

## Great is Thy Faithfulness: 50 Years Looking Forward

January 12, 2020

If you could write a letter to teenage self, back in the day...what would you say? I think my letter would be one question- "What were you thinking?" But also, I would want to tell myself to read more and play video games less. That my parents actually aren't as clueless as I think they are. I would want to tell my teen self not to make that girl the center of your life, it's not going to work out and God has someone amazing in mind for you. Can I get an Amen? Now, flip it. Go 50 years into the future, what would that version of yourself really emphasize as most important? As I look around, many of your 50-year future selves would be writing a letter from Heaven...Work less, spend more time in relationships? Give more of your money away? Kick your bad habits and eat better? What about what to make as the greatest priority of your life? What would you emphasize? That got me thinking...

**If Jesus were to write a letter to Brandywine Valley Baptist Church about what is most essential over the next 50 years, what would he say to us?** Would it be to have a detailed 5-year strategic plan? Would it be to make sure we have great musical talent, a great choir and band and sound systems? Would it be to make sure we are cutting edge in our ministry and discipleship programs? Would it be to have super-fun and exciting children and student ministry events? All of these things are good and worthy of attention and resources... but would that be at the center of what Jesus would emphasize?

I don't think we have to guess what Jesus would say because we have His words. In the last book of the Bible, Revelation, the Apostle John writes a letter to seven churches throughout the Roman Empire. But John was really not the author. He just happened to be holding the pen. This letter is written by the Lord Jesus Christ himself. These churches while real churches in a real context, represent aspects of every church throughout history. Here's what I want you to notice, that before Jesus tells the churches anything about what he wants them to do or not do, he starts with a revelation of Himself.

### Revelation 1:12-18

*<sup>12</sup> I turned around to see the voice that was speaking to me. And when I turned I saw seven golden lampstands, <sup>13</sup> and among the lampstands was someone like a son of man, dressed in a robe reaching down to his feet and with a golden sash around his chest.*

*<sup>14</sup> The hair on his head was white like wool, as white as snow, and his eyes were like blazing fire.*

*<sup>15</sup> His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of rushing waters.*

*<sup>16</sup> In his right hand he held seven stars, and coming out of his mouth was a sharp, double-edged sword. His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance. <sup>17</sup> When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. Then he placed his right hand on me and said:*

*"Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. <sup>18</sup> I am the Living One; I was dead, and now look, I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades.*

Notice John's reaction- falls over like a dead man. What would it take to make a grown man who has seen it all- witnessed the ministry of Jesus, his miracles, and his resurrection, was there through incredible beginnings of the birth of the church, on the receiving end of all kinds of persecution, and now as an old man is here exiled on this island of Patmos...what would it take to make his have a reaction like that? A vision of the glory, the power, the supremacy of Jesus Christ. Jesus dictates what he wants John to say to **the seven churches** in chapter 2-3. And notice how he starts every one of these letters.

Ephesus

*These are the words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand and walks among the seven golden lampstands.*

Smyrna

*These are the words of him who is the First and the Last, who died and came to life again.*

Pergamum

*These are the words of him who has the sharp, double-edged sword.*

Thyatira

*These are the words of the Son of God, whose eyes are like blazing fire and whose feet are like burnished bronze.*

Sardis

*These are the words of him who holds the seven spirits of God and the seven stars.*

Philadelphia

*These are the words of him who is holy and true, who holds the key of David.*

Laodicea

*These are the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God's creation.*

It couldn't be clearer, before Jesus goes into any specifics in the letter about what to do or not to do, he wanted them to catch a vision of the magnitude, authority, the splendor... the Supremacy of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now in case we think this is just one example from Revelation, let me show you what **Paul wrote to the church of Colossae**. The presenting issue is that this church had become distracted by religious rituals, on the object or ceremony more than to whom it pointed. This led to a drifting from pure gospel of Jesus Christ. What is striking about this letter is that Paul didn't come out the gate swinging against false teaching, he didn't start by telling them the 5 things they need to stop or start doing to become a better church, certainly not 4 strategies for getting

a bigger church. Instead, he first presents one of the clearest and most captivating revelations of the Lord Jesus in all of Scripture.

#### Colossians 1:15-23

<sup>15</sup> *The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. <sup>16</sup> For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him.*

<sup>17</sup> *He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. <sup>18</sup> And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. <sup>19</sup> For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him,*

<sup>20</sup> *and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross. <sup>21</sup> Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior.*

<sup>22</sup> *But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation— <sup>23</sup> if you continue in your faith, established and firm, and do not move from the hope held out in the gospel.*

*This is the gospel that you heard and that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven, and of which I, Paul, have become a servant.*

What did you notice? Paul's goal was to strip away every distraction and false teaching that was before their eyes by shining a clear beam of the light of Jesus Christ. What we see in Revelation to the 7 churches, what we see in Paul's letter to the church of Colossae is the same: catching a vision of the **supremacy of the Lord Jesus Christ.**

This should cause us to pause in reflection as we consider the next 50 years and what Jesus would say to us. What will keep us from drifting into theological error that is rampant in our day as it was in Paul's, and certainly will be over the next 50 years? What will protect us from erecting sacred cows of programs, buildings, budgets, or "the way we've always done things"? What will make sure that we aren't overcome by conflict, division or immorality? What will ensure that we remain healthy and effective? What does it look like for God to keep his faithful hand on us? Only one answer to that question: We make sure Jesus Christ is supreme here. That he is the head of our church. The supremacy of Christ, who is the great shepherd and we are the sheep, the bridegroom and we are the bride. The cornerstone of the building which is the church. The true vine of which we are the branches. The author and perfecter of our faith, the Alpha and the Omega. The redeemer. Our first and only true love. Jesus Christ our Lord.

Before the days of GPS, road trips were far more challenging and often circuitous. Prior to GPS, I remember the first time Shannan and I tried to travel down to Alexandria, VA... by taking the most direct route according to my ADC Map- Through Washington DC. Now I don't know if you have every attempted to drive through DC. I don't mean around DC on the beltway, but

through the city. Good luck, especially with no GPS. Not only will you deal with various road closures as the president and dignitaries are driving around, but the city is built like a jigsaw puzzle. We ended up in a sketchy part of the city, pulled over with a giant map covering our dashboard...Thank God, he protected us.

Who will ensure we navigate the next 50 years faithfully? Jesus Christ. Trying to chart a course for the next 50 years of the life of our church without Christ at the helm is like trying to drive through DC without GPS.

If Jesus is Supreme in our church, if he is navigating **what should we expect over 50 years?** Eight Things:

1. We should expect the **Gospel to flow out of every pore of our church**. In our music, in our preaching, in our classes and small groups, in our programs for Children, students adults and outreach...because the Gospel is not just the A,B,Cs of our faith it is the Alpha and Omega, the A-Z.
2. We should expect **fidelity to the Word of God**, the Bible in its entirety, regardless of waves of culturally changing morality, political landscape or even legislation. We will not get distracted or pulled into error or compromise because the Scripture points to Jesus and Jesus pointed to the authenticity and authority of Scripture.
3. We should expect **effective outreach and ministry to the lost, lonely and left out**. The broken and marginalized. To the inner city. Because this is who Jesus spent the vast majority of his time with and He came for the sick, for the sinner. And he called us to walk as Jesus walked.
4. We should expect **increasing diversity, racial reconciliation and unity across all dividing lines**. Because Jesus has broken down the dividing wall of hostility and created one new man. And worship of Jesus in heaven is every tribe, tongue, ethnicity around the throne. The political or ethnic or cultural differences won't divide us.
5. We should expect the **healing of broken marriages, of addictions and deep woundedness**. Because Jesus restores and sets us free and gives us a new power to overcome through following Him. The church isn't a country club, but a hospital for sinners and a bootcamp for spiritual soldiers.
6. We should expect **excellence, innovation and change** because we are so passionate about introducing Jesus Christ to the next generations in a way that is relevant, tangible and meets them where they are to the best of our ability with the Lord's help . As Paul, we are willing to adapt and get uncomfortable and leave behind preferences because seeing people come to Christ is more precious to us than our comforts.
7. We should expect **conversions, baptisms and people transformed**. We are unashamed because it is the power of God, unto salvation to all who believe. People will have their eyes opened to Christ and willing to give up everything to follow him- whether that is into missions, into the marketplace, into their homes.
8. We should expect **persecution and suffering in the name of Christ**. Because he was persecuted and suffered, we will too. And I expect this will increase over the decades if our culture continues to move in this direction. Being a Christian may be considered

anathema, it may come with fewer earthly benefits as it has in years past. But if Christ is supreme in the church it means we will not cave in to increasing pressure to bow down to the gods of culture whatever that may mean.

As long as I am your pastor, my commitment is we will make Christ supreme. And my prayer for Brandywine long after I'm gone, and most of you are gone, is we will remain true to our Lord. If this is the kind of church you want to be a part of- maybe you aren't a member yet, would you consider partnering with us as we seek the Lord? [Explore Membership](#)

But I've spoken on a corporate church level. What about you? [Do you know the supremacy of Jesus Christ, personally?](#) Have you caught the beam of light that is Jesus Christ?

[John Piper Video](#) (3.19min) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VeKgfUGtcl0> (first 3minutes and 18 seconds)

[After the revelation of the magnitude and supremacy of Himself](#), he closes the letters to the churches with a personal invitation into a relationship with Him. Behold I stand...

Maybe you are here today and you are distracted by work, stress, family, relationship, questions- behold he stands at the door and knocks. And when Christ is supreme in the church and in our lives individually- it puts everything else in perspective.

Pray

Benediction

Jude 24-25

*<sup>24</sup> To him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy— <sup>25</sup> to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen.*