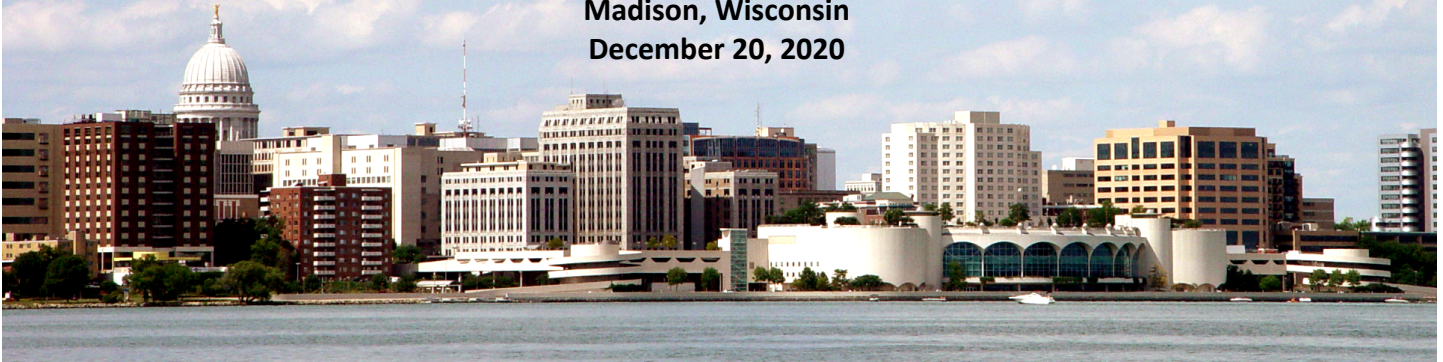


Jesus in Revelation

PART 2 • REVELATION 1:9-16

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****COVID-19 SPLIT SERVICE****

It is good to be with you this morning! By way of reminder, I hope all of you have the elements for the Lord's Supper, as we will be partaking together after our study this morning. And then, after the Supper, Clayton will be leading us in the song, "Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory" (#802).

As our tradition has been, we are starting this morning with a brief summary of God's plan for our salvation. Even before we were born, God loved us so much that he sent his only Son to this earth, but we killed him. He was buried, and then he was raised up on the third day, and in response, we must believe the message, we must turn away from sin, and we must allow ourselves to be buried with him in the act of baptism, at which point the Christian life begins. And our good news this week comes to us from the Lord's church in Mt. Juliet, Tennessee, just east of Nashville. This past Thursday afternoon, Emma was baptized! I know nothing about Emma other than the fact that she is now my sister, and she is also wearing a great shirt from Freed-Hardeman University! We are sharing this by way of encouragement. What Emma has done, you can do this morning. If you would like to know more, please give me a call this afternoon, and I would be glad to get together to study.

If you were with us last week, you might remember that we are heading toward a study of the Lord's messages to the seven churches of Asia in Revelation 2-3. This was a request from one of the seniors of the congregation. We'll get to this starting in January, if the Lord wills, but as we head in that direction, we are taking a few weeks to look at Jesus in Revelation 1, and we are laying a foundation. Last week, then, we talked about the government burdening the church with excessive regulations, even to the point of preventing us from worshiping together, and even to the point of imprisoning gospel preachers and elders. This is the situation in the mid-90's back in the First Century. It is so bad, in fact, that John, the last living apostle, an old man at this point, is sent away to the Roman version of Alcatraz, a prison island known as Patmos, in the Aegean Sea, just off the coast of modern-day Turkey. Tradition tells us that John was serving as an elder at the church in Ephesus. And as he is in exile on this island, he receives a series of visions from God, and he writes these down and sends them to seven congregations throughout the Roman province of Asia Minor. And this message is what we know today as the book of Revelation. Last week, in Chapter 1, we learned that the book is a "*revelation of Jesus Christ*," it is an "apocalypse." The word refers to something being unveiled or uncovered.

A few days ago, by the way, I saw the word “apocalypse” in the news, which should not be a surprise – this is 2020. But I laughed when I read the article, “Apocalypsing is the Newest Pandemic-Inspired Dating Trend.” A psychologist associated with one of the major online dating sites defines “apocalypsing” as “treating every relationship like it's your last and getting super serious with someone you just started dating.” They explain that due to the COVID-related isolation, people are somewhat desperate, causing things to get pretty intense a little too quickly. It was an interesting article, but it caught my eye because of the use of the word “apocalypse.” People tend to associate “apocalypse” with the end of the world, but the word itself simply refers to something being unveiled or revealed. So, the book of Revelation, the apocalypse, the revealing of Jesus Christ.

Last week, then, we looked at the fact that the book was written by John from a Roman prison island, and it was therefore “*signified*” or “encoded” in a way that the average Roman guard wouldn’t understand, but the early Christians would understand, with over 500 quotes or references to the Old Testament. And the message of the book is “NIKE,” or “victory.” God’s people will be victorious over the Roman Empire. These things will take place “*soon*,” and there is a special blessing on those who hear and pay attention to the words of this revelation.

With this as background, we then started looking at Jesus. In Revelation 1:4-8, we looked at who Jesus is, we looked at what he has done, and we looked at what he has promised to do. He is the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, the ruler of the kings of the earth, and so on.

Today, we move into the next paragraph in Revelation 1, as John continues revealing who Jesus is. As I mentioned last week, we need more Jesus! And today, the revelation of Jesus continues, with what seems to be a rare description of the Lord’s physical appearance. All of us have seen artwork depicting Jesus. We appreciate the efforts that have been made, but we also know that there is a danger in depicting Jesus as being “like us.” This is a rather famous painting of Jesus preaching what is known as “the Sermon on the Mount.” The artist is Danish, a man by the name of Carl Bloch, who lived in the mid-1,800’s. And in western culture, this is how Jesus is often depicted – a white guy, who looks to be about 7 feet tall, with long, flowing hair, looking like something straight out of a Pantene commercial. I’ve seen this painting before, as some of you probably have. But yesterday, I thought I’d look up an image of Carl Bloch, and this is what I found. And as I looked at these two images, I realized that Jesus looks a whole lot like Carl Bloch! But that’s the way it is. We tend to think of Jesus as looking like us. As we study, I would invite you to do your own artwork. Draw Jesus as he appears in this passage, and send it to me. I would love to be able to use some of your images as we move forward in this study.

As far as I can tell, the oldest depiction of Jesus comes from Syria, and dates to roughly 235 AD, which is still more than 200 years after the Lord’s life on this earth. I’ve zoomed in a bit on this one, but still, we don’t learn too much, do we? It seems that his hair is short and curly, but again, it’s possible that if we had a picture of the artist, the artist might have also had short and curly hair! As we think about what the Lord actually looked like, some people might be surprised that we really don’t have any clue whatsoever until the book of Revelation! The closest we get to a physical description might be a prophecy in Isaiah 53:2, where Isaiah predicted that the Messiah “*...has no stately form or majesty that we should look upon Him, nor appearance that we should be attracted to Him.*” In other words, Jesus would be pretty average! In terms of his physical appearance: Nothing remarkable! And we see this in the gospel accounts ****PPT**** as Judas betrays Jesus but has to identify him with a kiss. Remember: The authorities are not looking for a 7-foot-tall white guy with long, flowing hair! But instead, Jesus is average. He looks like everybody else. Judas has to identify him personally. By the way, speaking of Jesus being average, we have skeletons of Jewish men from the First Century, and they were quite a bit shorter back then than we are today. In my mind, I imagine myself looking up to the Lord. But in reality, if we could go back

in time, he would probably be about a foot shorter than I am. And that is so strange to me. I cannot imagine looking down on the Lord.

This morning, then, we come to one of the very rare physical descriptions of Jesus. And it's not from his earthly ministry, but it's a description of what John sees many years later as the veil is pulled back. The passage is found in Revelation 1, and today we'll be looking at verses 9-16. And really, for the first time in the Bible, we have a description of what Jesus looks like. John gives us something of a backstage pass, and we see Jesus as he really is. I want us to look at John's reaction to all of this next week (we'll see this in the last paragraph of Revelation 1), but today we look at verses 9-16. And to understand what's happening here, I want us to look at what John says about himself, I want us to think about the occasion or the setting, and then I want us to look at John's vision of Jesus.

Let's start, though, by reading the text – Revelation 1:9-16,

⁹ I, John, your brother and partner in the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance that are in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. ¹⁰ I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet ¹¹ saying, "Write what you see in a book 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." ¹² Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking to me, and on turning I saw seven golden lampstands, ¹³ and in the midst of the lampstands one like a son of man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash around his chest. ¹⁴ The hairs of his head were white, like white wool, like snow. His eyes were like a flame of fire, ¹⁵ his feet were like burnished bronze, refined in a furnace, and his voice was like the roar of many waters. ¹⁶ In his right hand he held seven stars, from his mouth came a sharp two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining in full strength.

Again, as we move through this passage, let's notice a few things about John, let's look at the circumstances here, and then let's look at John's vision of Jesus.

I. But first, we start with JOHN.

As with all artwork, it might help to know something about the artist. And I know, John is not really the artist, but he is a part of this. I think of something a friend of mine, Kathy Pollard, posted online a few weeks ago, a quote from John MacArthur, "The preacher is not the chef; he's a waiter. God doesn't want him to make the meal; He just wants him to deliver it to the table without messing it up." We might say that's John's role here. John is the eyewitness. He is communicating what he's seeing here. And with that in mind, it might help us to notice what John says about himself here.

In verse 9, he refers to himself as ***"...John, your brother and partner in the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance that are in Jesus."*** I find it interesting that he doesn't refer to himself as an "apostle." Sometimes, Paul had to defend his apostleship, but John doesn't need to do that here. These people know who he is. His only reminder, then, is that he is in this together with these people. He is their ***"brother."*** He is their ***"partner in the tribulation"*** and in the ***"kingdom"*** and in the ***"patient endurance that are in Jesus."*** John is suffering just like they are. You are not alone in this! Yes, we are going through tribulation, but we are also in the kingdom. Our citizenship is in heaven. And so, we endure.

By the way, as he identifies himself in this way, John joins a long line of messengers who have written from some very difficult circumstances. Moses wrote the first five books of the Bible from the wilderness. David wrote many of the Psalms as he was on the run from King Saul and others. Ezekiel wrote from exile, as did Jeremiah. Paul wrote several of his letters from a prison cell in Rome. John, then, joins this fellowship as he writes what he sees here.

II. This leads us to the OCCASION or the SETTING of this passage.

What's going on? Well, we have the reminder (at the end of verse 9) that John is ***"on the island called Patmos."*** As we learned last week, this is an island in the Mediterranean, but it's not a resort island, is it? This isn't somewhere you might go on vacation (at least 2000 years ago). Back then, it was a Roman prison island, something like Alcatraz. And let's not forget that John is old at this point – not just "elderly," but John is legit "old"! John is perhaps in his 90's at this point. And this was back when most people didn't make it past 40 or 50. And I say this just to mention that Patmos was something of a labor camp. As I understand it, prisoners would work in a rock quarry on the island. Emperor Domitian probably didn't want to make John a martyr, so he sent him to Patmos, most likely to cut and haul rocks – in his 90's!

Also notice (at the end of verse 9) that John is on Patmos ***"on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus."*** Some have suggested he might have gone there to teach – that this is his prison ministry. We aren't told. To me, it sounds like this is against his will.

Nevertheless, what is John doing as he's on this island with who knows how many hardened criminals? In verse 10, he says that he was ***"in the Spirit on the Lord's day."*** He's far away from Ephesus, where he has served as an elder, he's quarantined (as we might say today), he's alone (in a sense), and yet he's not alone, is he? He is ***"in the Spirit on the Lord's day."*** I think about Paul and Silas praying and singing praises to God in the prison in Philippi. They were in jail, in stocks and bonds, but in a sense, they were somewhere else entirely. And that's what John seems to be doing here. He's on the island of Patmos, but he knows it is the Lord's day. There is discussion on this, but my understanding is that this is the first day of the week, the day of the Lord's resurrection, the day Jesus met with his disciples after his resurrection, the day the church was established in Acts 2, the day the early church came together to give and to partake of the Lord's Supper. On Patmos, other prisoners might have been counting down the days until their release; without calendars, some prisoners probably lost track of time altogether as days of hard labor turned into weeks, and months, and years; but John was keeping time in terms of the Lord's day. Once every seven days, he made sure that he was ***"in the Spirit on the Lord's day."*** John had a permanent appointment on the first day of every week. As Jesus had said many years before this, ***"God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth."*** The place is unimportant – on an island, in prison, here in this building, or perhaps even isolated at home or in your car somewhere. It is important that we take time to honor God as he has directed on his day.

And on this Lord's day, as John is ***"in the Spirit,"*** he hears behind him a loud voice like a trumpet. I find it interesting that the voice comes from behind. Why behind and not in front? Why the need to turn? It seems that perhaps God wants us to listen on his terms, not on our terms. At this point, John apparently turns to listen, and he is told to write what he sees in a book, and he is to send it to the seven churches. And for the past 2,000 years, because John was in the spirit on the Lord's day and was willing to listen and to write, millions of God's people have been encouraged by this revelation – all because a 90-year old man makes himself available.

“Turn your eyes upon Jesus,” as we sometimes sing, “look full in his wonderful face, and the things of earth will grow strangely dim, in the light of his glory and grace.” When we are ***“in the spirit,”*** we pay attention to Jesus and we listen to his voice. There are many “voices” in this world – coworkers, politicians, spouses, teachers, parents – but Jesus is the voice that matters more than any other.

The last part of the “occasion” or “setting” for this vision comes in the last half of verse 11 as the voice calls out a series of seven congregations by name. We will get into these in detail in January. But for now, let’s just know that Jesus knows us not only personally, but also based on the congregation we are a part of. I would also point out that this is something of a shared letter. In other words, the advice we’ll get to in Chapters 2-3 might be specific to one congregation, but there’s a benefit to the other congregations hearing that same advice. Also, these are not the only congregations in the area. We also know there are churches in Troas as well as in Hieropolis, but these are the seven addressed in this letter. As I understand it, they are located on something of a mail route. But again, we’ll get back to the seven churches in January. Here, these churches are represented by seven golden lampstands (in verse 12, and explained later, in verse 20). But this is the occasion. This is the setting.

III. We now come to the VISION itself.

Starting in verse 13, John describes what he sees, and in the description, he makes some comparisons. It’s almost as if what he sees is too amazing, and so we see the word ***“like”*** used a few times here. So, let’s just keep this in mind. I would also point out that it’s been a while since John has seen the Lord. People have a way of changing over a period of 60 years, don’t they? This is like going to your 60th high school reunion. People change! The last time John saw Jesus, Jesus and John were both relatively young – Jesus was probably around the age of 33, and John was perhaps a bit younger. But now, John is most likely in his 90’s. The most significant difference, though, is that now, Jesus is being revealed to John for who he really is. Here on this earth (as we learned earlier today), Jesus had ***“...no stately form or majesty that we should look upon Him, nor appearance that we should be attracted to Him.”*** But now Jesus is being revealed for who he really is.

As we study, let’s not get bogged down in the details. We don’t need to assign some quality to everything John sees here, but a lot of this seems tied some imagery from the Old Testament. So, let’s do the best we can...

A. ...starting with John describing Jesus as being LIKE A SON OF MAN.

Now, anybody with a basic knowledge of God’s word knows that ***“son of man”*** is one of the most commonly used titles used to refer to Jesus. I did a quick search this week and came up with close to 80 times where Jesus is referred to as the ***“son of man,”*** just in the four gospel accounts, ***“For the son of man has come to seek and to save that which was lost”*** (Luke 19:10), and so on. It’s a reminder that Jesus is human. But it’s also a description that was used prophetically. Back in the book of Daniel (in Daniel 7:13-14), Daniel says,

¹³ ***“I kept looking in the night visions,
And behold, with the clouds of heaven
One like a Son of Man was coming,
And He came up to the Ancient of Days
And was presented before Him.***

¹⁴ ***“And to Him was given dominion,
Glory and a kingdom,***

***That all the peoples, nations and men of every language
Might serve Him.
His dominion is an everlasting dominion
Which will not pass away;
And His kingdom is one
Which will not be destroyed.***

And so, when John says that he sees someone ***“like a son of man,”*** it’s some very loaded language. It’s a phrase with some baggage (in a good way). Jesus was and continues to be one of us. But he takes on this title because it is a needed reminder. We wouldn’t refer to him in this way if it weren’t necessary. When the veil is lifted, John needs to remind himself: This is the Son of Man. He is God, but he is also one of us.

B. John continues (in verse 13) by describing Jesus as being CLOTHED WITH A LONG ROBE AND WITH A GOLDEN SASH AROUND HIS CHEST.

Here on this earth, Jesus was a carpenter. Carpenter’s didn’t wear long robes. Their clothing was usually shorter with a belt around the waist. Here, though, Jesus is wearing the robe and the sash of a priest. This is a robe ***“reaching to the feet.”*** It seems, then, we have the reminder that Jesus serves as a priest – not as a Levite, not as a descendant of Aaron, but according to the priesthood of Melchizedek (as Josh explained to us from the book of Hebrews on Wednesday evening a few months ago). And the main job of a priest is to intercede on behalf of the people. A priest is a go-between. The message here is the message of Hebrews,

¹⁴ Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. 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. ¹⁶ Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.
(Hebrews 4:14-16)

John, then, sees Jesus as a priest, representing his people in heaven.

C. He also notices that THE HAIRS OF HIS HEAD ARE WHITE, LIKE WHITE WOOL, LIKE SNOW.

Another positive reference to snow in the Bible, by the way! Jesus’ hair is white, perhaps a reference to his great wisdom and dignity. We think of Proverbs 16:31 where Solomon said that ***“A gray head is a crown of glory.”*** Jesus’ hair is his crown in this picture. We might also think back to the Ancient of Days in Daniel, who also had white hair compared to wool.

D. At the end of verse 14, John observes that HIS EYES ARE LIKE A FLAME OF FIRE.

We don’t want to assign something to this that isn’t there, but don’t we see the ability to see right through us? I can’t fake it with the Lord. As we learned in Luke this past Wednesday evening, Jesus sees through hypocrisy. He is perceptive. And as the author of Hebrews says, ***“...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.”*** We will see this in Chapters 2-3 as he observes these seven churches and tells them what is good and what needs to be changed. He sees our imperfections. We’re reminded here that there is no such thing as a perfect congregation. My grandfather used to remind me all the time, “The church is a perfect organization, but it is made up of imperfect people.” We

might think of a church like the one in Ephesus – established by Paul, they had Timothy as a preacher, and they ended up with John as one of their elders – and yet they had issues! This doesn't excuse sin, but it reminds us that we can't fake it with the Lord.

We might as well have David's attitude in Psalm 139:23-24 when he said, ***"Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me and know my anxious thoughts; and see if there be any hurtful way in me, and lead me in the everlasting way."*** Jesus sees us. He sees our imperfections.

E. John also notices (in verse 15) that the Lord's FEET ARE LIKE BURNISHED BRONZE, WHEN IT HAS BEEN MADE TO GLOW IN A FURNACE.

We think of metal that's refined by fire. Everywhere the Lord goes, he leaves a trail of purity. He cleanses. In the Old Testament, bronze or brass is often associated with the altar and those tools that were used on the altar.

F. At the end of verse 15, John tells us that the Lord's VOICE IS LIKE THE SOUND OF MANY WATERS.

I have some great memories of hiking to waterfalls in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan as a kid, with my parents and sister; and more recently, with my own children. And the highlight of those hikes was getting to that point in the woods when you could hear the rushing water for the first time. You know the falls is your destination, and you think you might hear it, and then it gets louder and more distinct, and at the end you are standing right there at the falls – thunderous, almost earth-shaking – what an awesome experience! And that's the only way John can even try to describe the Lord's voice, ***"like the sound of many waters."*** We think again of how Daniel described what he heard in 10:6, when he said that ***"...the sound of his words like the sound of a tumult" or "roaring."*** We think of Ezekiel explaining that God's voice ***"was like the sound of many waters."*** This comparison is not new. The prophets remind us that God rules through his word. This isn't a stream of some kind; no, this is the thundering roar of Niagara Falls – one Great Lake emptying into another. His voice is the voice of authority, impossible to ignore, filling the earth, resonating through the church.

G. In verse 16, John notices that IN HIS RIGHT HAND HE HOLDS SEVEN STARS AND OUT OF HIS MOUTH CAME A SHARP TWO-EDGED SWORD.

We'll get back to the stars next week as John tells us what they are – the stars are the ***"messengers"*** or the ***"angels"*** of the seven churches. The fact that they are in the Lord's right hand indicates that they are under his authority. But the emphasis here is on the ***"sharp two-edged sword."*** The sword seems to represent judgment based on truth. We think of Hebrews 4:12, where the Bible says that ***"...the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart."***

H. The last thing John notices here is that the Lord's FACE IS LIKE THE SUN SHINING IN ITS STRENGTH.

We can't really imagine something brighter than the sun, but I find it interesting that John has seen something like this before, hasn't he? At the transfiguration, when Peter, James, and John, were on the mountain, they saw the Lord, and ***"his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light"*** (Matthew 17:2). John has already told us in 1 John 1:5 that ***"God is Light, and in Him there is no darkness at all."*** In 1 Timothy 6:16, Paul tells us that God ***"dwells in unapproachable light."*** Paul should know; he was blinded by that light on the road to Damascus. And so, as Jesus is revealed, John sees his face ***"like the sun shining in its strength."***

Conclusion:

Hopefully next week we'll be able to look at John's reaction to all of this, but for today, how do we react to this? Is this different from the way we normally picture Jesus? Especially at this time of year, we might be thinking of Jesus as a harmless little baby (and that's great, Jesus did come to this earth as a child). But that's not exactly what we see here, is it? As Jesus is revealed, we see him in this passage as he really is, right now. When he came to this earth, Jesus poured himself out into human form, into the form of a servant, being made as a man, and becoming obedient, even to the point of death on a cross. But that's not who Jesus is right now. Right now, Jesus is interceding for us in heaven and ruling his people with all authority. I can hardly even picture what Jesus looks like right now. I can hardly imagine. But John sees him, and he writes it down for us. And it's meant to be encouraging. Hopefully it is. The question for us is: What now? Do we imagine Jesus as somebody like us, or do we think of him as holy and awesome? He's both, but the image we've looked at this morning is awesome and terrifying. And he is with us.

Like John, we are *"in the spirit"* this morning. At least I hope we are. When we come together as a congregation, we worship *"in spirit and in truth."* We are assembled together not just on this earth, but he is with us. And if you are discouraged today about being home alone listening to the word of God on the phone or online, let's take some encouragement from John, who was also alone. And yet, in exile on the island of Patmos, John was *"in spirit"* with Jesus.

Before John presides at the Lord's Table, let's go to God in prayer:

Our Father in Heaven,

You are the great and awesome Eternal God, and we praise you this morning for caring enough about us to send your one and only Son to leave the comfort of heaven to come here and to live a perfect life and to offer himself in our place on the cross. Thank you for allowing us to see at least some small aspect of who Jesus really is.

We come to you in the name of your son Jesus. AMEN.

To comment on this lesson: fourlakeschurch@gmail.com