

¹² I turned around to see the voice that was speaking to me. And when I turned I saw seven golden lampstands, ¹³ and among the lampstands was someone like a son of man,^[d] dressed in a robe reaching down to his feet and with a golden sash around his chest. ¹⁴ The hair on his head was white like wool, as white as snow, and his eyes were like blazing fire. ¹⁵ His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of rushing waters. ¹⁶ 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.

¹⁷ 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. ¹⁸ 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.

What are you afraid of? I looked up a list of "phobias" currently known in the psychiatric world. It probably doesn't surprise you that some of them are pretty silly. Take *genophobia* for example – that's a fear of knees. Or *octophobia* – a fear of the number eight. I don't get how people could be scared of numbers or knees.

Some, though, we can relate to – maybe because we have them or know people who do. *Ophidiophobia* – a fear of snakes. *Acrophobia* – a fear of heights. *Mysophobia* – a fear of germs or contamination.

What struck me about the list is just how many phobias there are. There are sixty that start with the letter "a" alone. And maybe that teaches us something? Either about the world – that it's a scary place. There's plenty out there to be afraid of. Or maybe just as likely, it teaches us something about us – that we are scared people. Human beings are fearful creatures that frighten easily.

And one more thing to learn from that list of phobias: There is a common thread that ties many of them together – a phobia behind the phobias. Think about it: When people are scared of heights or germs, what are they *really* scared of? What the height or the germs could do to them. Ultimately, we're scared of death. We even call extreme fear being "deathly afraid." There's the fear of pain associated with death. The fear of the unknown. The fear of leaving something unaddressed or unfinished.

So, what are you afraid of? Whether we try to be brave and "manly" about it or not, we all have fears. And I guess that shouldn't surprise us. Do you know what the first words spoken by Adam after the fall into sin were? "*I was afraid.*" Sin brought scary things into the world and fear into our hearts. But over 80 times in the bible after that, do you know what message a gracious God brought to sinners? "*Don't be afraid.*" In fact, it's what the risen Jesus says to John in our sermon lesson today: "Stop being afraid." [In other words, we can live without fear. How?] or [What are you afraid of? 1) See the One who alone should be feared, 2) See the one who alone takes your fear away.]

The Apostle John wrote the book of Revelation during a particularly scary time for Christians. The Roman Emperor Domitian had begun a large-scale persecution of Christians – you could die for believing in Jesus. John himself is exiled for his faith on an island in the Mediterranean as he writes these

words. So God gave him a series of visions to comfort Christians living in those scary times. In this first vision, he just heard a voice telling him to write what he saw and send it to churches.

That's where our text picks up the story. John turned to see who was speaking to him. And he sees "one like a son of man" walking in the midst of seven golden lampstands. You know who that is, don't you? That's Jesus. "Son of Man" is one of his favorite titles for himself. He's like a son of man because he *is* fully human. But he is oh so much more. John is overwhelmed at what he sees – his descriptions in Greek are a rapid fire list as if he's struggling to take it all in. "And he...and his...and his..."

First, John says the **hair on his head was white** – blindingly so. The best John can do is compare it to the two whitest things he's seen: It was **like wool, as white as snow**. White in the bible usually represents holiness – sinlessness. Jesus is completely holy and 100% opposed to all sin.

Next, John describes his eyes: **His eyes were like blazing fire**. Still today we talk about some people who can give a look that can burn a hole right through you. This Jesus can win every argument without saying a word – simply by looking at you. You wouldn't be able to take it; his look would bore a hole into your soul. In fact, it can burn through any barrier. Nothing is hidden from his righteous gaze. He can see all things everywhere.

Now to his feet: **His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace**, John says. Jesus' feet are usually a symbol his power and authority – all things, even his enemies, are ultimately under his feet. The fact that John sees them as glowing bronze emphasizes that there's no getting out from under Jesus' feet. You can't escape his control; it is absolute.

And his voice, John says, **was like the sound of rushing waters**. I visited Iguazú falls in South America once – the largest waterfall in the world. There was a place where you could stand right next to the falling water – and we couldn't even hear each other speak, the sound was so deafening. That's what Jesus' voice sounded like, John says. That's how powerful Jesus' words are. To emphasize what they can do: John sees a razor **sharp, double-edged sword** coming out of his mouth. Bring to mind a verse from Hebrews? "The Word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword." It cuts right past the exterior and cuts open the interior – soul, spirit. It lays bare and judges the innermost thoughts of the heart.

I'm kind of surprised John could make all those details out. Because, as he says, Jesus' **face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance**. If you've ever tried to look at the sun – that's how bright Jesus' glory as God was shining from his face. John must have been squinting with pained eyes and a hand in the air just trying to look at him.

Did you notice how John finally reacted to all this? Remember, John and Jesus were particularly close. John's favorite title for himself is "the disciple whom Jesus loved." John was reclining at Jesus' right side when he instituted the Lord's Supper. Jesus entrusted Mary, his mother, to John's care the next day on the cross. They had a close relationship - friendship, even. But does John see Jesus and smile and run toward him, "Jesus, buddy, it's been too long"?

No. "**When I saw him,**" John writes, "**I fell at his feet like a dead man.**" John was deathly afraid.

Here's step one to addressing your fears: Know whom you should really be afraid of – this man. He is pure and holy and 100% opposed to all sin. He sees and knows everything – all the selfishness and greed and anger and lust and coveting and idolatry in our hearts. He has all authority in heaven and on earth, and you can rebel against it all you want, but you will not get out from under his feet. His voice is so powerful it could bowl you over in an instant, and his words so sharp they lay bare and judge all the evil in our hearts. His face shines brighter than a mid-day sun – and that's the face before which you and me and all people will have to give an account on the Last Day.

And, like Jesus says, **he holds the keys of death and hades**. Do you fear death? Jesus determines when death may claim you and what it will do to you. He is the one who determines what happens to you – which door you will pass through – when you die.

Don't be afraid of germs. Don't be afraid of heights. Don't be afraid of losing your job, car crashes, corruption in government, or persecution. As Jesus once told his disciples, *“Do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that can do no more. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell.”*

That's step one: And it's important. Because once you realize Jesus is really the only one you have to fear, he himself takes your fears away.

When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. John must have had his face buried in the ground, scared to death. But what happens next? He feels a tender touch: **Then he placed his right hand on me. And** with a voice as powerful as a waterfall but as calming as a bubbling brook, Jesus **said** to him: **“Do not be afraid.”**

In the New Testament, that phrase is always followed by good news from God. It's not just a trite saying like you find on those motivational posters that really has no substance to it at all. God never says, “Don't be afraid” as if he were calling us to wish away our fears and work up some courage. No, he follows it with good news. The facts. What he's done to remove whatever causes our fear.

Here are the facts: **I am the First and the Last.** ¹⁸ **I am the Living One; I was dead, and now look, I am alive for ever and ever!** Jesus is the First and the Last. He is God, the Creator of all, and the one who will bring this world to its end. But in love for us he became also the Son of Man – human, like us – our brother. Because he didn't want to punish us for all the sins his fiery eyes can see and his sharp words lay bare. So instead he carried them to the cross and was punished by God in our place to take them away. He didn't want our death to become a door into hades, hell, everlasting punishment – so he passed through that door in our place on the cross to save us from it. He wanted to make us pure and holy, like him, so he shed his blood on the cross that washes away all our sins and makes us so. Proof that Jesus' work was perfectly complete is that he's alive and talking to John! **I am the Living One. I was dead** – but not anymore. I conquered sin and death, **and now look, I am alive forever and ever! And I hold the keys to death and hades.**

“Do not be afraid,” Jesus says to all who trust in him. Don't fear God's punishment – Jesus saved you from it. Do not fear Judgment Day – Jesus has made you holy, sinless, so there's nothing left to judge. Do not fear hades – the one who holds its key has closed its door for you, and opened heaven's. Do not fear death – Jesus has defeated it and will use it to bring you through heaven's door to everlasting joy.

No, all who believe in Jesus need not fear this fearsome Jesus. He's on their side. Know what that means? They are the ones to be feared. The prophet Zechariah wrote to God's people, “Whoever touches you touches the apple of his eye.” Would you want to lay hands on that which this mighty Jesus treasures? What he treasures is you!

In fact, he's not just on your side – he's at your side. Did you notice where John saw Jesus walking? Among **golden lampstands**. Jesus explains what those are: The churches. Believers. You! The Jesus who said, “All authority in heaven and earth is mine,” said just a few verses later, “Surely I am with you always.” What comfort for believers in John's day, fearing persecution, to know that this glorious Jesus was standing with them in it! What comfort for us! No matter what we fear, this glorious Jesus is standing with us in it – at our side. What is left to fear?

“Because I live,” Jesus once told his disciples, “you also will live.” And here, Jesus makes it clear what kind of a life his death and resurrection have won for us: Life where we can live without fear. Sin is gone. Hell closed, heaven opened, death defeated. And this mighty conqueror Jesus, who died for you and rose for you, now lives for you and with you. And he says to you today, “Do not be afraid.” Amen.