

## A Vision of the Ascended Christ

Revelation 1:9-20

Will you take your Bibles and a turn to the book of Revelation chapter 1. This morning we will be examining verses nine through 20. I've entitled my discourse to you, *A Vision of the Ascended Christ*; a marvelous text that gives us a deeper understanding of the Lord of the Church.

Before we read the passage I would like to introduce the subject by asking you to think with me a bit about the direction that we see our country going, and you will see the implications of this in a moment as we look at the text. Many Christians share my deep concern about the direction of our nation. The U.S. has now elected the most anti-Christian president in the history of our nation. All the more reason for us to pray for this man and for his family that they will come to a saving knowledge of Christ and the church will be protected from him and his administration. But it is deeply troubling to witness the mass idolatry of the new president. Thousands hail him as the, "messiah." It is absolutely astounding to see the demagoguery that is sweeping the nation. If you read the information on the Internet and the Blogs, there you will see, for example, one of his popular slogans: "We are the ones we've been waiting for"; translated "I am the one that *you* have been waiting for." He is being likened to the *Transfiguration of Christ*. You can read blasphemous slogans and signs that say, "Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done"; "Obama be thy name, thy change shall come, thy will be done." We even have public school children chanting, "He is the alpha and omega."

The Chicago Sun-Times is quoted to say, "We just like to say his name. We are considering taking it as a mantra." And one of their writers says, "He's not just an ordinary human being, but indeed an advanced soul." And of course Oprah Winfrey, who is by and large a spokesman for much of our culture, says this, "We are here to evolve to a higher plane . . . he is an evolved leader, he has an ear for eloquence and a tongue dipped in the unvarnished truth." There is a new album that is out that's called, "Songs of Obama." And even Rick Warren, who's called "America's pastor", praises Obama for inviting a homosexual Episcopal bishop to pray at the inauguration. He said this, "President-elect Obama has again demonstrated his genuine commitment to bringing all Americans of good will together in search of common ground. I applaud his desire to be the president of every citizen."

What a delusion, dear friends. The word of God says, "there is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death." Such idolatry is an abomination before God. Idolatry is when a man worships something other than the true and living God, and an Idol is any object of trust in which we place our faith. As the psalmist said in Psalm 31:6, (these are) "vain idols"; and Jonah said the same thing as he recounted his experience in the belly of the great fish; he called them "vain idols", literally, "lying vanities" and "empty deceptions."

I grieve over the idolatry that is sweeping the nation. Like lemmings, the American public, driven by greed and immorality and ignorance, is mindlessly marching over the cliff of destruction, deceived into believing the empty platitudes of "hope and change." Believing that somehow this will result in a better life. How I wish the people of our country, and the people of the world, could understand who the true Messiah is—the Lord Jesus Christ! The Lord of the church. And how I wish they could understand the passage that we have before us here this morning.

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Beloved, here we are going to see in verses 9-20 the Lord Jesus Christ revealing Himself in a vision to the apostle John. We're going to have a vision of the ascended and glorified Christ. Here we will see the Lord's description of Himself, where the glorified Lord of the church appears to John; the very One whom John had previously known so well some 65 years earlier.

What a magnificent yet terrifying reunion this must have been. Here, dear friends, the true Messiah establishes his divine credentials to John, and to all the recipients of this revelation, because there must be no equivocation with respect to the authority of the One who is about to reveal the future and return someday as the King of kings and Lord of lords. Here the Lord Himself is going to provide a magnificent description of His glorious character and a detailed portrayal of his infinite perfections. Beloved, you must understand that what we are going to look at this morning is the clearest contrast of His earthly suffering with his ascended glory that we can find anywhere in Scripture—and it's from the Lord's very mouth.

My friends, this is how we should see Him. We should not see Christ as a babe in a manger. We should no longer see Him as wearing a crown of thorns. We should no longer see Him as hanging on a cross. But now we must see Him in the resplendent glory of His Majesty as the Ruler of the universe. This is the One in whom we should trust, for He alone is the Messiah; the only Lord and Savior; the only hope for salvation for men.

You will recall that this is the *Apokalypsis Iesou Christou*, literally an *uncovering* given to us by Jesus Christ; something that *has been laid bare*; something that has been concealed in the past is now being *unveiled*. That is the title of this book. And we've learned in the prologue, in verses one through eight, that this is a divine disclosure of previously hidden truths given to Jesus Christ from God the Father as a description of the Son's glorious inheritance from the Father—events that are now imminent—the next things that will happen on the prophetic timetable. This was communicated to John by an angel, and then from John to give testimony to all of the bond-servants of Christ. We have learned that it is a written document that offers a special blessing to all those who *read* it and *hear* it and *heed* its contents. And in it, the triune Godhead offers “grace and peace” to all who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, the One who, according to verse five, “loves us, and released us from our sins by his blood.” And the theme of this book is found in the first prophetic oracle in verse seven. “Behold, He is coming with the clouds”; and the veracity of what will follow in this divine disclosure is affirmed by its ultimate author, God the Father, who affixes his signature to the prologue stating in verse eight, ‘*I am* the Alpha and the Omega,’ says the Lord God, ‘who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.’

Now, follow with me as I read the text before us this morning, beginning in v. 9: “I John, your brother and fellow partaker in the tribulation and kingdom and perseverance which are in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos, because of the Word of God and the testimony of Jesus. I was in the spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like the sound of a trumpet, saying, ‘Write in a book what you see, and send it to the seven churches: to the Ephesians and to Smyrna and to Pergamum and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea.’” And I turned to see the voice that was speaking with me. And having turned I saw seven golden lampstands; and in the middle of the lampstands one like a son of man, clothed in a robe reaching to the feet and girded across his breast with a golden girdle. And His head and his hair were white like white wool, like snow; and His eyes were like a flame of fire; and His feet were

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like burnished bronze, when it is been caused to glow in a furnace, and His voice was like the sound of many waters. And in His right hand He held seven stars; and out of His mouth came a sharp two-edged sword; and His face was like the sun shining in its strength. And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as a dead man. and He laid his right hand on me saying, “Do not be afraid; I am the first and the last, and the living One; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of death and of Hades.” Write therefore the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall take place after these things. As for the mystery of the seven stars which 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.”

I divided this text into four categories that I hope will be helpful for you as we endeavor to understand its meaning. First, we will look at *the circumstances of the vision*, in other words, the events surrounding the vision; secondly, *the commencement of the vision*; in other words, the beginning or introductory scene of the vision; then thirdly, *the consequence of the vision*, that is, the effect that it had upon John and God’s remedy for that effect. And finally, fourthly, *the commission of the vision*, that is the divine purpose and marching orders that God gives the apostle.

First we see *the circumstances of the vision* in verse nine. And here dear friends we see both the humility and the suffering of the great apostle. He says, “I John, your brother and fellow partaker in the tribulation and kingdom and perseverance which are in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos, because of the Word of God and the testimony of Jesus.” Now, historically you must understand that Christianity at first was merely considered another sect of Judaism, and therefore it was legal within the Roman Empire. Official persecution didn’t really begin until the reign of Nero in the 60s. And you will recall that he burned much of Rome because he had such an appetite for architecture and building. He did this on July 19, A.D. 64, and of course he had to blame it on someone, so he blamed it on the Christians. He executed many Christians at that time including, Peter and Paul.

But there is no historical or biblical evidence of widespread persecution until the time of the Domitian’s reign which began in 81 A.D. and finished in 96 A.D. For example, in Paul’s letters to the Ephesians, to the Colossians, as well as his first and second letters to Timothy (all of which were written in the 60s), there is no indication of persecution. All were relatively healthy churches at that time. But by the time we come to the text before us, the *Book of Revelation*, by the time of John’s writings, these churches had seriously declined, as we are going to see. And according to tradition, John left Palestine for Asia minor at the time of the Jewish revolt against Rome between A.D. 66 and 70. John’s ministry in this region in Asia Minor resulted in severe persecution, along with all the churches in that region. By then the nation’s hatred for Christians had spread all the way to Asia Minor where the seven churches existed.

Now Christians were mainly lower class people, and therefore the Roman aristocracy despised them. They were considered disloyal to Rome because they refused to worship Caesar as the supreme authority; they refused to worship the pantheon of Roman gods, and they even undermined, at least in the Romans mind, the hierarchical structure of Roman society because they believed that all men were equal and therefore they were opposed to slavery.

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So John is exiled to this tiny island of Patmos because he “believes” these things. Patmos was an island about 30 miles south of Ephesus in the Aegean Sea. He is banished there because he is a member of and a spokesman for this illegal religious sect. Now Roman penal colonies were horrible, and there were many of them in that region. We know, according to other historical records and tradition, that people were forced to work in mines. In fact, the early Church fathers indicated this was the fate of John. There was very little food or clothing, they were forced to sleep on the ground, and of course this would have been torture for anyone, but especially for a 90-year-old man.

And so here in verse nine he describes himself rightfully as a “fellow partaker in the tribulation and kingdom and perseverance which are in Jesus.” As a footnote, obviously the fullness of the kingdom had not yet come, and here we see that the church was in desperate need of encouragement. We know that at least one pastor, according to Revelation 2:13, has been martyred. We also know that all of the apostles have been martyred, except for John. And so you can imagine what would’ve been going on in his heart, knowing the persecution of the churches that he loves, and knowing his own fate. So he says that he’s “a fellow partaker in the tribulation and kingdom.”

The kingdom here includes the sphere of God’s sovereign rule over the redeemed that exists between Christ’s first and second comings. Hear John describes his suffering as a kingdom citizen as he awaits the reign of King Jesus and as he perseveres until He returns. I am reminded of Hebrews chapter 12, verses 1 and 2 where the writer says that we must “run with endurance the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith.”

And of course his only crime, as he tells us here, was his faithful preaching of “the Word of God and the testimony of Jesus.” And beloved, it is against this dark backdrop of persecution that the brilliant light of the future Messianic kingdom will shine all the more. What a blessing this divine revelation would have been to the apostle John and to the churches that will later receive it, and to all the churches henceforth.

So in verse 10 he tells us, “I was in the Spirit.” We must understand, this does not mean that he was asleep and having a dream. The verb here literally indicates, “I came to be in the spirit.” It denotes an entrance into an unusual state. This would’ve been a supernaturally induced state beyond our comprehension whereby God takes His messenger and allows him to gaze into the invisible spiritual world and see things that God would want him to see and to understand. Luke used the term *ekstasis*, which means “trance”, to describe what happened to Peter in Acts chapter 10.

This was also the same experience of Ezekiel, as well as the apostle Paul. So he says, “I was in the spirit”, and notice he says, “on the Lord’s Day”. This is a reference to Sunday, a phrase found only here in the New Testament. It was also a phrase found in other writings of ancient Christians in that very region just a short time after the writing of the Apocalypse. This is not a reference to the eschatological “Day of the Lord” as some believe—that day of judgment referred to by the Old Testament prophets. There’s a number of reasons why I would argue against that, the most important of which is that grammatically the phrase “the Lord’s Day” is a very different

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construction than the eschatological “Day of the Lord” used elsewhere, even here in the book of Revelation.

Now it became customary for Christians to refer to Sunday as “the first day of the week” because Christ’s resurrection occurred on Sunday, the Lord’s day. It was also customary for the “Lord’s supper” to be observed on Sunday, the first day of the week, as we read in Acts 20. But “Sunday” is also fitting in this context because this is the first part of the vision that John will receive pertaining to Christ’s present ministry *in His church*.

Now notice the striking way the Lord approaches John in v. 10: “. . . and I heard behind me a loud voice like the sound of a trumpet.” This was a startling, dramatic, authoritative sound that obviously got his attention. This is reminiscent of the events surrounding the giving of the Law at Sinai when, in Exodus 19, they heard a very loud trumpet sound that terrified the people as God descended upon the mount with thunder and lightning flashes in a thick cloud. This was also the experience of Ezekiel when God ushered him into an ecstatic state as we read in Ezekiel 3:12, when he heard a great rumbling sound behind him. Now here in Revelation 1:10, John hears something behind him; it is a loud voice like the sound of the trumpet.

The phrase, “a loud voice” is used throughout the book to denote the profound importance of what was about to be said. And *trumpet calls* are used throughout Scripture to announce important events, as well as to assemble God’s people and prepare them for some special announcement. And in verse 11 we read that the “loud voice” is saying, “Write in a book what you see,” (literally, “write in a “biblion,” or a “scroll”); this would’ve been a scroll made of papyrus material made from plants that are grown in Egypt, not the more expensive parchment made from animals skins. “Write what you see, and send it to the seven churches in Ephesus . . . Smyrna . . . Pergamum . . . Thyatira . . . Sardis . . . Philadelphia and to Laodicea.”

This is the first of 12 commands that John will receive to write what the Lord will reveal to him and these seven churches that evidently were the most representative of the unique spiritual situations described in each of their respective letters. But these were also very prominent cities in that region, each one being a postal district in Asia Minor. They circle clockwise from where the messengers of the book would eventually arrive at Miletus on the coast, and from there the messengers would travel North first to Ephesus, and make their way around the seven churches. As we will learn, a messenger from each church would have presented the scroll to his church, they would read it, and probably make a copy of it, then the remaining messengers would leave for their respective churches with the original copy and repeat the process. So these are the circumstances of the vision.

Secondly, notice *The Commencement of the Vision* detailed here in verses 12-16. This is the beginning the introductory scene preceding the actual vision. Verse 12, “And I turned to see the voice that was speaking with me. And having turned I saw seven golden lampstands.” This symbolism can be understood by the common usage “lychnias,” the term for “lampstands,” which was merely a word to describe the stands used for portable oil lamps of that day. But as we see in verse 20, in this context they are emblems of each of the seven churches in their respective cities, each local assembly having the responsibility to emanate the glorious light of the Gospel of Christ.

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And may I remind you, dear friends, as Paul tells us in Philippians chapter 2 beginning in verse 15, that the church is to “appear as lights in the world, holding fast the word of life.” These “seven golden lampstands” therefore symbolize the witness of God’s people to a Gentile world—a world that is dark and in need of the witness that is reflected here in the seven-branched golden lampstands. Even like the ones that we saw in the tabernacle where we know that there was one set (of lampstands) that stood outside, and one that stood inside the veil, according to Exodus 25.

The same idea is also found in Zachariah’s vision in Zachariah 4:2 where we read of “a lampstand all of gold with its bowl on the top of it, and its seven lamps on it with seven spouts belonging to each of the lamps which are on the top of it.” The seven spouts indicating an unlimited supply of that which would bear witness to the glory of God.

Moreover, we see that there are “seven” of them; the number seven is always the number of completeness. Thus the seven churches symbolize the various kinds of churches that will exist throughout the church age. And as we study them, we will see that the various difficulties and areas of sin in each of those churches can be found in each and every church that has existed from that day to this.

And next we see the ascended Lord of the church standing in the midst of those who are to bear witness to the light of his glory and grace. He is the One who indwells each of us as we are all united together in the body of Christ. Now He’s going to use nine descriptive phrases to describe the glory of His person and the nature of His works in His church. Each title will offer hope and comfort to the discouraged apostle and certainly to the seven churches, and all churches from that day to this. Here He reminds them all of his holiness and his sovereign authority over them.

Notice the first description in v. 13: “and in the middle of the lampstands one like a son of man.” We know this is messianic title, we read it in Daniel 7:13, and it is the same text Jesus applied to Himself some 60 years earlier in Mark 13:26. “One like a son of man” indicates that when John turns around he sees a human form, he sees the glorified Lord Jesus Christ. This is also a title used in John 5:22 and 27, and Acts 17:31 to describe Jesus’ authority to judge His church, given to Him by the Father (which He will do in Revelation chapters 2 and 3). This is also a title that the early church used to depict the Lord’s suffering, which is also in view here in the context of the seven churches.

The second description the Lord gives of Himself in verse 13 is that He is “clothed in a robe reaching to the feet, and girded across His breast with a golden girdle.” This is a description of the attire worn by the high priest of the Old Testament, and here it pictures the Lord Jesus Christ as our faithful and our great high Priest. You will recall that it is Christ alone who could offer up sacrifice and make atonement for sin. He alone is the mediator between God and man. Hebrews 7:25 says that “He always lives to make intercession for us.” He alone can transform sinners into saints and take us into the very presence of a holy God. The writer of Hebrews tells us in chapter 2:17 and 18: “He had to be made like His brethren in all of things, so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins

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of the people. For since He Himself was tempted in that which he has suffered, He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted.”

I'm sure these eternal truths resonated within the hearts of the people later on as they heard these descriptions being given to them. The writer of Hebrews also said in chapter 4:15: “For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and may find grace to help in time of need.” Beloved, come what may, we have a high priest who is intimately involved in our lives and who knows everything about what we are struggling with. What an enormous comfort these truths must have brought to the suffering saints of those days.

In the third description in v. 14 we read that “His head and His hair were white like white wool, like snow.” Here John turns from describing His attire to His actual appearance as a person. “White” depicts that which is brilliant and blazing and bright, symbolizing both His glory and His holy purity. This is also the appearance Daniel saw in Daniel 7:9, a description of the *Ancient of Days, God the Father*. And what is interesting is here in v. 14 it is applied to the Son—once again giving us an understanding of Christ’s deity. Like the Father, He is the eternal, preexistent Christ. And here the seven churches are reminded once again of the infinite glory and purity of their God and Savior Christ Jesus who indwells His church, the body of Christ.

The fourth description of the ascended Christ in v. 14 tells us that “His eyes were like a flame of fire.” This is a description that we will see repeated once again in chapter 2: 18 in chapter 19:12. The source of this expression is found in Daniel 10:6 when Daniel beheld the pre-incarnate Christ. There Daniel describes Him saying, “His body also was like beryl, His face had the appearance of lightening, His eyes were like flaming torches, His arms and feet like the gleam of polished bronze, and the sound of His words like the sound of a tumult.” And as we come here to John’s description in v. 14 we see the text conveying to us the fierceness of the Lord’s wrath against His enemies. The penetrating eyes of His divine omniscience has the ability to peer through all the walls of rebellion and deception, and to pierce through every man’s heart and lay bare all that he does and all that he is; all of his sin and wickedness. Beloved, this is the Lord of the church.

The writer of Hebrews tells us in 4:13, “There is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and the laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do.” Pity the church that violates His Word. Pity the church that is ashamed of the gospel. Pity the tares that are among the wheat, that corrupt the purity of the Church. And pity the wolves in sheep’s clothing that would devour the sheep. Beloved, Jesus Christ sees it all. And He warned in Matthew 10:26, “There is nothing concealed that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known.” He judges all of the affairs of every man and every church, and there is never a day that that truth is not absent from my heart.

The fifth description is in v. 15: “and His feet were like burnished bronze when it has been caused to glow in a furnace.” These people would’ve understood this very clearly. In ancient days a king’s feet symbolized his absolute authority. They always sat upon elevated thrones, and if you came into the presence of the king, when you looked up at him you would see the bottom

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of his feet. Every subject would realize that they were beneath the king. Also, we know that “feet” in the New Testament symbolizes movement. We see this in a number of passages. In Luke 1:79; Acts 5:9; Romans 3:15 and 10:15; and Hebrews 12:13. So this denotes Christ’s moving in the church—His involvement in His church. What a precious thought to know that the Lord is present with us now; He is present with us when we’re meeting corporately; He is present with us when we are alone in our closet of prayer. He is always moving in our midst. There is no escaping Him. The emphasis here is also on purity and the judgment of the Lord as seen in similar descriptions in Ezekiel 1:1,3,27 and Daniel 10:6.

We read that His feet were like “burnished” (or gleaming) bronze.” The idea here is that His feet are still glowing hot from the furnace, indicating their utter refinement or absence of any impurity. The intention is to communicate Christ’s movement among the churches for the purpose of purifying them. And we know that sometimes that happens through divine chastening and through discipline in the church. Beloved, Christ is serious about the purity of His church, and He has the authority to judge those who trifle with his Word; those who wink at sin; those who trivialize worshipping the Lord Jesus Christ by worshipping Him in ways that are inappropriate.

And we have sixth description in v. 15: “and his voice was like the sound of many waters.” We later see the angelic hymns drawing from this imagery in 14:2 and 19:6. The source of this symbol is also found in the Old Testament, in Ezekiel 43:2 where Ezekiel sees and hears the glory of the God of Israel returning to his millennial Temple in Jerusalem after his second coming; there we read, “And behold the glory of the God of Israel was coming from the way of the east” (you will recall this is the opposite direction from which he departed because of Israel’s apostasy), “and His voice was like the sound of many waters; and the earth shown with His glory.” Of course John was familiar with “the sound of many waters” on that tiny little island. He could hear waves banging against the rocks constantly. Especially during a storm, the sound would be deafening, attesting to its enormous power. So he heard the sound of the Lord’s voice, one of infinite power and authority that cannot be silenced, that cannot be drowned out by any other sound. This was the force behind John’s commission to write the Revelation of Jesus Christ.

On the Mount Transfiguration you’ll recall that God commanded us to listen to His beloved Son, and we hear His voice through the inspired and infallible record of His Word. For this reason we are to preach the Word with authority and thus release its power to accomplish the purposes of God. Like the mighty roar of Niagara Falls, the voice of the Lord is the absolute voice of authority, one that exceeds the sound of any other voice.

We read the seventh description in verse 16: “And in His right hand he held seven stars;” and that is explained in v. 20: “the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches.” Now, this is the only description that is not drawn directly from the Old Testament. However, its imagery does parallel other Old Testament passages. The idea of His “right hand” is a common expression in the Old Testament that denotes God’s power and control. And the term “angels” can be translated “messenger.” These are not angelic beings. Angels are never involved in church leadership, nor do they sin and repent (as these messengers are exhorted to do in numerous passages to follow, along with their congregations). So He has the authority and the control of



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the messengers and the churches they represent. Evidently, these men came to visit John on the isle of Patmos to receive the scroll and disseminate its contents to their respective churches—truly a solemn and sacred responsibility.

And we have an eighth description here in verse 16: we read, “out of His mouth came a sharp two-edged sword.” This description is used elsewhere in Revelation 2:12, 16 and also in 19:15, to depict His fierce judgment against His enemies who exist primarily within the church. You must remember that our greatest enemy is always from within. Like pastors who pretend to be pastors but they’re not, and other tares as well; unbelievers posing as Christians, many of them unwittingly so.

We also see this same imagery in Isaiah 11:4 where the Messiah is depicted as the Warrior-King reigning in His millennial glory, ruling in righteousness with unrivaled force. There Isaiah says, “. . . and He will strike the earth with the rod of His mouth, and with the breath of His lips He will slay the wicked.” And the word “sword” (*rhomphaia*), that John uses in 2:16 refers to a large bladed, double-edged sword used by cavalymen on horseback. So here John sees the ascended Lord of the church as the invincible warrior who can slay His enemies with merely the pronouncement of a word.

Also in v. 16, the Lord gives a ninth description of Himself: “and His face was like the sun shining in its strength.” This was a familiar sight for John, having seen the resplendent, dazzling light of the glory of God emanate from the person of the Lord Jesus Christ on the Mt. of Transfiguration 65 years earlier, along with Peter and James.

This was the shekinah that blinded Paul on the road to Damascus. Here the aging apostle sees once again a preview of the glory of God—an ineffable display of the majesty of Jesus Christ, the ascended, glorified Lord of the Church; a glory that is to be refracted and reflected by His church. In 2 Corinthians 4:6, the apostle Paul said: “For God, who said, ‘Light shall shine out of darkness,’ is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ. But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the surpassing greatness of the power may be of God and not from ourselves.”

Paul also describes *us* as “heavenly luminaries” in Philippians 2:15, and here in v. 16 we see Christ as the ultimate source of spiritual light and holiness, a light like the sun that reflects off the moon. Indeed, He is the light of the world that reflects off of us as we bear witness to that light and offer hope to a dark world.

Oh child of God, what a magnificent scene to introduce John’s vision—a glimpse of the ascended Christ and His respective functions in His church. He is the divine Authority and Judge, having suffered and died for His own. He is our great High Priest who has made the final sacrifice for sin with His own blood, who sympathizes and intercedes for His own. He is the pre-existent, eternal, utterly transcendent God of the universe. He is the One who is pure and holy. He is the One whose penetrating eye of divine omniscience can see with perfect clarity the heart of every man and will judge accordingly. He is the One who moves through His church to enforce His holy standards of purity. He is the One whose Word cannot be silenced or ignored. He is the One who has the authority over the seven messengers and the churches they represent. He is the invincible warrior with power to defeat all His enemies both inside and outside the

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church. He is the One who will return in power and great glory to judge the wicked of the world. These magnificent descriptions set the stage for the revelation John will receive.

So we've seen the *circumstance* and *commencement* of the vision, now thirdly, the *consequence* of the vision in verse 17. "And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as a dead man." Here we see John was absolutely overwhelmed and overcome by what he saw. The language indicates a lifeless stupefaction whereby a person falls prostrate to the ground in sheer terror. Such is the reaction of every person in Scripture who saw a glimpse of the glorified Christ and the glory of God. Now this makes sense. Does it not? Whenever a sinner stands in the presence of the blazing holiness of God, he is exposed for who is. And whenever we are exposed in such a way, our guilt is undeniable.

Unlike the many charlatans who brag about seeing God face to face as if they just met an old high school friend and had a few laughs. Unlike those liars, John collapsed in reverent and paralyzing fear. "For," as the writer of Hebrews says in 12:29, "our God is a consuming fire."

Then in verse 17 we read, "and He laid His right hand upon me, saying, "Do not be afraid; I am the first and the last." "I am," *ego eimi* in the original language, the name of deity. We see it in the Old Testament. It is the personal, covenant name of God. It is the name rooted in the Tetragrammaton, the four letters YHWH, translated LORD. Now John had heard this name used before, the name "I Am." He heard it and recorded it in John 8:58 where Jesus said, "Before Abraham came to be I am (*ego eimi*)." This was the same name he heard Jesus use to comfort him along with the other disciples when they saw Him walking on the Sea of Galilee. You will recall in Matthew 14, at that time Jesus saw them and He said: "I AM, stop fearing!" Very simple. What an amazing scene. To be sure, this was the same God-man whose breast John once laid his head upon some six decades earlier at the last supper. "Do not be afraid; I am the first and the last"; again, another title God used of Himself in the Old Testament to describe His eternal nature.

Verse 18: "and the living One"; a precious title, a common description of God in both testaments; "I am the living One, and I was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of death and of Hades." *So don't be afraid. I am the One who is life. I am the One who decides who will live and who will die.* Here the Lord comforts John with the assurance of eternal life.

Essentially what He is saying as we look at it in the grammar of the original language is "life is my very nature!" . . . I am the uncaused, pre-existent, self-existent, eternal God." Literally He says, "I became dead." Now you must understand, as God, He could never die. He could only die by becoming man—so that He could become the propitiation for our sins. Peter describes this in 1 Peter 3:18 when he said, Christ was "put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit." You see, only in the Lord's humanness could He die, never in His deity. That's what He is saying here.

Then He says to him, and I love this, "and behold!" In other words, *look upon Me with sheer amazement!* "Behold, but now I am alive forevermore." Therefore He says, "I have the keys of death and of Hades" (synonymous terms describing the grave). And of course a *key* is something

## **A Vision of the Ascended Christ**

Revelation 1:9-20

that gives one access as well as symbolizes authority. So He is saying here, *I have the power to give life, and I have the power to consign men to a permanent death or to release them from it. Because I have gained victory over death, I have the keys to it, and no one can be death's prisoner unless they choose to be so.*

And with these profound words of comfort He commissions John finally, the *commission* of the vision found in verse 19, "Write therefore the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall take place after these things."

I love it when the Lord gives me very clear divisions of that which I am to preach. I love it when he gives me an outline because then I know with confidence that it is the right outline. Here he gives us a very simple three-part division of the book of Revelation, one that will help us understand the book.

First of all I want you to write "the things which you have seen." This is real easy to understand, this is the past vision of the glorified Christ that John had just seen, recorded here in verses 10 through 16. And then I want you to write "the things which are." This is a reference to the letters to the seven churches in chapters two and three that detail specific conditions of not only those churches in John's day but all churches that have existed from that day and all of the events surrounding that up until chapter 4 verse one. So, *I want you to write the things which are.*

Then thirdly, "I want you to write the things which shall take place after these things," in other words the prophetic events detailed in chapters 4 through 22. These are events that will take place after the church is removed. In fact from chapter 4 on you never see the church again on earth, it's always in heaven. So, *write the things which you have seen, the things which are, and the things which shall take place.*

Beloved, may I challenge you this morning as we close our time together, especially those of you who know and love the Lord Jesus Christ, will you see Christ afresh today, in all His ascended glory, in the manner in which he has described Himself; and therefore experience the blessing that is promised to you?

And may I ask you to do something else? You know the Lord gives all of this information with respect to the details of his person, all these symbols . . . he gives this to John to establish this scene, to set the stage for all that God is going to give him subsequently. Will you allow that same scene to prepare your heart? Will you allow yourself to meditate on the glorious truths of the resurrected, glorified, ascended Christ so that you too can be prepared for what you are going to hear over the months to come? . . . prepare your hearts to hear and heed the revelation as we read in verse three. And may the light of the truth of the gospel of Christ never be extinguished from our lampstand here at Calvary Bible Church.

Finally, for those of you who do not know Christ as Savior; for those of you who have refused to repent and believe in Him, and bow to Him is the only Savior and Lord; may I encourage you with all my heart to repent and to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ before it is too late, and He will save you from your sins.

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Revelation 1:9-20

*Let's pray together. Father thank you for these eternal truths. May they resonate within our heart and also within our minds; that we might understand that which you would want us to understand in our study to come. Thank you for condescending to our lowly estate so that we could grasp some of the marvels of your person and of your work. But I pray as well for those who do not know you as Savior. I pray that by the power of your Spirit you will convict them of their hypocrisy, of their rebellion, and Lord may today be the day they experience the miracle of the new birth, because today is the day they repent and believe in You. I ask all of this in the name of Jesus and for his sake. Amen.*

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