

Revelation Studies
John's Vision of Jesus: 1:9-20
Part 2

Introduction: This morning we are going to finish up this passage in Revelation chapter one that we started last week. In verses 9 – 20 we were going through this passage where John receives a vision of Jesus, and is then commissioned by Jesus to send the contents of the vision to the seven churches. We worked our way from verse 9 through 16 where we saw how John's circumstances didn't affect his ability to worship the Lord on the Lord's Day. The lesson we learned is that it really is possible to live above our circumstances, to embrace the serenity Jesus gives His children because we have an accurate perception of reality. We know what is temporal and what is eternal. We know what is significant and insignificant.

And then we got into his vision of Jesus. As we went through the specifics of how Jesus presented himself to John we noted that all the specifics were designed to communicate some attribute or dimension of Jesus. Jesus is wise and powerful and has the authority to judge and is omniscient and pure and His words are powerful – all of these attributes very different from the other powerful beings you see in the book of Revelation.

The significance of this vision is that it is very easy to be intimidated by the powerful forces of darkness. The Beast and the False Prophet and the Great Dragon and Satan are scary enough to make us shake in our boots, but we have to remember Whose side we are on. And as powerful as these other beings are, they are nothing compared to our Jesus as exemplified by this vision in verses 13 – 16.

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. 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.

So it is understandable that John has the reaction he does in verse 17. *“And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as a dead man.”* This is a natural and proper response. How many of you have ever spent time thinking about the first question you are going to ask Jesus when you see Him in heaven? Do you understand that when you finally see Him you aren’t going to be able to speak at all? You’re probably going to be on your face, awestruck that a person as sinful and unworthy as yourself gets to spend eternity in His presence!

From the accounts we have in the Scriptures, when you see Jesus or God as He really is, you respond like Isaiah did in Isa. 6:5, *“Woe is me, for I am ruined. I am a man of unclean lips and I live among people of unclean lips.”* That is the kind of response John has when he sees this vision of Jesus, so we see in the last half of verse 17 that Jesus *“laid His right hand upon me, saying, “Do not be afraid.”* The significance of Jesus laying his hand on John is that Jesus was acknowledging the appropriateness of John’s response and accepting him. It is similar to the King of Persia holding out his scepter to queen Esther when she came into his presence.

And then Jesus describes himself by repeating what John had expressed earlier in the chapter, *“I am the first and the last, ¹⁸ and the living One; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of death and of Hades.”* I want us to think a little about this concept of the keys because it is an important dimension of the book of Revelation.

How many of you have ever been to a city where there is a ceremony and the Mayor gives the keys of the city to some famous personality? It's a very old tradition that has its source in what we see here. When you hold a key in your hand, you have the authority, or power, even control over whatever is that is locked up and the key can open. If there is a vault full of money and you hold the only key to it, that makes you a powerful person, because what happens to that money is solely up to you as the key holder. That is the biblical concept behind a "key."

We see a good example of this in chapter 20 where we read about the angel who has a great chain and the keys to the Abyss. He seizes Satan, binds him in chains and throws him into the Abyss, slams the door shut and seals it over him for 1,000 years. When you hold the key, you have that kind of authority.

Now this verse tells us that Jesus has the keys of death and Hades. We all understand the concept of death, but Hades is probably a little more unfamiliar to us. The word literally means "the unseen place," and is the term the Bible uses to describe the realm of the dead. This is why it is often translated as "grave." In the OT, the equivalent term is *sheol*, and it implies neither heaven, the place of eternal bliss, nor hell, the place of eternal torment. It is a general term referring to the realm of the dead.

The point Jesus is making here is that death and the grave are not indicators of Satan's ultimate success, as he thinks they are. We know from Scripture that Satan has a single objective for mankind (Jn. 10:10), "*he comes to steal, and to kill, and to destroy.*" This is why Peter (1 Pt. 5:8) compares Satan to "*a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.*" Mankind has an inherent understanding of this which is why there is a universal fear of death.

So when a person dies and it appears that Satan has accomplished his objective for that person (remember, Jesus brings life and Satan brings death), we read in today's passage that Jesus has authority over death. He has power over the grave. He has control over death and the grave. And by the way, Revelation is full of death and dying. Even for God's people. But the message of this verse is that Jesus holds the keys, which is why we are encouraged to be faithful, even unto death. And that is why the follower of Christ going through Revelation level tribulation isn't afraid of ending up in the grave. Jesus holds the keys of death and Hades.

And after this reminder to John, Jesus commissions him in verse 19. *"Write therefore the things which you have seen [ch. 1], and the things which are [chs. 2-3], and the things which shall take place after these things [chs. 4-22]."*

And then in verse 20 we have a brief introduction to chapters two and three when Jesus interprets part of the vision for John. *"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."* Don't you like it when Jesus does the interpretation of the symbols for us? Personally, I wish this happened more often in the book because this means we don't have to speculate over what it means. What is happening here is that the golden lampstands represent the seven churches John is supposed to send the message to, and the seven stars are the seven "angels" of those seven churches. We'll identify those angels next week, but for now there is an important message being communicated by this image.

Jesus is in close proximity to His church. That is the message behind the imagery of Jesus in the midst of the seven lampstands. He is not on the outside of the lampstands looking at them, He is in the center, equally aware of and accessible to each of them. Now, that is a message of *comfort* as well as a message of *warning*. It is a comfort to

know that Jesus is with us to strengthen us and encourage us and minister to us. Isn't it great to know that Jesus is aware of the specific circumstances of us as a church?

But this is also a message of warning! His proximity to us means He knows what we are doing. His penetrating gaze, or as the vision describes, "His eyes like a flame of fire" sees everything we do as a church. As Hebrews 4:13 puts it, "*there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do.*" This is a word of warning. And we see this twofold relationship (comfort and warning) illustrated in each of the messages to the seven churches. He commends them for what they are doing well, and He rebukes them for what they are doing wrong.

Well, what does all this mean for us today? The thought I want you to take with you goes back to last week's message. Do you remember how John was able to identify with his readers and refer to them as his brothers? Can you appreciate that Jesus is able to identify with you and your circumstances? In fact, Mt. 12:50 tell us explicitly that if we obey the will of the Father that Jesus is our *brother*. In addition to this, Heb. 4:15-16 we read that "*we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses* (He is not some aloof deity), *but One who has been tempted* (tested) *in all things as we are, yet without sin.*"¹⁶ *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.*" Whatever your need is this morning, please don't hesitate to bring it before the throne of grace.