

## A Vision of the Exalted and Glorified Christ

### Revelation 1:9-20

Introduction: 1) The book of Revelation is unique in so many ways. It is the only book in the New Testament where the writer is told to write at the direct command of the Lord who appears to him (1:10-11, 19). It was written at the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> century when the church faced persecution from without and compromise from within. It was written by the last living apostle, the apostle John, who also gave us a gospel and three letters that bear his name in our Bible. It was written from an island called Patmos (1:9) in the Aegean Sea which is about 70 miles SW of Ephesus. John was a prisoner there, having been exiled under the reign of Emperor Domitian (A.D. 81-96) because of his faithful witness to Jesus (1:9).

2) Three times in the 22 chapters, at strategic moments, three great visions of the exalted Christ take the stage. Some even believe Revelation was written as a 3-act or 7-act play patterned after the Greek theater (Osborne, 29).

a) 1:12-16 The exalted Christ who walks among His churches.

b) 5:5-14 The Warrior-Lamb upon the throne in heaven.

c) 19:11-21 The KING OF KINGS who is coming again.

For people who need to be encouraged to persevere when persecuted and challenged to be faithful and not compromise, these visions are timely and much needed medicine.

3) Before examining the 1<sup>st</sup> vision in 1:9-20, we must raise and ask a very important question: what interpretive method should we employ? Basically four views have been set forth.

- a) Preterism – the book addresses details and events in the first century.
- b) Idealism – the book addresses timeless truths and does not deal with historical events.
- c) Historicism – the book is a chronicle of western church history.
- d) Futurism – the book (chs. 4-22 or 6-22) speaks primarily to future events at the end of history and leading into the eternal state (chs. 21-22).

There are elements of truth in each of these views. Personally, I try to draw what I see are the best elements from all four! The result is I take a modified futurist approach (I am not a classic dispensationalist) or what some call an eclectic approach.

In this regard I fall in line with New Testament scholars like Greg Beale, D. A. Carson, Robert Mounce and Grant Osborne. That does not mean I will be in agreement with these men on every interpretive point, but I do agree with them overall. Osborne summarizes this perspective well when he says: “The solution is to allow the preterist, idealist, and futurist methods to interact in such a way that the strengths are maximized and the weaknesses minimized...For instance, the beast of 13:1-8 refers both to the “many antichrists” throughout church history and

to the final Antichrist at the end of history...the futurist rather than the idealist position is primary. My study of ancient apocalyptic and of the Book of Revelation has led me to believe that John's visions (esp. chps. 4-22) were primarily intended to describe the events that will end world history. The saints in these chapters are believers alive in that final period, and the beast is the Antichrist who will lead the "earth-dwellers"/unbelievers in a final pogrom against all the people of God. The seals, trumpets, and bowls symbolize a final series of judgments by which God will turn the evil deeds of the nations back upon their heads (the Roman legal principle of *lex talionis*, the law of retribution) to prove his sovereignty once and for all and to give them a final chance to repent (9:20-21; 11:13; 14:6-7; 16:9, 11). But the preterist school is also correct, because the visions use the events of the future to address John and his readers in the present. Most of the imagery used to describe the beast and Babylon the Great comes from actual first-century parallels. The beast is a final Nerolike figure, and Babylon is the final unholy Roman Empire. One of my definitions for apocalyptic is "the present addressed through parallels with the future." John's readers were being asked to identify with the people at the end of history and gain perspective for their present suffering through the future trials of God's people. This leads us to the idealist position, also intended in the text, for these final events are also timeless symbols meant to challenge the church in every era" (Osborne, 21-22).

I believe this hermeneutical approach is both balanced and wise. It allows apocalyptic literature to do what it is intended to do, and at the same time it helps us avoid wild speculation that often, if not always, proves embarrassing and foolish. We will move thru the 22 chapters with what I hope is a sane and tame premillennialism (my cards are on that table)!

I. The plan of Christ involves suffering and service 1:9-11

1) I was tempted to entitle this study, “The Normal Christian Life: Prosperity Gospel Need Not Apply.” Why? Because John had been faithful to 1) preach the Word of God and 2) proclaim the testimony of Jesus Christ (cf. 1:2).

David Platt points out this idea appears three other times in Revelation (6:9; 12:17; 20:4), and every time it refers to Christians who are suffering because they are speaking and witnessing about Jesus. Christians will be attacked, exiled, slain, beheaded. Serving Christ will not be easy. It is costly! What was John’s reward for being a faithful witness? It got him imprisoned and sent away to die alone. No health and wealth for this follower of Jesus!

Patmos was a 10 x 6 mile mountainous island in the Aegean Sea off the coast of Asia Minor (modern Turkey). It may have been a penal colony for exiled criminals banished and sentenced to hard labor in the rock quarries. Though the island was inhabitable and had a sizable population, it is all but certain John was sent there (c. A.D. 95 according to Eusebius) as a criminal against

the state. John MacArthur summarizes what might well have been John's situation: "According to the Roman historian Tacitus, exile to such islands was a common form of punishment in the first century. At about the same time that John was banished to Patmos, Emperor Domitian exiled his own niece, Flavia Domitilla, to another island (F.F. Bruce, *New Testament History* [Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1972], 413). Unlike Flavia Domitilla, whose banishment was politically motivated, John was probably sent to Patmos as a criminal (as a Christian, he was a member of an illegal religious sect). If so, the conditions under which he lived would have been harsh. Exhausting labor under the watchful eye (and ready whip) of a Roman overseer, insufficient food and clothing, and having to sleep on the bare ground would have taken their toll on a ninety-year-old man. It was on the bleak, barren island, under those brutal condition, that John received the most extensive revelation of the future ever given." (*MNTC*, 41).

1. We suffer for His kingdom 1:9

- John begins by calling himself not an apostle, but a "brother and partner." He knew that there is partnership in suffering for Jesus. John has brothers and partners (co-fellowshippers, co-partners). He is not alone. He is no Lone Ranger. His Lord had suffered, his brother

James martyred. Paul and Peter were dead. Many share as a partner in the Lord's work. But take heart, we suffer as family.

- There is also pain in suffering for Jesus. "Tribulation" means pressure, trouble, affliction. It is a part of the normal Christian life. Tribulation need not sidetrack our walk with Christ. John, like Peter, Paul and the Lord received his greatest revelation and climbed his highest spiritual mountain during a time of extreme suffering and persecution for Christ. Second Timothy 3:12 reminds us, "All those who want to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted."
- There is privilege in suffering for Jesus. John speaks of a "kingdom." Jesus inaugurated His kingdom as a suffering Savior. We enter the kingdom and serve as suffering saints. Reigning and suffering are not mutually exclusive. It is the way of Jesus. It is also to be our way.
- There is purpose in suffering for Jesus. "Endurance" or perseverance means to abide under a heavy load, to endure, to stay with it, hang in there, not throw in the towel or drop out of the race. All of this is in Him, in Jesus, according to His will, His plan. John's exile to Patmos was no accident. It did not catch God by surprise anymore than any crisis or tribulation we face catches Him off guard or unprepared. It is in Christ, of Christ and for Christ. Jesus provided the needed strength

for John, and He will do the same for us. James 1:4 reminds us to let “endurance do its complete work, so that you may be mature and complete, lacking nothing.”

- Being witness to God’s word, all of it, and staying faithful in our testimony to Jesus may cost it. We may suffer unjustly. When that happens remember what Jesus said, “A slave is not greater than his master. If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you” (John 15:20).

2) We serve His church 1:10-11

John tells us he “was in the Spirit on the Lord’s day. The phrase “in the Spirit occurs four times (1:10, 4:2; 17:3; 21:10). Like Old Testament prophets, he was in a supernatural state of inspiration as he wrote. He was “caught up in an ecstatic experience” (Ladd, 31). Nothing in the text indicates John sought it. It was a divine seizing by God. The Lord’s Day is almost certainly Sunday, or perhaps Easter Sunday. It was the day of worship. It was resurrection day, and John was worshiping the Lord. Suddenly John heard a loud voice behind him like a trumpet (cf. 4:1). It was sharp, clear and loud; a clarion call! Some say the voice is that of an angel, but what follows clearly identifies the speaker as the Lord Jesus Christ. He is commanded to write on a scroll what you see and send it to

the seven churches. These seven churches were especially dear to the heart of God and the heart of John. These were actual historical churches in Asia. The number seven also stands for completeness. It would also indicate their representative nature of the various types of churches that exist through the history of the church. Christ had a word for His churches that is detailed in chapters 2-3. He tells John to write and he does; one of the most magnificent books of all time. John received a command from his Lord and obeyed. Obeying our Lord has was blessed. Obeying our Lord, he served well His Church.

## II. The person of Christ should awe and inspire 1:12-16

- In Song of Songs 5:10-16 there is a poetic description of Solomon as the shepherd-king and husband. Some have said it is almost apocalyptic. Now in Revelation we find another portrait of a shepherd-king and husband (Rev. 7:17; 19:7-10) that is apocalyptic, and it may be the most magnificent picture in all of Scripture of the Lord Jesus Christ.

### 1) Sense His presence 1:12

- John turned to see the one whose voice was like a trumpet who spoke directly to him with a commission to address the seven churches. What John saw would encourage his heart. It would also knock him off his feet and nearly take his life (1:17).

- John sees “seven golden lampstands.” Moses constructed a seven-branched lampstand for the tabernacle (Ex. 24:31 ff). Zechariah had a vision of a seven-branched golden lampstand which was to be the “eyes of the Lord, which range throughout the earth” (Zech. 4:10). Verse 20 tells us that in Revelation they are the seven churches. As lampstands they held small oil lamps. From them light, God’s light, was to go out to a dark and evil world. For us, the assignment is the same. We are to be “the light of the world” (Matt. 5:14). John also saw a person in the midst of the lampstands. His identity is no secret: it is the Son of Man, the Lord Jesus. Both his title and His location are significant. The title goes back to Daniel 7:13-14. This is Jesus’ favorite self-designation. It occurs 81 times in the gospel. It identifies Him as the heavenly Messiah who is also human who will receive an eternal kingdom. His location is in the midst, the middle, of the lampstands. He is there with them. He knows what they are going through for He is among them. He is watching and He is working in His churches. Thought they may fail Him, He will not fail them. To sense His presence would encourage and sustain them. He is right there in the middle of all they experience. And, what a One it is who is with them as verses 13-16 make clear.

2) Marvel at His portrait 1:13-16

Jesus is unveiled in all of his glory and splendor. What John saw human words can only approximate. His appearance again draws our attention to Daniel 7 as well as His 3-fold office as Prophet, Priest and King.

What unfolds in the vision of Christ bears this out. John saw the unveiled, glorified and exalted Jesus.

In His dress He is our priest (1:13). He is dressed “in a long robe and with a gold sash wrapped around His chest.” This is the dress of the Priest in the Old Testament (Exodus 28:4). It signifies Jesus as our great High Priest and points to His work of atonement and intercession on our behalf (cf. Heb. 7:25).

In His wisdom He is profound (1:14). “His head and hair were white like wool – white as snow –.” The significance of these words and their Old Testament connection are powerful and must not be missed. John Piper, with great insight, puts it in proper perspective: “This is remarkable, because in that same chapter in Daniel (7) where John gets this picture of “one like a son of man” (v. 13-14), God the Father is described like this in verse 9, “The Ancient of Days took his seat; his vesture was like white snow, and the hair of his head like pure wool.” In

other words John is describing the Son of Man in terms used for God himself.

John wants us to see something here about the age of Christ and the wisdom and dignity that come with age – everlasting age!

In American culture today, we respect the process of aging less and less.

A person is admired if he can keep looking young, not if he has the

dignity of age. The Bible saw it another way. Proverbs 16:31 says, “A

white head is a crown of glory, so much so that in the law God

commanded, “You will rise up before the white head, and honor the face

of an old man, and you shall fear your God; I am the Lord” (Leviticus

19:32).

One of the reasons we don't want to grow old is that we associate age with the fading of powers that make life worth living – the capacity to see and hear and think clearly and move about and not have pain. But all of those things do not belong to aging as aging. They belong to aging in a futile and fallen world of sin. Once God does away with sin and the curse, and establishes the new heavens and the new earth, aging will not have any of these negative connotations. It will only be associated with growing wisdom and insight and maturity. All the strength will still be there. All the mental powers. All the sight and hearing and agility.

Nothing that is great about youth will be left behind. There will only be added all the powers and beauties and depth of age.

This is what John saw in Jesus. He was like the Ancient of Days with all the wisdom of eternity and all the maturity and steadiness of age, but he was not weak or weary or faltering in his step.” (“A Year End Look at Jesus,” 12-27-92).

“His eyes are like a fiery flame.” This speaks of penetrating insight and omniscient intelligence. In fiery holiness, the true condition of each church, each Christian, is transparent to the gaze of His eyes (cf. 19:12).

In His strength He is permanent (1:15). “His feet are like fine bronze, fired in a furnace.” He is strong, solid and stable (context of judgment – cf. Psa. 110:1 and Heb. 10:13).

In His announcement He is powerful (1:15). “His voice is like the sound of cascading waters.” It is a voice of awesome power and pervasive authority. It echoes forth His majesty and sovereignty like the waves which continually crash against the rocks of Patmos.

For His servants He is protective (1:16). The “right hand” is the hand of authority and honor. What is in His hand is His possession and has His protection (cf. John 10:28). The “seven stars” (see v. 20) are His servants who are protected. They most likely are angels who have a

specific relationship to the church (see 1 Cor. 11:10) though many believe they represent the pastor of each church. Regardless, they belong only to Him. They are His and under His protection.

In His judgments He is perfect (1:16). “From His mouth came a sharp two-edged sword” (cf. Heb. 4:12), the Tracian sword – long, broad and heavy; sharp on both sides (mentioned 6 times in Revelation; 1:16, 2:12, 16; 6:8; 19:15, 21). The sword is the Word of God, divine in judgment, power and authority! Two sided-its cuts and cures/hurts and heals.

In His appearance He is praiseworthy (1:16). “His face was shining like the sun at midday.” This speaks of His brilliance, holiness, majesty and awesomeness. John saw Jesus as He, the Son of God, truly is. He is an awesome God, a powerful God, a majestic God. He is a God worthy of our worship, worthy of our service, worthy of all we can give Him. He is a God whose presence gives us assurance. The Lord knows what is happening in His churches for He is continually among them. Our Lord is an awesome God sufficient for every need we may have.

### III. The power of Christ should overwhelm and encourage 1:17-20

To see Jesus today as He is (glorified) and us as we are (sinners) is more than we can take. In our sinful condition, the magnificence of His glory would overwhelm us as it did John. It would be too much. We would not survive.

John nearly died. Why? Verses 17-20, following 13-16, help answer the question. This is the Lord, the Savior, King Jesus.

1) He lives forever 1:17-18

John “fell at His feet as dead”, but Jesus laid His right hand on him with gentle authority. He said, “Do not be afraid (pre. imp. w. the neg.), literally “stop being afraid.” I am the First (*protos*) and the Last (*eschatos*). This is said of God in Isaiah 44:6; 48:12 and also of Jesus in Revelation 1:17; 23:8; 22:13. He is God, absolute Lord both of creation and history. He starts and He finishes! He is before all and He is after all. All is under His sovereign control.

He is the Living One “I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forever more. Amen.” I was dead (once, in the past) but look, I am alive forever and ever. He died once and for all on the cross, but He will never die again. Atonement, perfect atonement, has been made. Amen!

2) He has authority over death 1:17-18

“Hades” is similar to the O.T. *sheol*, meaning the grave, place of all the dead, or as it is used in Revelation, the place of the wicked dead. “Death” claims the body. “Hades” claims the soul, but not unless Jesus says so!

Why? Because He has the keys! He has the authority. Jesus holds “the keys of Hades and Death.” He alone opens and closes this door.

### 3) He has a plan 1:19

I believe this verse unlocks the key to the book of Revelation. It tells us how the book unfolds, and it tells us how God's eschatological plan will take place. James Hamilton says it "serves as a preview of the overarching structure of the book of Revelation" (*Preach the Word*, 51).

- "What you have seen looks to 1:9-20.
- "What is" looks to chapters 2-3.
- "What will take place after this" looks to chapters 4-22.

As we work through the book we will see a general chronological progression, not a direct line. At times we step back in history, have interludes, but all the while moving toward the consummation of history and the eternal state.

### 4) He helps His people understand His word 1:20

- Jesus now becomes our teacher and interpreter. He informs us that the 7 stars are the 7 angels of the 7 churches, and the 7 lampstands are the 7 churches we see in chapters 2-3.
- Many times, but not every time, symbols will be explained for us. This is a blessing and act of divine grace. Christ gives us spiritual insight at this point as we prepare to move ahead. Then, as now, He looks for those who have ears to hear what the Spirit says (2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22).

This Word was made clear in chapter 1, of that there is no doubt. Where we listening? Were you?

Conclusion: 1) Revelation, rightly understood, had a word for the 1<sup>st</sup> century church. Rightly understood, it has had a word for the church throughout its history. And rightly understood, it has a word for the church today and tomorrow. At the heart of that word, that message is this: gaze upon the exalted and glorified Christ. He walks among His churches and His people as the glorious Son of Man (v. 13). He is, as John Piper well says, “the one with power over the nations and with everlasting dominion and glory. He is the great high priest that has put away the sins of his people once and for all. He is as aged and wise and mature as the great white-crowned Ancient of Days, yet with eyes that are aflame with the fire of youth and energy and hope and exhilaration for his unstoppable plans for you and for this church and for the world.

Gaze upon Jesus and let his royal power and his priestly forgiveness and his ancient wisdom and his fiery hope fill you with confidence afresh that [in the past] has not been in vain, and that [in the future] will be the appointed brush-stroke on the canvas of your life and on the canvas of history till the great mosaic of God’s work is done.” (“A Year-End Look at Jesus Christ” 12-27-92).

2) So, don’t fear time. He is the Last and the Last.

Don’t fear life. It is He who is alive forevermore.

Don't fear death. He holds the keys to the grave and death.