

A Vision of the Glorified Christ
(Sermon 3 – Rev. 1:9-20)
9.15.24

Please turn in your Bibles to the Book of Revelation, chapter 1.

When you picture Jesus in your mind, what does He look like? If you're basing his appearance on depictions of Jesus in movies or paintings that portrayed Him, you probably have a picture of a thin, pale, Caucasian man with long hair. And in the older movies about Jesus, for some reason He always had an English accent.

Or maybe when you think about Jesus, you picture Him on the cross, suffering for your sins. That's good, but that's not how Jesus is right now.

Jesus is no longer hanging on the cross. And He never was a pale European hipster.

One of the Ten Commandments tells us not to make any graven images. Don't create a likeness of God. One reason for that is that we will be tempted to worship the image or picture of God rather than God Himself. But another reason is there is no image (whether actual or imagined) that can fully capture the magnitude and glory and holiness and all that God is.

Our text today proves that point, as John describes seeing the glorified Jesus, as He is, right now. And not just His appearance, but also a picture of Christ's power and authority that cannot be captured in words, that is so much bigger and more profound and terrifying and beautiful than anything we could imagine.

Let's read Rev. 1:9-20, and then we'll pray...

[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.

(Let's Pray)

PROP: Nothing is more humbling or faith-building than a clear vision of the glorified Christ.

The description of Jesus that we are given in our text today is one of the most compelling, amazing descriptions in the Bible. And that is certainly John's focus.

But to be sure that those that John is writing to will know and believe this vision is truly from God, John first gives an introduction about himself, and the how this vision came to him. So the first section we'll look at is...

I. John, our brother and partner in the faith

Look at v. 9 again...

[1:9] 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.

The Apostle John was well known in the early church, and certainly to these 7 congregations he is writing to. So why the introduction of himself here? A few reasons: Since John is writing to persecuted Christians, he reminds them that he himself is under persecution as well. He first calls himself...

-“Your brother and partner in the tribulation”

John is not referring to some great future period of suffering, but “the tribulation” here means the kind of suffering the 7 churches in Asia were currently facing in John’s time, and the suffering the church has endured through the ages – being persecuted for their faith.

In times of suffering, it can be a comfort to know we are not alone, that there are others who understand our pain. John is reminding those enduring tribulation – those suffering for the faith – that he joins them in their suffering. After all, John’s home at the time was the small prison island of Patmos.

The last of the Apostles at the time, probably in his nineties, John is exiled by Rome, “on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus”. John was being persecuted for his faith in Christ, and His ministry of spreading the gospel. John knows persecution.

Scripture tells us all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted (2 Tim 3:12). All who treasure and live and proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ, we will be persecuted. We will be hated. Some will lose homes and possessions and jobs. Some will lose family. Some will lose their lives.

That means we need to be prepared to suffer. And it means that we should pray for those Christians who are being persecuted around the world – that they would stand firm in the faith.

Next, John identifies himself as...

-Your brother and partner in the kingdom (one in Christ / Messianic Rule to come)

John is reminding these churches that even though they are all suffering under the persecution of worldly rulers and tyrants, that all who trust in Christ are part of His kingdom. That’s our identity. It means we belong to the king. It reminds us we are no longer outside of His Covenant, as we once were. We are adopted and part of His family.

And as sons and daughters of the king, that makes us brothers and sisters in the kingdom. And as heirs of the kingdom of God, John is encouraging the church to look beyond this life, to look forward to the time when Messiah returns and sets up His Kingdom.

That leads to the third way John identifies with the persecuted church...

-Your brother and partner in "the patient endurance"

This is one of main reasons Revelation was written – to give encouragement and hope to the persecuted church, that they would “patiently endure” until Christ returns.

Scholars tell us that phrase “patient endurance” has a double meaning – a passive patience to wait, and an active perseverance to trust and be faithful and stand firm till the end.

Jesus once told His disciples, *“In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.”* (John 16:33)

We may suffer now, we may have to endure pain and hardship now, but because we know that Christ’s kingdom is coming, we can be patient, knowing Christ has overcome the world. And we can endure, knowing that Christ is coming again.

[10] I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet

To be “in the Spirit” means that John was in a unique, supernatural state, similar like a trance, not discerned by our natural 5 senses. John begins seeing and hearing spiritual things as the Holy Spirit enabled him.

John says it was “on the Lord’s day”. This is the only time in the NT this phrase is used, which likely means it was on the Sabbath, the day set aside for worship and to remember the resurrection of Christ.

In the Spirit, on the Lord’s day, John heard behind him “a loud voice like a trumpet”. Trumpets are mentioned more in Revelation than any other NT Book. They signify an announcement, a proclamation of authority. It tells us whatever is being proclaimed is something that we need to hear. And the trumpeting voice says in v. 11...

[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.”

Just as John has pointed out that he is a fellow sufferer with these churches he’s writing to, John now reminds them that he is not writing on his own authority. He has been commanded to write to them.

Seven specific congregations in 7 different cities – some churches will be commended, some will be corrected, and some will receive both.

(Transition): Now we move to the second section of the text, as John gets to the heart of this vision...

II. Jesus, the Glorified Lord

[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...

John turns to “see the voice”, but the first thing he sees are lampstands. The lampstands were part of the vision, but not the focal point. So, John mentions them, (which he will come back to later), and immediately focuses us on the person in the vision, which we learn is the glorified Christ.

We’re going to see three aspects of Christ seen in this vision: Christ’s appearance, His authority, and His assignment. (Keep your Bibles open as we look at each of these.) First...

A. Christ’s Appearance

If you’re curious to know what Jesus looks like right now, here’s what John saw...

[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.

Now, we don’t want to read too much into every detail. But we also don’t want to miss some important symbolism. For instance, the garments that Jesus is wearing a long robe down to the feet, a sash around the chest, are those of a high priest.

Just in the first part of this letter, we have seen three distinct offices of Christ represented. Back in verse 1, Jesus is revealed as Prophet, as the one who has received the vision from the Father. In verse 5, Jesus is revealed as King, described as “the ruler of kings on earth”. And finally, here in v. 13, as Priest, wearing the high-priestly garments.

This is meant to be a comfort to His church: Jesus is Prophet, King and Priest. He is everything we need.

[14a] The hairs of his head were white, like white wool, like snow.

This points to the wisdom of God as the Ancient of Days, as Daniel calls Him. The white wool and white snow also represent purity – the holiness and sinlessness of the Savior.

[14b] ...His eyes were like a flame of fire,

He is all-seeing, He has sovereign power over all. And fire often represents judgment, reminding us that Jesus has the authority to judge the nations.

[15a] ...his feet were like burnished bronze, refined in a furnace,

Similar to how heated metal glows in the blacksmith’s fire, Jesus’ feet looked like glowing metal. And as metal is strengthened in a furnace, Jesus has been tested and tried by living a sinless life and by conquering death, and like tested metal, He is strong and stable.

[15b] ...and his voice was like the roar of many waters.

The OT prophet Ezekiel also described the sound of the coming of the Lord like “the sound of many waters” (Ezek. 43:2), which, for a person in biblical times, a waterfall or a raging river was one of the loudest things you could hear and also one of the most powerful things to witness. John is pointing to the constant, unavoidable, inescapable, never-ending power of Christ.

[16a] In his right hand he held seven stars,

We will unpack this a little later. But for now, notice that these stars are not floating out in space. Christ holds them in His hand, which is a sign of protection and favor.

[16b] from his mouth came a sharp two-edged sword,

This represents the Word of God, the authority of divine judgment from God’s word. Hebrews 4 says, “*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". (Hebrews 4:12)

It is double-edged because it both wounds and heals. God's word does both. It convicts and corrects, but it also is the remedy and the balm that heals. And in this vision, Jesus brings both encouragement and correction to His Church.

[16c] and his face was like the sun shining in full strength.

Much like roaring waters were one of the loudest things a person in biblical times would encounter, the brightest thing they would know is the sun shining at noon.

On the mount of transfiguration, Jesus revealed a glimpse of His glory to Peter, James and John. This is the 2nd time John sees the glory of the Savior. But this time, John sees more than a glimpse. He sees the Risen Savior, the Ancient of Days, the Lord of Heaven and Earth, shining in His glory, brighter he says, *"than the sun at full strength"*.

John is not alone in using these extreme comparisons to describe Jesus. Back in the OT, Daniel had a vision, too. Look at how similar his description is...

*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. His body was like beryl, 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.
(Daniel 10:5-6)*

Daniel in the OT, and John in the NT. Two separate visions of the same person. Daniel seeing the pre-incarnate Jesus, and John seeing the Resurrected, glorified Jesus.

And Jesus is still preeminent, still the eternal, sovereign Lord and Ruler over all. The God of the OT is still God in the NT. The God of all of history is still God right now. The God that made the universe is the God over every detail of your life. He is the same yesterday, today and forever. And His name is Jesus.

What a comfort that is, especially for Christians who are suffering. Remember, John is writing to persecuted churches, those suffering at the

hands of earthly rulers. These saints have chosen faithfulness to Christ over the comforts of conformity, not loving their life unto death.

John writes to give them hope and encouragement in these visions revealed by God - not by giving the church a timeline of end-time events – but to give them a clear revelation, a revealing, of their Savior.

Now, John transitions from Christ's appearance to Christ's authority...

B. Christ's Authority

[17] When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead.

John falling down like a dead man, this was not a voluntary bow of respect. It was more like fainting face-first in the dirt. Even in a spiritual state, John could not stay standing at such an astonishing sight, which is common throughout the Bible for those who got a glimpse of God's glory.

[17b] But he laid his right hand on me, saying, "Fear not, I am the first and the last..."

The same hand that held the stars now reaches down and touches John. Remember that Christ is big enough to hold and care for His entire church, yet He is close enough to care for one Christian, one sheep in His fold, with direct, intimate care. Your needs are not too much for Him.

Jesus comforts John - and says, "Fear not" - the same words Jesus has comforted His Church through the ages. Jesus says, "*I am the first and the last*". This is a reflection of Isaiah 44... "*Thus says the LORD, the King of Israel and his Redeemer, the LORD of hosts: "I am the first and I am the last; besides me there is no god... Fear not, nor be afraid" (Isaiah 44:6, 8)*

Jesus says, "John, don't be afraid, I am the first and the last." Similar to the description back in v. 8 – "I am the Alpha and Omega". Jesus is the Eternal God, the Source of life, and the one who gives new life to those who trust in Him.

And why is Christ able to give this new life? V. 18, Jesus is...

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

Jesus reminds John and the suffering church, and announces to the nations, "I was dead, but I am no longer. I am the living one. My death was planned from the foundations of the world. And my resurrection proves my authority over all things, even death itself."

Jesus has the keys to Death and Hades. Keys are a picture of authority. Through His death and resurrection, Jesus has defeated death, and has been given all authority, even over death and the grave.

Again, this is a specific encouragement for Christians facing their own death, especially through persecution and trial.

We do not need to fear kings or rulers or governments that would threaten our lives. None of them are supreme. None of them are sovereign. Only Jesus is. He is over all things. He holds the keys to death and the grave. He is the one who gives us life, He is the one who takes it away. He is the one who will put all other rulers and authorities under His feet. And He is the one who promises eternal life to His Church. "*Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?*" (1 Cor 15:54-55)

Jesus alone has the authority to free us from death and hell since he has conquered both. So, Christian, you have nothing to fear, for your Lord reigns supreme.

Finally, John turns to one last aspect of this amazing vision. We've seen Christ's appearance, His authority, and now we see...

C. Christ's Assignment *(the assignment Jesus gave to John)*

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

This repeats the command that John was first given in v. 11, to write down the visions he would receive. Because of Christ's supremacy and complete victory, "therefore" John, write these things down:

- Write the things "that you have seen", which is this vision of Christ.
- Write those "that are", which is the condition of the 7 churches and some other things that Christ will show John in later visions.
- And write those "that are to take place after this" (the future events that would be revealed).

John was commanded to write out these visions, and to distribute them to the 7 churches in Asia, and eventually to all of Jesus' Church, so that they would be comforted, and in some cases, corrected. That was the assignment Jesus gave to John.

Remember at the beginning of this vision, John saw Jesus walking among 7 lampstands, holding 7 stars in His hand. Here in v. 20, after we have seen the glorified Christ, Jesus reveals the meaning of some of the symbols we saw before...

[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.

First, these 7 stars represent the "angels of the 7 churches". We are not sure exactly what this means. It could mean:

- guardian angels for each of the congregations
- the general spiritual condition of each church
- or, since the word for angel also means "messenger", this could refer to the pastor of each church.

I tend to believe it refers to the pastor of each church, since Jesus will address his instruction and correction to them for each church.

Then Jesus says the lampstands represent the 7 churches. Back in v. 13, Jesus is seen in the midst of the lampstands. He is in the midst of His churches – comforting them, near them, present with them, to comfort these persecuted churches, but also to hold them accountable, as we will see in the coming weeks when we unpack these letters.

Christ holds His people in His hand, protecting us, caring for us. He is sovereign over His Church, and cares for those who belong to Him, and no one can snatch us out of His hand.

Now why does Jesus use lampstands to represent His church?

These lampstands most likely resembled what we know as a **menorah** – a seven branched lamp we first see used in the OT to light the inside of the Tabernacle.

-Just as the lampstand illuminated the Tabernacle, the church is called to shine God's light into a darkened world. Jesus called Himself the light of the world. And He said that we are to reflect that light, like a city on a hill that cannot be hidden. We are to be His witnesses, His mouthpiece, His ambassadors in a foreign land. We are to shine His light to our neighbors, our co-workers, our family, our community, and to every nation on earth.

Some of these 7 churches are doing that - faithfully shining that light, even to the point of persecution. But some of them are not, and for those He brings correction. What good is a lamp if it is not shining into the darkness?

-Also, these lampstands are perfect symbols for the church because they did not produce light. A lampstand was not the source – it was only a structure, a vessel, that was designed to be filled. That oil that filled it would then be lit using wicks at the top of each branch, and *that* would provide the light. The lampstand must be filled, and it must be lit, to be of any use.

Church for us to be effective, we must be filled with the Spirit. All through the NT, oil represents the Holy Spirit. We are not the source of light. It is not our building, or our programs, our creativity, or even our people. The source of power in the Church is the Holy Spirit. The Spirit fills us and empowers us to reflect the light of Christ to the darkened world.

We need the help of the Spirit. We need to be filled and re-filled so that the light of Christ can shine through us, so that we can be more than people who gather on a Sunday. We must be disciples making disciples. We want to be a people who worship Jesus, who live out the gospel of Jesus, and who share the grace and the love of Jesus with one another.

Conclusion:

Remember: Nothing is more humbling or faith-building than a clear vision of the glorified Christ. This happens as we see Jesus for who He is. Once you recognize Jesus, as He is, it changes everything. No longer as a vulnerable baby in a manger. No longer dead in a tomb.

But see Jesus today as:

- the Risen Savior, who came up out of the grave.
- the Victor, the one who defeated the devil once and for all.
- the Conquering, Sovereign God and King - the one who is over all.

Jesus alone is the author of life, and He alone is victorious over death.

Jesus as the one who ascended, and He is the one who will descend, who will return in power and glory to set up His kingdom on earth, laying low every enemy, and wiping away every tear from His Beloved.

And who is His Beloved? It's you – His Church. You are Jesus' beloved. You are the ones He died for. You are the ones promised to never leave nor forsake. You are the ones, as John reminded us, that Jesus is walking in the midst of. Jesus is present in His Church, with His people,

- bringing comfort in our distress
- bringing light to a darkened world
- giving strength to the suffering and the persecuted

See Him today, Church. Receive a clear vision of the Savior, on full display for you in these pages.

May that vision of the glorified Christ give us renewed hope in the midst of heartache, renewed joy in midst of pain, and renewed faith in trying times, knowing that one day our faith will turn to sight, and we shall see Him as He is, in all His glory.

We long for that day. Come, Lord Jesus.

(Let's Pray)