

THE VISION OF THE RISEN LORD

Revelation 1:9-20

Introduction

What does Jesus look like right now?

The book of Revelation is a series of visions given to John by the Lord Jesus Christ.

Remember we are following Jesus into the future. No wonder the book begins with a revelation of the risen Savior and an amazing description of Jesus Christ the Lord. This is a vision of exaltation, glorification, adoration, dignity. Why is this important? Before Jesus speaks to the churches—He gives John a glimpse of Himself. This is important—when Jesus speaks to you, do you fully understand that He is the Lord God of the Universe? Jesus Christ wanted both John's immediate readers and His future readers to know who it was who was giving this message to the churches. This is not opinion polls, pundits, talking heads, self-proclaimed prophets, or wishful thinking. The message comes from the supreme Majesty of the universe, from someone who must be obeyed, heeded, from One who possesses all power, all authority, all knowledge, who can secure, protect, assure, judge, destroy. This is the vision of the author of Revelation, this is the vision of the Son of Man, a glimpse a picture of the glorified Christ Himself.

The Setting and Circumstances (v.9)

Revelation 1:9 (NKJV)

9 I, John, both your brother and companion in the tribulation and kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was on the island that is called Patmos for the word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ.

We have already discussed the author, setting and circumstances of the epistle. The Apostle John wrote the book (John 1:1,4,9; 22:8). This was the consensus of the early church fathers like Justin Martyr, the Shepherd of Hermas, Melito, Irenaeus, The Muratorian Canon, Tertullian, Clement of Alexandria, Origen and others. The island of Patmos is about forty miles from the city of Ephesus—I have sailed past the rocky prison. It is in the midst of a group of islands called the Sporades. The island is about 10 miles long and six miles wide. The island is rocky, barren, with hills rising up about 1000 feet.

Bible scholar William Barclay provides ample historical proof that the early church had a long tradition of John's banishment. It was the unanimous tradition of the early Church that John was banished to the island of Patmos. Origen says, "The Roman Emperor, as tradition tells us, condemned John to the island of Patmos in the reign of Domitian". Clement of Alexandria tells us; "On the death of the tyrant John returned to Ephesus from the island of Patmos." This would mean that John was banished about 94 AD and released about 96 AD.

"Your brother and companion in the tribulation and kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ." "Persecution and overt hostility erupted in the Roman World during the time of

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both Nero and Domition. Some people place the writing of this epistle during the reign of Nero—but I think that is probably incorrect for several reasons. (1) The testimony of Irenaeus (disciple of Polycarp who was a disciple of John) and other early Christian writers. (2) John probably did not move from Jerusalem to Ephesus until c. A.D. 67, shortly before the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. The early dating would not give him enough time to have established an ongoing ministry in Asia y the time he wrote the book. (3) The churches in Asia appear to have been in existence for a number of years, long enough for some to reach a point of complacency and decline (cf. 2:4; 3:1, 15-18). (4) The deeds of Domition are more relevant than those of Nero to the themes of the Apocalypse. Worship of deceased emperors had been practiced for years, but Domitian was the first emperor to demand worship while he was alive. This led to a greater clash between the state and the church, especially in Asia, where the worship of Caesar was widely practiced” (see Talk Thru The New Testament; Wilkenson & Boa pp.511-512).

John calls himself ‘brother’ because we are family in Christ.

We all experiences times of exile, of imprisonment, dark times when the Lord Jesus Christ visits us. In our darkest times God is always there. We can call upon the Lord, we can cast our cares upon Him, knowing He cares for us. You may remember that it was in exile that Jacob saw God at Bethel (Gen.35:6). In exile from Egypt Moses saw God at the burning bush (Ex.3:1). In exile Elijah heard the still small voice of God (1 Kings 19:3). In exile Ezekiel saw the glory of the Lord by the river Chedar (Ezek.1:3). It was in exile that Daniel saw the Ancient of Days (Dan.7:9).

John was in exile—and ‘in the Spirit’. John is said to be in the Spirit four times—and it marks the transitions in the book; 1:9-10; 4:1-2; 17:1-3; 21:9-10.

The first vision is given by Jesus Christ coming down to John—the last three visions John is commanded to “come up here”. John is given the perspective of heaven about the events which must shortly come to pass.

The Exalted Jesus Christ (vv.10-11)

Revelation 1:10-11 (NKJV)

10 I was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day, and I heard behind me a loud voice, as of a trumpet,
11 saying, "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last," and, "What you see, write in a book and send it to the seven churches which are in Asia: to Ephesus, to Smyrna, to Pergamos, to Thyatira, to Sardis, to Philadelphia, and to Laodicea."

The voice is described as a trumpet—loud—commanding. The idea of a trumpet again speaks of volume, and authority. The Lord proclaims his identity, “I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last”. He is the Lord who occupies eternity—and sees all things. John is instructed to write what he sees in a book and send it to the seven churches in Asia.

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Jesus is not giving John a vision for John himself—but for the church. He was to use what the Lord was giving him for the building up of the body, for the edification of the saints. This is one of the great purposes of this book, this is why it must be read and taught in the church.

The Nine fold Description of Christ (vv.13-17)

Revelation 1:13 (NKJV)

13 and in the midst of the seven lampstands One like the Son of Man, clothed with a garment down to the feet and girded about the chest with a golden band.

- 1. He is the Unknowable One (v.13).**
- 2. He is the Unemotional One (v.13)**
- 3. He is Unimpeachable (v.14)**
- 4. He is the Undeceivable One (v.14)**
- 5. He is the Undeterable One**
- 6. He is the Unanswerable One (v.15)**
- 7. He is the Unparalleled One (v.16)**
- 8. He is the Unconquerable One**
- 9. He is the Unapproachable One**

He is the Unknowable One (v.13)

“and in the midst of the seven lampstands One like the Son of Man, clothed with a garment down to the feet”

We know the lampstands represent the churches (v.20). Why this symbol? Jesus Christ is the light of the World and it is the task of the church to hold Him forth before the world. The church is to proclaim the light of Christ to a dark, dying, blinded world, and to do so with all the brilliance and illumination, radiance, glow that it can muster.

Jesus Christ stands in the midst of the candlesticks. The churches receive her light from Christ—not the other way around. Unless Jesus stands in the middle of the church—the church has no light. The Church must always allow Jesus CENTER STAGE.

In order for Christ to be in the center of the Church, the message of Jesus must be the central message of the church. The message of Christ is certainly the gospel, and the gospel is certainly contained in the Word of God, the Holy Scriptures. He is the theme of the Scriptures and Jesus proclaimed the Scriptures. Recently the Episcopal Church named a practicing homosexual as Bishop of New Hampshire. On a newsbroadcast a

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reporter asked a spokesperson for the church how they could contradict what the Bible clearly teaches concerning homosexuals. The spokesperson's response was, 'the Bible is not the final authority in the Church. The final authority is the Holy Spirit in the midst of the congregation.' The broadcaster responded with, "Are you sure the Holy Spirit is O.K. with this?"

This is what happens when we move from the authority of the Word of God.

Philippians 2:15 (NKJV)

15 that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world,

What do I mean by 'unknowable one'? Jesus is wearing a garment from the shoulder to the feet. There are certain mysteries associated with God. He is concealed to a certain extent. God has revealed some things, and concealed others. Jesus is standing in the midst of candlesticks which symbolize the church. What is the point? How little He is known even by those who should know him best! His clothing can best be understood in terms of being a priest and a judge. Like Aaron's robe it was designed for "glory and for beauty" (Ex.28:2).

He is the Unemotional One (v.13)

"and girded about the chest with a golden band"

In ancient times the chest was the seat of emotion. Judges had a golden band around their chests. This is the image of an impartial judge. Jesus cannot be manipulated by emotion or false sentiment. We often allow our emotions to cloud our judgment or impair our reasoning. This does not mean that we all have to be a bunch of Vulcans like Mr. Spock or logical empiricists who look at only the facts, that we are oblivious to our emotions. We know Jesus has emotions, he weeps at the tomb of Lazarus, he is touched with the feelings of our infirmities (he has feelings). He weeps for Jerusalem knowing they face judgment. The first and last miracles recorded in John's gospel are a wedding and a funeral. These are life's most emotional times. The significance of the golden girdle is it represents both his right and authority to judge. His emotions are restrained. He is without pity or passion, completely impartial. A picture in our own culture is Justice represented as blindfolded and carrying scales. Justice must be impassive, impartial, impervious only to truth.

The High Priest of Israel wore a golden girdle. Josephus explains the girdle as keeping with the dignity and majesty of his office.

He is Unimpeachable (v.14)

"His head and hair were white like wool"

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Isaiah suggests the significance of this; “Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow: though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool” (Isa. 1:18). This speaks of Jesus’ perfection and purity. Jesus knows all about sin and temptation but He himself is absolutely pure. Note: There is no record of what Jesus physically looked like. Daniel 7:9 “The ancient of Days did sit, whose garment was white as snow, and the head of his hair like pure wool”. White hair (note beard or beards are never mentioned in the NT). Contrast that with today—His white hair speaks of age—today we try to color our grey! “The glory of young men is their strength; and the beauty of old men is the grey head” (Prov.20:29).

The ancients had a legend that ships were drawn to mountains of Lodestone (magnetite-magnets), it could seize a vessel against all the tug of wind and drawn by the mountain, against all effort and resolve, until it became shipwreck. We are drawn by nature to sin—like iron to magnets. Jesus was never drawn to sin. Sin was never attractive to Jesus.

He is the Undeceiving One (v.14)

“and His eyes like a flame of fire”

Fire burns timber and steel if you generate enough heat. The ancients knew there was no hiding from the flame—it consumed everything. Jesus can’t be fooled. He knows our thoughts and intentions and motives. John 1:48; “when you were under the fig tree I saw you”. John 4:29; “Come see a man which told me all things that I ever did” announced the Samaritan woman after meeting Jesus. Matthew told us, “and Jesus knew their thoughts”.

He is the Undeterable One (v.15)

“His feet were like fine brass, as if refined in a furnace”

On earth these feet were affixed to a cross by a cruel Roman nail. Like the Serpents fang, it stung him, now these same feet will conquer all His enemies. This speaks of our Lord’s commitment to march forward in judgment. He will crush the Serpent’s head. Jesus Christ is unstoppable. Cooper alloy was used in OT types of the brazen altar and other items of brass used in connection with sacrifice for sin (Ex.38:30) “And with it he make the sockets for the door of the tabernacle of meeting, the bronze altar, the bronze grating for it, and all the utensils for the altar”.

He is the Unanswerable One (v.15)

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“His voice was the sound of many waters” Try to imagine having a conversation or argument with Victoria Falls or Niagra Falls. Imagine standing at the foot of falls with 12 Million cubic feet of water roaring past you each minuet. A mighty water fall pours out a thunderous sound with a deafening roar. This is a voice unmoved. John Phillips writes: “One of the great mysteries of the present age is the silence of God. It is not the silence of indifference; it is the silence of the great sabbatic rest. Sir Robert Anderson says, “When faith murmurs, and unbelief revolts, and men challenge the Supreme to break the silence and declare Himself, how little do they realize what the challenge means! It means the withdrawl of amnesty; it means the end of the reign of grace; it means the closing of the day of mercy and the dawning of the day of wrath”. One day that voice “as the sound of many waters” will break the silence with a roar, and all voices in angry protest will be silenced, drowned out by his”.

I remember the story of an unbeliever, who was at the meeting of a famous evangelist. The unbeliever stood up and defied God. He said if God were real, he challenged Him to destroy him in the next three minuets. He dramatically let the clock tick down, all the while defying God to kill him. At the last second, the crowd gasped the man was still standing. “See, I told you, God is helpless. God can do nothing.” Wrong. You cannot exhaust God’s patience in three minuets. God appoints even the time of judgment.

He is the Unparalleled One (v.16)

“He had in right hand seven stars”

These are the angels (messengers) of the seven churches (pastors?). The symbolism suggests someone who has complete control over all forces known and unknown, natural and supernatural, seen and unseen. He holds these forces in his right hand (again a symbol of total power). Phillips: “The things that overtake us are not overlooked by Him; they are overruled by Him. It is not that He is careless, for the hand that holds the stars still bear the scars of Calvary’s nails. He knows the searing pain of the hammer, nail and wood. It is not that he is careless, but that He is in control”.

Jesus holds the messengers (pastors) with skill and strength and comfort.

He is the Unconquerable One (v.16)

“Out of His mouth went a sharp two-edged sword”

God help me—I love sharp things. When you love sharp things you must be open to being cut. The Sword is the Word of God. Heb. 4:12; “For the Word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two edged sword, piercing even to the dividing of soul

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and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.”

For those of you who like to know the technical things: The word for sword here is ‘rhomphia’ this is a long and heavy sword, mentioned five other times in the book of Revelation. This is a sword of devastating judgment. The other word for sword machiera—is a Roman short sword—more about the size of Bowie knife—about 18 inches—it speaks more about uncovering unbelief, exposing false thinking.

I love sharp things. You judge a blade by its hardness, sharpness, cutting ability, and ability to retain an edge. Custom knives are made to perform specific functions. We have now invented Lasers that can cut at almost microscope levels and perform specific cutting on the surface of your eye. The Word of God is able to cut into the invisible realm of the Spirit. The Word of God can cut along the imprecise border that marks the soul and the spirit. No human instrument can even come close. The Word of God is powerful and invincible. Ten times in Genesis God spoke—and galaxies were birthed, darkness fled, the dry land arose from the waters, the sea was established, its shores, billions of life forms proliferated on the planet. When the Word was made flesh, demons and disease and death fled. Whether the Word is replenishing the earth or redeeming the earth, the result is the same—glorious!

He is the Unapproachable One (v.16)

“His countenance is as the sun shines in its strength”. Saul of Tarsus was blinded when he saw it. Jesus on the earth, veiled in flesh, was approachable. Sinners, children, prostitutes, religious leaders, lepers, rulers. The risen Savior dwells in unapproachable light. Things have changed. The earthly Jesus has become the heavenly King of Glory. He is radiant. If you look at the Sun for any length of time you will damage your eyes. Such exposure will burn you. One pound of heat from the sun can raise the temperature on the earth, 20 million tons of rock by 2500 degrees centigrade, and turn it into a giant earth lava lamp. The sun is losing radiation at the rate of 4,200, 000 tons a second! You cannot approach a power like that! John knows this and falls. He says when I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead (v.17). “If God had a name, what would it be and would you it to his face?”

In our glorified bodies we will see Him face to face.

Verse 17: “The first fear not” of the Bible occurs just before the first I am of the Bible. “Fear not Abram: I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward”(Gen.15:1). For mortal, sinful man to come into the presence of the living God is death (unless they are in the spirit).

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Note: The Lord reassures John by touching him and speaking to him. I think Jesus does the same today. He reassures us by touching us and speaking to us. When Jesus says fear not—we don't need to fear. He is in control of life and in control of death. He died and lives having conquered death.

Verse 18: Revelation 1:18 (NKJV)

18 I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore. Amen. And I have the keys of Hades and of Death.

This is one of the great claims of Jesus. Can you imagine Bill Clinton or George Bush or any other world leader making such a claim? Gurus, religious leaders, philosophers have all searched for this key. But Jesus has the key. He has the key to Hades (Hell, the grave, the afterlife etc.). Hades is the Greek equivalent to the Hebrew Sheol. This is the place of departed spirits. Of course many modern scientists reject a literal heaven and hell. The popular view is that there is a place of separate existence (another dimension?) outside the framework of the physical universe. Some people (Bible teachers like Henry Morris, even Chuck Smith believe that both heaven and hell exist in the context of the physical universe.

Quote Morris:

We do not need to fear eternity because Jesus holds the keys of hell (the place of the dead) and death itself. The One with the Keys is the One with the authority. Jesus is the boss! When Jesus rose from the dead he took what little authority Satan had in those areas. I believe to one can die unless they have divine permission from God. Even in trial, trouble, tribulation or torture.

Hades (is the intermediate state of the dead). Hell is the eternal state of the unregenerate dead. The lake of Fire or Gehenna refers to the place of everlasting punishment. To avoid confusion I think it is better to translate it Hades and Gehenna. The confusion is in the translation and not in the original.

Revelation 1:19-20 (NKJV)

19 Write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after this.

20 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 which you saw are the seven churches.

As far as I can tell, the book of Revelation is the only book in the Bible with an inspired table of contents!

“Write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after this”(v.19). ‘The things which you have seen’ are between chapter 1:1-1:20. The things which are begin chapter 2:1-3:22. “The things which will take

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place” begins in chapter 4:1-22:21. The book can be divided between John’s vision of Christ (1:1-3:22) and John’s vision of Consummation (4:1-22:21).

The visions include this vision of Jesus Christ, the vision of the seven churches (2:1-3:22); the vision of The Judge (4:1-5:14; The Tribulation 6:1-19:6; The Second Coming 19:7-19:21; The Millennium 20:1-20:15; The Eternal State 21:1-22:21.

This is an index, a table of contents for the book of Revelation. I think it implies that there are times and seasons that are only known to God. I believe the Return of Jesus Christ is always imminent—that means the next thing—not necessarily immediate.

The Lord says, “write”. That is exactly what John does, and why we are reading and studying this document. Can you imagine? His faithful obedience to that command has touched all of our lives. The things that were (chapter 1); the things which are (chapters 2-3); the things which shall be (the rest of the book).

Verse 20: When symbols are used they are explained (usually) internally. The symbols are meant to both hide (to those who are unwilling to know) and reveal. This even includes the bizarre imagination of some Bible teachers. The great lampstands (Menorah) are light bearing churches. The stars represent the angels of the churches. Who are the angels? Some say Pastors (if that is so—it is one of the rare times the term is used to describe a human messenger). Angel appears some 188 times in the NT and is used only some half dozen times to mean a human messenger. If the Lord meant Pastor or Elder, I wonder why he didn’t use that term? The term is used 67 other times in Revelation and always means a heavenly being. If we take the passage literally—it would appear that churches may have their own guardian angel. Could it be that God has assigned certain churches to watch and care for the church?

J. Vernon McGee writes: “Angels can either be human or divine—the word here is messenger. It could refer to the angelic host of heaven; it could refer to a ruler or a teacher in the congregation. Personally, I think it refers to the local Pastors. It is good to hear a pastor being called an angel—sometimes we are called other things!”

Some of you know I collect Roman Coins. One writer has an interesting thing to say about one of Domitians gold aureus—a coin—of his wife-Domita—on the reverse is a picture of his deified son—playing on a globe playing with seven stars! Stauffer writes; “The legend reads DIVUS CAESAR IMP DOMITIANI F-the divine Caesar, son of the Emperor Domitian. The seven stars indicate the seven planets, a symbol of heavenly dominion over the world”.

There was an ancient symbolism associated with Crete where Zeus was allegedly born. On Cretan coins you Zeus playing on a heavenly globe, symbolizing rule over the world. Stauffer explains: “In the context of Domitians’ whole coinage this means that the

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imperial Zeus Child, has been exalted to be the Lord of the stars, ushers in the age of universal salvation, which is to come”. Not so! The mystery of the stars is explained in the Scripture. (v.20) the seven stars are the seven churches—and the real Lord of the universe is Jesus.

Sometimes in the dark, the only hand you recognize is the one with the holes in it. Rest assured, Jesus has you in his hand.