

“I SAW ONE LIKE A SON OF MAN.”

Rev. Robert T. Woodyard

First Christian Reformed Church

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Scripture Texts: Revelation 1:9-20

Introduction

Remember how Revelation begins, “The revelation of Jesus Christ.” That has a double meaning. Revelation is by Jesus and it’s about Jesus. Jesus is both the content of the revelation and the agent through whom that content comes.

Everything about the past, present and future points to Jesus. We will never understand Revelation if we don’t understand this. It will be hard for us to sustain this focus because of all the mind-blowing images and symbols, but we must keep everything else in subordination to the central truth, that this is all about Jesus.

But then that’s how we are to read the whole Bible right? Take Jesus out of the Bible and none of it makes any sense. Put Him at the center and it all becomes clear.

The end will not be about Buddha, not about Confucius, or Gandhi, or the Dalai Lama, or Mohammed or Allah; not about politics, world powers, science or technology. The end will be about Jesus.

So as we turn the page to the last book of the Bible all that has been anticipated, all that has been prophesied and preached and proclaimed and taught is now revealed. Christ has the last word.

The curtain rises and the drama begins with John’s first stunningly glorious vision.

Our text has three parts, John’s commission to write down a great vision, John’s description of the risen Jesus in all His glory, and the authority of Jesus given to John to write what he sees.

The Voice, write what you see, Rev. 1:9-11

John speaks first and in a few brief words we learn he is a fellow sufferer and that because of his loyalty to Jesus he is banished to Patmos. He doesn’t play up that he is an apostle and a prophet, but a brother and a companion, a fellow sufferer.

There are two parts of being a Christian, suffering and kingdom, pain and glory, circumstances and the Lord over circumstances, earth and heaven.

Acts 14:22 through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.

I Peter 4:12-13 Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. 13 But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed.

Imagine being on that rocky island of Patmos, slaving in the hot sun, surrounded by barren hills and mine pits. Can you imagine day after day, month after month? The whole scene is depressing.

And then one day, a Lord's Day, the whole depressing scene gave way to a glorious vision. One reality gave way to another far greater and far better reality. Somehow he is transported from the physical world to a spiritual world.

Remember what I pointed out last week, this is the first of four times in Revelation when John says He is in the Spirit (4:2; 17:3; 21:10) and each marks a significant visionary experience.

For the first time the seven churches are named, and they are named in the same order in which the messages to the churches is given in chapters 2 and 3. This is also the order most convenient for a messenger to deliver this letter.

John has received his commission to write on the authority of Christ who told him to do so.

The Vision, what John saw, Rev. 1:12-16

What John sees is a fulfillment of a vision given to Daniel some six hundred years before.

Daniel 7:9-10 "As I looked, thrones were placed, and the Ancient of Days took his seat; his clothing was white as snow, and the hair of his head like pure wool; his throne was fiery flames; its wheels were burning fire.
10 A stream of fire issued and came out from before him.

Daniel 10:5-6 I lifted up my eyes and looked, and behold, a man clothed in linen, with a belt of fine gold from Uphaz around his waist. 6 His body was like beryl [beautiful mineral], his face like the appearance of lightning, his eyes like flaming torches, his arms and legs like the gleam of burnished bronze, and the sound of his words like the sound of a multitude.

An ancient vision is now clarified and fulfilled. John sees someone like the Son of Man clothed with majesty and splendor, with awe and terror, with power and authority. Everything things is in the superlative degree. He sees Christ in overwhelming glory.

His robe is a priestly robe defining His role and work of presenting us to God and God to us. The white with the golden sash signifies beauty, purity, and wealth. All human wealth pales before the splendor and magnitude of God's wealth. The phrase you can't take it with you underscores the reality that all that we have here is worthless compared to what is in heaven. In heaven they really do use gold for concrete or asphalt.

His hair glistens like white snow in the sun, signifying purity and wisdom. His character matches His role; He is pure and holy, as God. His eyes are flashing fire, penetrating to every corner of every heart, burning away sin and impurity. Nothing escapes His searching gaze.

His feet are like polished bronze, again suggesting intense beauty, purity and glory. The feet of bronze are a contrast to Nebuchadnezzar's magnificent image of a being with feet of iron and clay. That base was doomed and fell. Christ's kingdom is on solid footing and will not fall.

His voice is louder than the breakers crashing on the rocky shores of Patmos, similar to the loud sound Daniel heard, a sound louder than a great multitude. Where God is there is terrifying thundering. Listen to what the people of God heard when Moses went up on Mt. Sinai.

Exodus 19:16, 19 On the morning of the third day there were thunders and lightnings and a thick cloud on the mountain and a very loud trumpet blast, so that all the people in the camp trembled. ... 19 And as the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder, Moses spoke, and God answered him in thunder.

That sharp doubled edged sword from his mouth cuts to the depths of joints and marrow. Christ comes with all authority to judge, to bring punishment and reward.

The whole scene is too intense for human eyes, brighter than the equatorial sun at high noon. No one can look directly at the sun especially at noon. Even when fully eclipsed the sun can damage our retina. The brilliant majesty of Jesus' appearance and heavenly glory is too great to be fully comprehended.

Let's come back for a moment and notice the first thing to catch John's eye, a circle of *seven golden lampstands*. He is told in verse 20 that these seven lamps represent the seven churches. There is no doubt here as to the meaning of these symbols.

This is not all together foreign to us. We are familiar with other passages of Scripture that refer to Christians as lights in the world.

John 8:12 Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."

Matthew 5:14-16 "You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. 15 Nor do people light a lamp [same word as in Revelation] and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. 16 In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

The church is the light of Christ in the world. She is the body of Christ, representing Christ in the world, she displays His glory and grace. She is not just a human institution under human government. She is infinitely greater and more superior to every other organization and institution. She is worthy of our greatest loyalty, love and support.

Where is Jesus? If we want to find Jesus, where should we look? In His church, He is among the lampstands. There are many people who are unhappy with the church for lots of different reasons, so all they want is Jesus and they hope to have Him outside of the church.

He who loves Christ must love His Bride. And he who will not have the church for his mother, will not have God as his Father.

She is the object of Christ's affection and of Christ's attention in Revelation. Christ walks among the churches as Lord and Shepherd. His glory dwells over His church, just as God's glory dwelt among Israel in the Tabernacle and Temple.

The temple with its lampstands is now replaced with a church, which Jesus fills as God's glory filled the temple. The light still shines.

But there is another cluster of lights, the seven stars in the hands of Jesus. He is told they are the seven angels of the seven churches. We know from other texts that individuals and nations appear to have angels, so churches may have guardian angels as well.

What Jesus holds in His hands He controls and protects. He controls the destiny of His church and His people. He is Lord.

But both of these lights pale in insignificance to the splendor of the sun and the glory of the Son of Man who's "face was like the sun shining in full strength."

The Fear, what Christ said, Rev. 1:17-20

The beloved disciple sees his beloved Lord, the one against whom he leaned his head. What a flood of memories and joys. So why if Jesus was so familiar to him does he respond the way he does?

Today there's a tendency in conversation and in music to portray Jesus as our friend and buddy. He is indeed a friend to sinners but He is much more, He is the Christ, the Son of the living God, full of majesty, power, dominion, authority, power, purity and righteousness.

The famous passage from C.S. Lewis' *The Lion, The Witch, and the Wardrobe* comes to mind.

"You'll understand when you see him."

"But shall we see him?" asked Susan.

"Why, Daughter of Eve, that's what I brought you here for. I'm to lead you where you shall meet him," said Mr. Beaver.

"Is—is he a man?" asked Lucy.

"Aslan a man!" said Mr. Beaver sternly. "Certainly not. I tell you he is the King of the wood and the son of the great Emperor-beyond-the-Sea. Don't you know who is the King of Beasts? Aslan is a lion—the Lion, the great Lion."

“Ooh!” said Susan, “I’d thought he was a man. Is he—quite safe? I shall feel rather nervous about meeting a lion.”

“That you will, dearie, and no mistake,” said Mrs. Beaver; “if there’s anyone who can appear before Aslan without their knees knocking, they’re either braver than most or else just silly.”

“Then he isn’t safe?” said Lucy.

“Safe?” said Mr. Beaver; “don’t you hear what Mrs. Beaver tells you? Who said anything about safe? ’Course he isn’t safe. But he’s good. He’s the King, I tell you.”

John describes the scene as so breathtaking, he falls down as though dead. He has seen God, Jesus Christ in all His infinite and eternal and divine glory, a glory beyond human ability to endure or comprehend. What John saw was completely beyond anything he had ever seen before, even on the Mount of Transfiguration. Only when we are clothed with His glory will we even be able to stand in heaven.

Jesus reaches out and says, Fear not. What a picture, the terror of Jesus’ majestic divinity and holiness and glory and then the tenderness of His compassion and comfort for His own.

These words aren’t just for John. Jesus told him to write this to the churches, for all fearful hearts. For all who suffer for Christ.

Fear not. The reason is not that Jesus isn’t scary. His glory and holiness are indeed cause for sinners to tremble. The glory of the risen Christ is terrifying. So why not fear? Jesus gives John *four reasons* not to fear.

1:17-18 “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.

First, fear not for the one you fear is also the one who takes away all fear.

The thing that John saw that frightened him was the very thing that removes all fears, the personal glory of His own Savior. This is grounds for joy and hope and peace and love; this is the proof of eternal security and victory.

Remember this. Fear rises out of our misunderstanding, out of our misconceptions, out of our ignorance and inability to see the big picture and the hand of God.

If Jesus tells us not to fear, it means He is with us and for us and all is well.

Second, fear not for your redeemer is God.

Jesus is the first and the last, the beginning and the end, the living one. In Him is all the fullness of the Godhead, from whom and to whom and for whom are all things. He holds all things in His hands, whether the fall of the sparrow and the fall of a nation.

He is the author and finisher of our salvation and faith, He is with us always. Fear not for I am God.

Third, fear not for His atonement and intercession are sufficient and perpetual.

He died and He lives again and ever lives. Worthy is the Lamb who was slain. This is cause enough to cancel out all fear.

Revelation 1:5-6 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.

“Because I died, you cannot die. Because I atoned for your sins, you cannot feel the sting of death. Your life is hid in mine and because I ever live so will you.”

Hebrews 7:25 He is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them.

Fourth, fear not because He has keys, He has dominion over death and hell.

He has the keys. Do you fathom the importance of that? He has raided hell and robbed it of all its power and torment and fear. Jesus has the keys of death and Hades.

Imagine the scene in hell on Good Friday night. “Satan, we have won, we have defeated Him, He is dead and we are bringing Him down.” And then the scene on Sunday morning. “Satan, how can this be, He has escaped, and Satan, it’s worse than that, Satan, He took the keys.”

Nothing was able to hold Him down, He has all power and authority. By His resurrection He has power and authority to raise believers to life. He has power and authority at His second coming to empty the graves and unite our bodies and our souls.

No more can anything separated us from the love of God in Christ Jesus. Jesus is in complete control of all that happens to us. And for us death is our path to glory. The curse is gone.

This verse anticipates Revelation 20 and 21:

Revelation 20:14 Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire.

Revelation 21:4 He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.”

Because of Christ’s victory, we will have victory. With this vision, this revelation, Jesus Christ will be the central and dominate theme and image throughout the rest of Revelation.

Our worship and obedience will be fuller and richer and more faithful if we have a compelling vision of Jesus, if we have greater intimacy with Him, if we know Him as He has revealed Himself to us and if we fear Him and yet fear Him not.