

Revelation Studies
John's Vision of Jesus: 1:9-20
Part 1

This morning we are going to be reading about John's vision of Jesus. Last week we saw John's personal statement of what he knew to be true about Jesus. He had spent three years as a close associate of Jesus and knew Him thoroughly, so everything he tells us about Jesus in the first eight verses was based on personal knowledge. But today we are going to get an eye-witness account of what Jesus looked like when He revealed himself to John. Now obviously, John knew what Jesus looked like because of the considerable amount of time in the physical presence of Jesus during Jesus' earthly ministry, but he gets a different view this time around, and his response is understandable.

As we go through these verses, let's see what we can learn from John's physical setting as well as what we can learn from his vision of Jesus – those are the two main points of this passage. We'll start in verse nine where John describes his personal situation.

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 think it is interesting how John describes himself – as a “brother” of those he is writing to. Something to keep in mind is that the Apostle John was no small figure in the early church. He had full apostolic authority and was probably the bishop of these churches he is writing to, yet he describes himself as their brother. This shows us something of his humility. But he also describes himself as being in the same boat as they were. He was a “fellow participant” in the tribulation they were going through. He is not an outsider looking in, he is insider looking around, and there is a big difference between those two ideas.

This ability to personally, experientially identify with the readers of his letter adds a tremendous amount of credibility to what he has to say. He is not pontificating - he is their brother; nor is he speaking theoretically - there is nothing they are going through that he hasn't experienced as well. He had been banished to the island of Patmos because of his preaching the Word of God and testifying about Jesus.

Now in verse ten we see something very curious as well as instructive. He says, "*I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like the sound of a trumpet,*¹¹ *saying, "Write in a book what you see, 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."* John had been banished to a remote island, cut off from friends and family, and if the church traditions are accurate, he was working in the mines six days a week. This is not what we would call idyllic circumstances. When we envision an Aegean or Mediterranean Island, we usually think of a place to vacation in, but that isn't what was happening to John. Yet what do we find him doing on the Lord's day? He was worshipping. He was communing with the Spirit of God. In fact, he was engulfed by the Spirit of God to such a degree that he received a vision of the future.

Isn't there a lesson there for us? What a tremendous example of living above your circumstances. What an example of not letting your physical state affect your spiritual condition. In spite of the distressing nature of his situation, he was able to focus on his Lord and shut out the distractions of life. This is where we need to be!

How do we get there, though? Turn with me to 2 Cor. 4 where we see the key to this kind of living. In this chapter, Paul talks about the person who has had the light of Jesus Christ shine into his life and show him the true knowledge of God and Jesus. When a person has had this happen to him, he understands true reality, he grasps the

difference between the temporal and the eternal, and it affects every dimension of his life, especially the temporal. When you've had that experience, you can say with Paul in verse 7,

But we have this treasure (the true knowledge of God and Jesus from v. 6) in earthen vessels, that the surpassing greatness of the power may be of God and not from ourselves; ⁸ we are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing; ⁹ persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; ¹⁰ always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body.

John knew the reality of this passage and it enabled him to be that overcomer we spoke of last week.

So while John was in this state, he hears this piercing sound of a trumpet, and it tells him to send the letter he is about to write to these seven churches. When you look at the placing of these churches on a map, and note the order that they are listed in, you see they form a natural, circular route that one would follow as he took the letters to the churches.

Starting with verse 12, we get into John's description of what he saw. And here we have our first example of apocalyptic literature. As we read down through verse 16, note that John describes Jesus with nine different attributes.

¹² And I turned to see the voice that was speaking with me. And having turned I saw seven golden lampstands; ¹³ 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 (belt). ¹⁴ And His head and His hair were white like white wool, like snow; and His eyes were like a flame of fire; ¹⁵ and His feet were like burnished bronze, when it has been caused to glow in a furnace, and His voice was like the sound of many waters. ¹⁶ 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.

How do we know this is a description of Jesus? Because in verse 13 John says this person was like the “son of man.” “Son of man” was Jesus’ favorite way of referring to himself (cf. also Daniel 7:13). So we see Jesus standing in the middle of these seven golden lampstands, and the visual descriptions all point to different attributes or functions of Jesus. In verse 13 where John mentions the robe and golden sash, his authority to judge is being highlighted, as we see from 15:6 where we see seven angels of judgment clothed the same way. In verse 14 the white hair emphasizes his wisdom and his eyes of fire emphasize his purifying gaze as nothing is hidden from his sight. His feet that are glowing like molten metal in verse 15 shows us He was so bright He was hard to look at, and his thunderous voice is indicative of his power and authority. In verse 16 we immediately think of His words that are sharper than any two-edged sword, and his face that was shining like the sun remind us that there is nothing that is hidden from his brilliant gaze.

But what is the purpose behind this visual representation of Jesus? At the surface level it provides a direct connection between Jesus as portrayed in chapter one, and Jesus as portrayed in chapters two and three. In each letter to a church, it starts with some element of this portrayal of Jesus. For instance, in 2:18 we read, *“And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write: ‘The words of the Son of God who has eyes like a flame of fire, and whose feet are like burnished bronze.’”* So you can see the obvious connection there.

But I believe there is more going on here in that this picture of Jesus stands in stark contrast to the other powerful figures we see described in the book of Revelation. When you think about the beast and the false prophet and the great dragon; in spite of their power, none of them have the attributes of eternity, and wisdom, and purity, and final authority, and omniscience that is being visually represented in this picture of Christ.

And that is important to remember when you are in the midst of Revelation level persecution. Your Lord is far superior, in every way, to the powerful, yet temporal, finite, human, limited figures you see throughout this book. When you are on the Lord's side, you are on the right side, which is the winning side.

We are going to have to stop here and pick up the rest of this passage next week. I want to spend some time in our memory passage, and then learn a great song that comes straight from the book of Revelation. But there is a thought I want to leave with you that comes from this passage. I want us to go back to the idea that John was "in the Spirit on the Lord's Day," even though he was in distressing circumstances.

John was able to do this because he had a good grasp on reality. His perspective on life included a knowledge of the difference between the temporal and the eternal, the difference between the earthly and the heavenly. And to the degree that the follower of Christ has an accurate perception of reality, he will be characterized by the peace that necessarily comes from such knowledge. In Jn. 14:27 we read, "*Peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be fearful.*" The kind of peace Jesus is talking about here is a supernatural serenity that enables us to accept what God has sovereignly brought into our life. That is precisely where John was on this Lord's Day on the Isle of Patmos. And that is exactly where we need to be – characterized by the serenity that accompanies a good grasp on reality.

