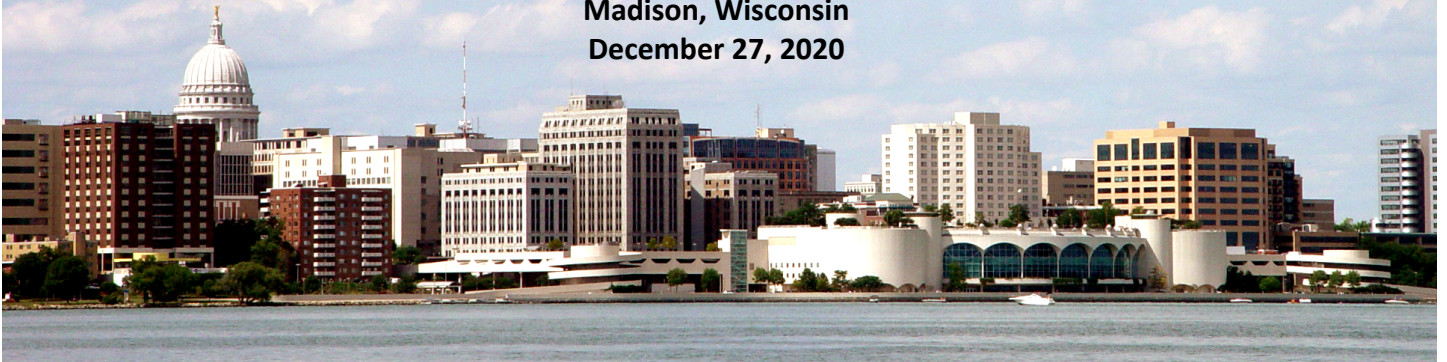


Jesus in Revelation

PART 3 • REVELATION 1:17-20

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Four Lakes Church of Christ
Madison, Wisconsin
December 27, 2020



****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, Caleb will be leading us in the song, "On Zion's Glorious Summit?" (#515).

As our tradition has been, we are starting this morning with a brief summary of God's plan for our salvation. Even before the creation, God had a plan, and at the right time, he sent his son to this earth in human form, he died for our sins, he was buried, and then he was raised up on the third day. In response, we are called upon to believe the message, we must turn away from sin, and then we 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 Phil Sanders. Brother Sanders preaches for the program "In Search of the Lord's Way," which we put on our local cable station here in Madison for many years. But this past Monday, brother Sanders had the privilege of baptizing Clarence Hartman, from Frisco, Texas. We posted this on the church's Facebook page this week, and if you have not seen the video (about a minute long), I would highly recommend it. It's not the smoothest or most dignified baptism I've ever seen, but it is amazing. As he regains his composure before getting out of the water, he says, "What a weight lifted!" What a weight lifted! And so we rejoice with Clarence this morning. What Clarence did a few days ago, you can do today! If you have any questions at all, if you'd like to get together to study, please give me a call.

If you have been with us over the past two weeks, 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 next year (next Lord's Day morning), 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. We started, then, by introducing the book, written by John, the last living apostle, an old man at this point, as he 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 Asia Minor. And this message is what we know today as the book of Revelation.

Two weeks ago, 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. And the message of the book is “NIKE,” or “victory.” God’s people will be victorious over the Roman Empire. These things would 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.

Then, last week, we looked at what seems to be a pretty rare description of the Lord’s physical appearance – not from his earthly ministry, where Jesus seems to be pretty average in terms of appearance, but this is Jesus revealed. This is Jesus as he really is. John is **“in the Spirit on the Lord’s day,”** he’s told to write what he sees, sending it to the seven churches, and when he turns, he sees 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.

This morning, we move on to the last few verses of Revelation 1. And today we come to John’s reaction to seeing Jesus in this way, we then notice the Lord’s reassurance, and then we come to John’s reassignment. And that will be our outline this morning – John’s reaction, Jesus’ reassurance, followed by the reassignment. So, John sees Jesus as he really is, the veil is pulled back, and we pick up with Revelation 1:17-20,

17 When I saw Him, I fell at His feet like a dead man. And He placed His right hand on me, saying, “Do not be afraid; 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. 19 Therefore write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after these things. 20 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.

I. Let’s start, then, by looking at JOHN’S REACTION to what he sees here.

And before we go back to what happens, let’s remember: John spent 3-½ years with Jesus. John has seen Jesus walk on the water. John has seen Jesus feed thousands with nothing but a few loaves and fish. John has seen Jesus heal and even bring people back from the dead. John, in fact, is in the Lord’s inner circle of close friends – Peter, James, and John. They’ve walked, and talked, and fished together. It seems that John is **“the disciple whom Jesus loves.”** Jesus is closer to John than just about any other human being. John takes care of Jesus’ mother for at least some period of time. John and Jesus were practically family. So, when we come to this reunion after 60 years or so, we might expect something a different from what we see here. We might expect a bear hug! We might expect, “Jesus, it’s been so long! It’s so good to see you again!” We might expect a joyful reunion between two good friends. And yet, that’s not what happens, is it? No! John sees the Lord, and he falls down at his feet **“like a dead man.”** Maybe we can picture somebody passing out. I’ve passed out once in my life, at the dentist. It was an intense experience from the beginning. We got there early and heard screams of

terror coming from the back room. I was expecting a 3-year-old to come out, but the screamer was a teenager. I go back, the dentist hits a nerve, everything goes gray, and I'm out. As I'm out, I see the church treasurer chasing me down the middle of a 4-lane divided highway. And then I wake up. That's my experience of passing out. We've seen somebody faint on the news this week, haven't we? We saw the nurse in Tennessee get her COVID vaccination live, during a news conference. She's talking about how great it is, and how nothing bad will happen, then she says something about not feeling well, and she drops right there live on television. That's pretty much what happens here. John sees the Lord as he really is, and he immediately falls at his feet **"like a dead man."** He is completely overwhelmed simply by being in the presence of Jesus. He's overwhelmed with a sense of awe. We think of Hebrews 12:28-29, where the author says, **"Therefore, since we receive a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us show gratitude, by which we may offer to God an acceptable service with reverence and awe; for our God is a consuming fire."** God is awesome! And that's what we see here – John sees Jesus, not as a man, but as he really is, and he is overwhelmed.

We've seen this before in scripture. We think of Isaiah's reaction to seeing the Lord in Isaiah 6 as he says, **"Woe is me, for I am ruined! Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts."** God is God, and we are not. We see the same thing happen with Daniel in Daniel 10. When he sees the Lord, he says, **"...yet no strength was left in me, for my natural color turned to a deathly pallor, and I retained no strength. But I heard the sound of his words; and as soon as I heard the sound of his words, I fell into a deep sleep on my face, with my face to the ground."** The same thing happens to Ezekiel. Four times throughout the book of Ezekiel, Ezekiel is described as seeing the Lord and falling on his face. This is what happens when mere mortals see God as he really is. We think of Saul seeing Jesus on the road to Damascus. What happens? He is surrounded by a light from heaven, and he falls to the ground.

John's reaction here in Revelation 1 is very similar, by the way, to John's reaction to the transfiguration. On the mountain, the Lord's face **"shone like the sun, and His garments became as white as light."** The voice from the cloud says, **"This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased; listen to Him!"** And when the disciples heard this, **"they fell face down to the ground and were terrified."** Of course, the last time John fell down at the Lord's feet, John was much younger. Now he's perhaps in his 90's. We're a bit concerned when somebody in their 90's falls down, aren't we? But that's what happens here. John falls on his face in worship and fear.

An observation here: In the presence of Jesus, John is not fearing whatever the Romans are dishing out. He's not focused on the island. He's not focused on being imprisoned. He's not thinking about these external things. But he's focused on Jesus! He is overwhelmed in his presence. And this is appropriate.

Sometimes we look at the fact that the word **"reverend"** is only found once in the Bible (only in the KJV) in Psalm 111:9. The NASB refers to God and says, **"Holy and awesome is His name."** His name is **"reverend."** His name is **"terrifying."** His name is to be **"feared."** But you know what the very next verse says? **"The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom; a good understanding have all those who do His commandments; His praise endures forever."** So yes, God is terrifying, God is holy and awesome, but when we fear him as we should, our fear is appropriate. Our fear now prepares us for when we will someday meet him face to face just as John does. There's a time coming when all of us will fall at his feet.

But, our awe of Jesus isn't just reserved for when we meet him face to face, is it? We can live in awe of him right now. We have these written records as a reminder of who Jesus really is. We read, and we are amazed. We read, and we fall down to worship. Yes, Jesus came to this earth in human form. He lived. He taught. He did good. But Jesus is so much more than that. He is the one and only awesome and all-powerful God, creator of

everything we see around us. We will fall before him someday, but we also live in his presence right now. We are unworthy, and this is why we worship – right now. So, this is John’s reaction: He falls down in worship.

II. This leads us to JESUS and to the REASSURANCE JESUS GIVES.

Notice: Jesus doesn’t just dismiss John’s fear. He doesn’t say, “Oh, don’t worry about it John. I’m not scary!” No, he says, **“Do not be afraid,”** and then he explains that he’s even more amazing that John might assume, **“I am the first and the last, and the living One; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of death and of Hades.”** The only way to truly please God is to accept all of this. The sooner we do, the sooner we can get to work. We accept Jesus for who he really is.

Who is he? He tells us, **“I am the first and the last.”** He is eternal. As we learned a few weeks ago, he is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. Any problem we might have tomorrow, Jesus has already seen it. He is **“the living One; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore.”** John knows this. John has seen this. John is one of the only disciples who stuck around for the crucifixion. Everybody else ran away, but John was there. And so, more than anybody, John knows that what Jesus is saying here is true. Jesus is alive. According to all 14 authors of the New Testament, and according to all 27 books, Jesus is alive. Not only that, but Jesus says that he has **“the keys of death and of Hades.”** Hades is simply the place of the dead. So, Jesus has the keys of both death itself and of the place where dead people go. And Jesus is the only one with these keys. I think of keys, and I think of some of the jails and prisons I’ve been in. When I’m visiting somebody in a prison, I want to be near the guy with the keys! Keys represent power, and Jesus has absolute power over death and Hades.

All of this reminds us that Jesus appears to John, not to scare him, but to encourage him. And so there is some reassurance here as Jesus reaches out and puts his right hand on John. Jesus did this quite a bit during his earthly life. He touched Jairus’ daughter as he raised her from the dead. He laid his hands on lepers, and the lame, and the deaf, and the blind, as he made them whole. Jesus, then, reaches out to touch John, here. There’s no rebuke, it wasn’t wrong of John to fall down, but Jesus doesn’t want him to stay there, and that leads us to the last part of this passage...

III. ...because, in verses 19-20, Jesus has A NEW ASSIGNMENT FOR JOHN!

Jesus is hiring! He’s not through with John. And so, instead of leaving John flat on his face, trembling in fear, Jesus gives him something to do, “John, I know you are an old man now, I know you might be feeling a bit disconnected out here on this island, but grab a pen and start writing! Write what you see. My people need to hear some things. My people need to be encouraged. My people need to hear some good news” [PARAPHRASED].

In a slightly similar way, Jesus also has an assignment for all of us here this morning. This world needs to hear the good news. Our job is to get busy with it. And even if it’s difficult or terrifying, he will be with us. We fall down in worship, Jesus reaches out, and we get up to do what needs to be done.

And this will be the message to the seven churches in chapters 2-3. Based on this vision of Jesus as he really is, John is communicating both the good and the bad – what these churches are doing well, and what they need to change. But it’s all based on who Jesus really is. Over the next seven weeks, we’ll notice that each message starts with some aspect of who Jesus is, based on this vision we’ve looked at today. He is holy and awesome, and in

response we worship, and then we get to work. We accept whatever assignment he gives to us. And what Jesus has to say to us is especially important in difficult times, in times we seem to be cut off from each other, in times when we might be angry, or scared, or frustrated.

Conclusion:

We started this series by suggesting that we need more Jesus. And we've had more Jesus over the past three weeks. We've looked at who he is, what he has done, and what he continues to do. We've seen Jesus revealed to John, so that John can see him as he really is. And this morning we've seen John's reaction, Jesus' reassurance, and we've seen just a preview of John's new assignment. I hope you can be with us next week as John starts carrying out that new assignment by communicating the Lord's messages to these seven congregations.

Before John leads us in prayer for the Lord's Supper, let's go to God in prayer:

Our Father in Heaven,

Thank you for hearing our prayer. Thank you for Jesus. Thank you for sending him to this earth, and thank you for giving us your word so that we can learn more about you. We praise you this morning for making us a part of your kingdom. Thank you for forgiving our sins.

We pray that you will continue to be with us as your people, that we might continue to do good and share, for with these sacrifices we know you are pleased.

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

To comment on this lesson: fourlakeschurch@gmail.com