things that please Him, that make Him proud, that He says, you know, that's what I was looking for, that's what I was after.

Well done, good and faithful servant. We have a wonderful Lord. He's not off in some far-off place, busy doing other things.

He is watching us. He is observing us. He is with us.

And it ought to be a source of great encouragement and great motivation. Well, this is a good place for us to pause. We'll pick up with the letters to the seven churches, addressed to the angels of the seven churches, and we'll look at these keys of Hades and death next time.

Father, we thank You for the privilege of studying Your Word together. We pray that God the Holy Spirit will take these things and minister them to our hearts. We pray that we will grow in grace and knowledge, that these seeds planted in the soil of our hearts will bear fruit that reflects the glory of our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.

We pray it in His name. Amen.