

⁹ 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. ¹⁰ I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet ¹¹ 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."

¹² Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking to me, and on turning I saw seven golden lampstands, ¹³ 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. ¹⁴ The hairs of his head were white, like white wool, like snow. His eyes were like a flame of fire, ¹⁵ his feet were like burnished bronze, refined in a furnace, and his voice was like the roar of many waters. ¹⁶ 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.

¹⁷ 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, ¹⁸ and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades.

¹⁹ Write therefore the things that you have seen, those that are and those that are to take place after this. ²⁰ 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.

In the ESV (of the Bible), the phrase “fear not” occurs 33 times. **Another** 33 times, it says “Do not be afraid”. And usually these words are spoken either by God or one of His messengers (an angel; a disciple; or a prophet). But why is it said so often? Why do we humans **get** so afraid?

*In Australia, anxiety is **the** most common mental health condition. (Did you know that?) On average, 1 in 4 people – 1 in 3 women and 1 in 5 men – will experience anxiety.ⁱ*

In a 12-month period, over two million Australians experience anxiety.ⁱⁱ (a debilitating fear or anxiousness, that they cannot control)...

And Christians, aren't immune from fear. And spiritually speaking, fear comes, usually, when one of 2 things happen – Either:

a) A person encounters God or one of His messengers face-to-face, and they are struck with fear, because of the awesome presence of God.

e.g. When the angels appeared to the shepherds that very first Christmas, **they were filled with great fear.**

¹⁰ And the angel said to them, “**Fear not**, for behold, I bring you **good** news of great joy

b) The other circumstance where God says “don't be afraid”, is when the circumstances around us, and the pressures start to build up, and we begin to fear what our

enemies might do to us, or we fear “what could possibly happen to us”, and the fear just grows and grows until it cripples us....

But then God says “Fear not!”, and He opens our spiritual eyes, so that we can see what’s **really** going on. He reveals to us, His purpose. He reveals to us, His activity – (that is) what **God** is doing. And when we begin to see things from **God’s** perspective, we can see that, **through** all of this “bad stuff” – that through all of the dangers or persecutions or humiliations – The Lord helps us to see how **His** purpose is being achieved **through** all of it, and that He is with us, **in** our troubles.

e.g. When Paul was in Corinth, the Jews were against him. And Paul had already fled for his life (many times) from city to city. And he thought he was going to have to flee for his life again, and escape from Corinth, ^{Acts}

^{18:9} And the Lord said to Paul one night in a vision, **“Do not be afraid, but go on speaking and do not be silent, ¹⁰ for I am with you, and no one will attack you to harm you, for I have many in this city who are my people.”**

Another e.g. The King of Syria wanted to take out the Prophet Elisha, and he sent a whole army to capture him – an army of horses and chariots – to capture one man. And when they came against him, Elisha’s servant was terrified, “Oh no, what are we going to do?”

And Elisha said: ^{2Kings 6:16} ..., **“Do not be afraid, for those who are with us are more than those who**

are with them." ¹⁷ Then Elisha prayed and said, "O LORD, please open his eyes that he may see." So the LORD opened the eyes of the young man, and he saw, and behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha.

The Lord's armies of angels were invisible to human eyes, but they were there, surrounding them, to protect Elisha....

So, they're the 2 main types of fear: Fear at the awesome presence of God; and fear of our enemies, or of our circumstances, or of the future,, because we don't know what God is doing, and we don't have enough faith to just trust Him.

So, what sort of fear, is John encountering in this Revelation? ... It's actually **both** those types of fear.

Here in the opening paragraphs of the revelation, John comes face to face, with the Risen Lord Jesus Christ. And he is utterly terrified. He says: ¹⁷ **When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead...**

You know, I've often heard it said, that if you're a true Christian, you won't have a fear of God.... **Rubbish!!**. What happened to John? This John, was a disciple of Jesus. He used to refer to himself as "the disciple whom Jesus loved". And yet, when **he** came face to face, with the risen and

Glorified Jesus Christ, in all of his terrible glory, he fell down on the ground as if He was dead.

Our generation, have generally lost our fear of God. *There once was a time, if somebody was dying, the family would call the minister to the hospital, so that their loved-one could make their peace with God before they died. But now-a-days, if the minister gets called at all, it's usually after they've died and after they've rung the funeral director and solicitor. We are a generation who have lost their fear of God.*

I've talked before about trying to reclaim the word "awesome".

The word "awesome" used to describe something that produced "awe" in the beholder. And "awe" used to mean "feelings of reverential fear or dread". Whereas now, "awe" is used to describe the feelings we get when we observe a thing of great beauty, and "awesome" means "that's really good"...

When John saw the Risen Lord Jesus Christ, in all of His glory, he was terrified – he fell on the ground as if he was dead... And then Jesus laid His hand on Him, and He said "Fear not."

The point is, "As Christians, Yes, we **can** stand before God. We **are** worthy. But only because He lays His hand on us, and makes us worthy. We fall down, in reverential fear, and He lifts us up.

So, what did John see? – that made him fear so....

He saw 7 golden lampstands. ¹³ 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. ¹⁴ The hairs of his head were white, like white wool, like snow. His eyes were like a flame of fire, ¹⁵ his feet were like burnished bronze, refined in a furnace, and his voice was like the roar of many waters. ¹⁶ 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.

Now remember, in the introduction to the Revelation, I explained how this book of the Bible, is it's what's known as "apocalyptic literature". It uses images, to give a message.

Righto, what does all this imagery mean?

Let's start with the **Lampstands**. The lampstands represent the 7 churches, that John was to provide with a copy of this revelation. And isn't the image of a lampstand, a great image for a church. The job of a lampstand, is to hold up the light, for the whole world to see. And the church, does not exist for itself. The church, holds up the light of Christ, for the whole world to see. We have no glory of our own. We don't even have any purpose of our own. Our whole purpose, is to hold out the light of Christ.

And the number "7" is significant. It represents completeness. And over the next few weeks, as we study the letters to the 7 churches, we're going to discover, that these churches represent the different types of churches that we can see in the world, even today. In these 7 churches, we find a complete

picture, of what all the different churches can be like, even in the world today.

And Jesus is in the **midst** of the lampstands. Christ, is in the midst of His people. We haven't come here today, to just meet with each other – we're meeting with Christ. And we're going to be very aware of that when we share communion.

Let's move on – The **stars**.

The stars that Jesus holds in His hands represent the angels of the 7 churches. Did you know that this church (Bush Disciples) isn't by any means, a product of human planning and human ability... This is something that God is doing. A church has power, and a church has life, by means of the Spirit of God.

And it seems here, that God has appointed an angel to each church... And we're going to find out over the next few weeks, that when a church becomes godless, He can remove their lampstand – He removes their position, as a church. And that church – well, it may continue to exist for a while (as a human club or institution), but God has left it – And it's died spiritually. Anyway, we're getting ahead of ourselves.

He wore a **long robe**, and a **golden sash**. Which obviously mark Him as a person of importance and distinction – maybe even as a priestly garment.

The **hair** of His head, was bright white. *We don't need to do the Omo ultra-violet test to see that it's white.* John leaves no

doubt – it’s **pure** white. It’s an image of “holiness”, but more than this, It’s an image that’s taken from the Old Testament – Daniel 7:9 – an image of The Ancient of Days – an image of God Himself. And this one matches. Jesus Christ, is God. Don’t you believe the Jehovah’s Witnesses for a moment – they believe Jesus is an angel. He’s not an angel. He’s God Himself.

And then John describes His **eyes**.

They are like a flame of fire. Here He is – Jesus is among the churches, and He knows our deeds – He sees everything (with His eyes of fire). He knows (very well) the spiritual condition of every church. He knows our hearts. He knows the spiritual condition of **this** church. ,,,, and based upon what He observes with His penetrating eyes of fire, a church will be either blessed, or judged, by its deeds. And we’ll see this as we study His message to the 7 churches – some will be blessed. Others will be judged.

Next, is the description of His **feet**.

They were like polished bronze that had been refined in a fire. Now, I don’t know exactly what that means, but I **do** know, that my feet are the first part of me that gets grubby. But for Jesus, it’s an image of absolute purity, so it gives to us a picture of His holiness. And He walks among the churches. The holiness of our Lord Jesus Christ, is right here today... Are you humbled by that?

And His **voice**, was like the roar of many waters. That’s a description that Ezekiel used of Godⁱⁱⁱⁱ. It’s an image of the immense power of God’s word.

In His right hand, He held the **7 stars**. We already talked about that. Jesus holds us – He holds the church, in the palm of His hand – we belong to Him.

from his mouth came a **sharp two-edged sword** –
What is **that** about???

In Ephesians 6:17, it talks about “the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God”

Hebrews 4:¹² For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. ¹³ And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

Alright, Jesus’ words, are the words of God Himself. And His words have power, and He has authority, with His words, to judge.

and his **face** was like the sun shining in full strength.

As I’ve told you before, the New Testament was originally written in Greek. And the word that our Bibles translate as “full strength”, in the original Greek, they used the word

δυνάμει (dynamei). From which we get our word, “dynamite”. This represents the immense power and Glory, of the Lord Jesus Christ.

It isn't a wonder, that in fear, John fell as if he was dead.

But Jesus put His hand on Him, and said those words, “**Fear not**”

And He explained to John why he had no reason to fear. John didn't need to be afraid of the one standing before Him, because when He described Himself as “the living one” – that he **was** dead, but now he's alive forever.... At that point, I reckon it must've been a remarkable confirmation for John – this **is** Jesus. And John knew that he didn't have any reason at all, to be afraid of Jesus.

You see, when John wrote Gospel of John, to record the things that Jesus said and did, in it, he described himself as “the disciple whom Jesus loved^{iv}”. He didn't need to be afraid of Jesus – he knew Jesus loved Him.

So there you go, he had fear because he had come face-to-face with the living God, in all of his glory and power and might....

But there's also a **second** reason, that John was told, not to fear.

The revelation that Jesus is about to unveil to John (and that we're going to be studying over the next several months), at times, will be utterly terrifying. He's going to be describing the tribulation that the people of God, will have to endure in the last days..... Terrible times....

He's going to be telling the terrible truth of the cataclysmic events that will take place at the end of time...

And John is already experiencing tribulation. When John received this vision, he was on a Greek Island called "Patmos". And he wasn't there to enjoy the wonderful climate of a Mediterranean paradise. He'd been transported there as a convict. He was in prison because he was a Christian who preached the good news, and he was arrested because of it. He is languishing in prison.

But Jesus is telling John, "You don't have to be afraid." - "The one thing you need to remember as you see this vision" - and the one thing that we need to remember as we study this book of revelation, is "No matter how scary it might seem, don't be afraid, because God is in control."

Jesus said: **I have the keys of Death and Hades.**
"Hades" is the realm of the dead.

And what Jesus is saying, is He is totally in control. It's ok that John is in prison - Jesus is in control of that. It's OK when we are persecuted for His name - He's in control of that. It's OK when circumstances rise up against us and threaten to swamp us - Jesus holds the keys of life and death. We're even OK when a Christian is martyred for their faith. Even

physical death, does not take us from the realm of Jesus' care and protection. It's OK

God is in control. Christ, is the first and the last. He's the Lord God almighty.

And whatever's going on in your life, if you are obedient to Christ, and trust Him, and follow Him, you don't need to be afraid. He holds us in His hand.

Even as the end of this world, draws near, we don't need to be afraid. God is in control.

Questions

ⁱ <https://www.beyondblue.org.au/the-facts>

ⁱⁱ Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2008). *National Survey of Mental Health and Wellbeing: Summary of Results, 2007*. Cat. no. (4326.0). Canberra: ABS. quoted from <https://www.beyondblue.org.au/about-us/research-projects/statistics-and-references?sec=sec-anx>

ⁱⁱⁱ Ezekiel 43:2

^{iv} John 13:23; 20:2; 21:7,20