

Revelation: Because the Time Is Near

Study #2: The Vision of the Glorified Christ

What is the most beautiful sight you have ever seen? The Grand Canyon? A Hawaiian sunset? The artwork of Italy? Dr. Magherini, head of the psychiatric hospital at Florence warns that too much beauty can overwhelm us. She says, "Some tourists fall to the ground with heart palpitations thinking they're having a heart attack. Others suffer from delirium or disorientation. But what they're really having might be called a 'brush stroke.' Mix one tired and lonely tourist with a heavy dose of Michelangelo, throw in a fresco by Giotto and a Bernini statue or two, and presto! You have a victim of art illness." But she says most victims recover quickly. "All they need to return to normal is a heavy dose of the familiar and the mundane."

That is fascinating for two reasons: 1) It shows how accustomed we are to the ordinary. 2) It gives us a glimpse of how you and I would react if we witnessed the truly glorious. After all, if people faint from seeing something as mundane as Michelangelo's David, imagine how we'd react if we came face to face with the Risen Christ! Revelation chapter 1 is a case in point. John the apostle has been banished to the Isle of Patmos for preaching the Word of God, when Jesus suddenly appears to him—altogether holy, glorious, and beautiful. How does John react? He says in verse 17, "When I saw Him, I fell at His feet as though dead!" Why? Faced with the majesty of the All-Glorious Jesus, the only thing anyone can do is fall at His feet in worship.

In this, our second study of the Revelation, John pulls back the veil and reveals the Lord Jesus as He really is. No longer is He the meek and mild Savior; now He is the All-Glorious King of Kings and Lord of Lords. As John tells us what he saw, let the majesty of Jesus fill you with awe. Four facts stand out about Him in Revelation 1:12-20.

1. His Position

John begins in verse 12, "Then I turned to see the voice that spoke with me. And having turned, I saw seven golden lampstands, and in the midst of the lampstands One like the Son of Man." Two things to notice here. First, notice what John sees when he turns toward the voice speaking to him. He sees seven golden lampstands. What do they possibly represent? There is no need to wonder because Jesus explains it in verse 20, "The seven lampstands which you saw are the seven churches." That's a fitting symbol for a church, isn't it? For just as a lamp is not the source of the light it gives off, but gets its flame from the oil burning inside it, so you and I have no glory of our own. Instead, where do we get our light? We get it from Jesus, the Light of the World who commanded His disciples, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven." So yes, Jesus is the Light of the World, but it is through the churches, His lampstands, that He makes His glory known.

That raises the question. What kind of light are you giving off? Is it bright enough for others at your workplace to see? Or what about your neighbors? Can they see the likeness of Jesus in you? Several years ago I met with our church's nominating committee to consider new elders and deacons. Someone suggested the name of one of the sharpest and most successful men in our congregation. But right away someone nixed his nomination. Why? They said a friend of theirs ran a store in town and whenever this man came into his shop, he acted like a

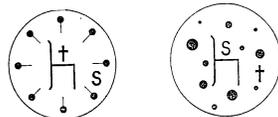
“jerk,” cursing about this or that. The friend said, “If that’s what the people at your church are like, my family and I will never attend one of your services.” Anyone, of course, can have a bad day. But apparently this was a habit, reminding me that people are watching! And if we say that we are Christians, they’re expecting to see a reasonable likeness of Jesus Christ in us.

Even more important, however, is where Jesus is in relation to the lampstands. Verse 13 says He is “in the midst of them.” This signifies two truths about Him. First, His presence with us—that He will never leave us nor forsake us, but is with us until the end of the age. For even though Jesus has ascended to His throne in heaven, He is still with us in the Person of His Holy Spirit. And not only is He with us, He’s watching us. This is the point of Revelation 2:1, which says He “walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands.” This is not a leisurely stroll He is describing; it is our Commander-in-Chief inspecting His troops, listening to our worship, watching the way we do business, and examining the thoughts and intents of our hearts. Even in the heated atmosphere of a business meeting, we need to remember that Jesus is with us, watching what we say and how we say it. So be careful what you say and do!

Second, it emphasizes His centrality. Throughout the book of Revelation, Jesus is pictured at the center of everything. Here He walks in the midst of the seven churches. In chapter 4, He is the center of Heaven’s worship. In chapter 6, He becomes the source of the world’s future judgment. And in chapters 21 and 22, He becomes the Light and Temple of the New Jerusalem and the new heavens and the new earth where righteousness dwells.

So an appropriate question to ask is: Is Jesus Christ the central focus of your life? If He is, what difference will it make? Certainly, it will lead you to spend daily time with Him in Bible study and prayer. It will also make you more faithful in serving the church to which you belong. But most telling of all, it will affect the decisions you make as a mother, a father, a student, an employee, a neighbor, and a citizen. Simply stated, when you realize that Jesus is present in every part of your life, it will radically transform how you think and what you do.

Are you familiar with the following illustration from Campus Crusade? The first circle represents a person who has given Christ center place in his life. Self has been dethroned and Christ is in charge of his life, bringing him joy and fulfillment by putting all things in their proper order. But there is a second possibility for the Christian, illustrated by the second circle. Christ is also in this person’s life, but He is not in control. Self is on the throne making the decisions. As a result, life is filled with chaos, frustration, and discouragement. Everything is out of proper order. Why? Because you and I were never designed to be the lords and masters of our lives.



Which circle represents your life? The good news is nothing prevents you from enjoying the abundant life Jesus came to give you. All you need to do is yield to Him the same place He enjoys throughout creation. Will you step down from the throne of your life and give Jesus control. My prayer is that you will do that right now in the quietness of your heart.

2. His Appearance

Verse 13 continues, He was “clothed with a garment down to the feet, and girded about the chest with a golden band. His head and His hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and His eyes like a flame of fire; His feet were like fine brass, as if refined in a furnace.”

Bible commentators are divided over the meaning of **Christ’s clothing**. Some say it is a symbol of His priesthood. Others say it pictures His kingship. I believe it is a symbol of both. Like Aaron the high priest (Exod. 28:34), Christ does wear a robe reaching all the way to the ground. But, unlike Aaron, His waistband is made of gold, not purple or scarlet, indicating that Jesus is our royal high priest. Therefore, as Hebrews 7:25 puts it, He is the guarantee of “a better covenant” than Aaron. Because “He is able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He ever lives to make intercession for them.”

Doesn’t that make you feel secure? Jesus offered Himself as the complete payment for your sins, crying out from the cross, “It is finished! Paid in full! Nothing more need be done!” But He also loves you so much that He is praying for you before the Father’s throne, ensuring that nothing will ever steal your salvation. It reminds me of Jesus’ words to Peter before his temptation and fall. “Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has desired to have you, that he may sift you like wheat: but I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail.” If you are a disciple of Jesus, that is what He is doing for you each and every moment of your life as your royal high priest. He is at the Father’s right hand praying for you, that your faith may not fail.

Notice also the **color of Christ’s hair**. Verse 14 says, “His head and His hair were white like wool, as white as snow.” Again the scholars disagree. Some say it is a symbol of His purity or wisdom. Surely both are true. But Daniel 7:9 gives the best explanation for this symbol. In describing the Messiah, it says, “His garment was white as snow, and the hair of His head was like pure wool...I watched till thrones were put in place, and the Ancient of Days was seated.” This, then, is a picture of Christ’s eternity, ruling forever and ever as our Lord and King.

Have you recognized this about Christ? That He is the divine and eternal Son of God? Most religious people are happy to call Jesus a great teacher or a mighty prophet. Mahatma Gandhi, the holy man of India, openly declared his admiration for Jesus and said he was glad to give Him an equal place with Buddha, Confucius, and Mohammed. But he said, “I cannot place Jesus Christ on a solitary throne.” And yet, that’s what Jesus demands. He demands that we give Him the throne of our lives. For He is much more than a prophet or a teacher. He is God in human flesh, co-equal with the Father and deserving of your worship and obedience. Jesus said in John 8:24, “If you do not believe that I AM (the Old Testament name for God), you will die in your sins.” So bow your heart to Him today. Remember Doubting Thomas’ reaction when He saw the Risen Christ. He fell at His feet saying, “My Lord and my God!” (John 20:28) You need to do that too. You need to recognize who Jesus is and give Him the worship He deserves.

Verse 12 adds, “**His eyes** were like a flame of fire.” What does this mean? Revelation 2:23 unlocks the mystery. Something we discover as we study this book is that each description in chapter 1 is repeated in one of the letters to the churches, emphasizing an attribute of Christ they were forgetting. So how does Jesus describe Himself to the compromising Christians in Thyatira? Revelation 2:18 begins, “These things says the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire,” explaining in verse 23, “And all the churches will know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts. And I will give to each one of you according to your works.”

This is a reminder of His perfect knowledge and judgment. Often we fool ourselves pretending that Christ doesn't notice the little compromises we make with sin—things we read, things we watch, the ways we talk, and the ways we spend our money. But we're wrong! As Hebrews 4:13 reminds us, nothing escapes His notice, for "all things are naked and open unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do." So the challenge is to hide nothing from our Savior, but to confess all our sins to Him, asking for forgiveness and the grace to begin again. Do you know the little song we teach children in Sunday School? It's true for adults as well.

*O, be careful little hands what you do.
O, be careful little hands what you do.
For the Father up above is looking down in love.
So be careful little hands what you do!*

There are other verses to it as well. "O, be careful little eyes what you see. O, be careful little ears what you hear. O, be careful little lips what you say." The point is: Someone incredibly holy is watching over us who cares about everything we do. So, in a grown-up way, we need to ask ourselves, "How will this look to the One with eyes like a flame of fire?"

Notice also **Christ's feet**. Verse 15 says, "His feet were like fine brass, as if refined in a furnace." In other words, they're red hot and ready for judgment. That is what furnaces picture in the Bible. They are symbols of judgment. Remember the fiery furnace into which Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were cast? The same is also true of feet. The way that a conquering general demonstrated his power and victory over an enemy was by placing his foot on his neck. Is there anything more like that mentioned about the feet of Christ in the book of Revelation? Yes! Notice what Revelation 19:15 says the feet of Jesus will do. First, it says He will rule the nations with a rod of iron, and then it adds, He will "tread the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God." Summing it up, then, what does Christ's appearance to John picture for us? His eternal power and glory as earth's coming King. Now notice a third fact about Him.

3. His Power

We immediately see a hint of this in verse 15, where John says, "And **His voice** was as the sound of many waters." I learned the meaning of this while visiting Narada Falls with my family. Compared to Niagara Falls, Narada Falls is a baby waterfall. But still I found as I stood in its spray, all other sounds were drowned out by the roar of its waters. So it is with the voice of Christ. When Jesus speaks, all other voices lose their impact. At creation, He commanded, "Let there be light!" And there was light. At Bethany, He shouted, "Lazarus, come forth!" And a dead man came hobbling out of his tomb. But the greatest display of His power will be at His second coming. Jesus said, "The hour is coming...when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God...and come forth—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation." (John 5:25-29)

Today our ears are assaulted by the foolish babble of arrogant men trying to impress us with their wisdom. But one day soon Jesus will return, and when He speaks, all other voices will be silenced in His presence. "For," Isaiah 11:9 says, "the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea." In other words, what Jesus says will be the only topic of interest in that day. So let me ask you. Whose voice are you listening to today? The voice of

the political pundits and late night comedians? Or are you faithfully studying what God says in His Word, eagerly responding to the promptings of His Holy Spirit?

Notice also how John describes **Christ's hand**. The hand of God is a symbol of His power. Proverbs 21:1 says, "The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord, like the rivers of water; He turns it wherever He wishes." But here John also emphasizes its contents. "He had in His right hand seven stars." To what does this refer? Verse 20 explains, "The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches." What is that about? Who are the angels of the seven churches? The Greek word **angelos** simply means messenger. It can mean a heavenly messenger if the context warrants it. Or, as in this case, because of the context, it refers to a human messenger. After all, what would be the purpose of writing letters to angelic beings? For example, Revelation 2:1 says, "To the angel of the church of Ephesus write."

So, if these are not heavenly angels, what are they? Most Bible teachers agree that it is a reference to the pastors of the seven churches. I like what the late J. Vernon McGee wrote: "I like to think that it refers to the local pastors." Then he added, "It is good to hear a pastor called an angel; sometimes we are called other things." By the way, if this does refer to the pastors of the churches, it should be a great encouragement to church members. Why? Because of where they are—right in the center of Christ's hand. Which implies that as faulty and flawed as we are, Christ is in control of us, and when you pray for us, your prayers make a difference.

Next John says that there is a "sharp two-edged sword" coming out of **Christ's mouth**. This refers to the power of God's Word. Ephesians 6:17 calls it "the sword of the Spirit," our weapon for destroying Satan's lies. Hebrews 4:12 adds that it is "sharper than any two-edged sword." But the word for "sword" is different in this passage. It refers not to the small sword used by Roman soldiers in hand-to-hand combat, but to the large two-handed sword used to decapitate the leader of a defeated army. As such, it signifies the complete and final victory of Jesus Christ over all His enemies. This is something that will come about not by some great excruciating effort on His part, but simply, 2 Thessalonians 2:8 says, "by the breath of His mouth" and "the brightness of His coming." Revelation 19:15 adds, "Out of His mouth goes a sharp sword, that with it He should strike the nations..."

Finally, notice how John describes the face of Jesus. He says that looking into the face of the glorified Christ is like staring into the "sun shining in its strength." Have you ever tried that? To stare into the brightness of the sun? How long could you do it? It's actually not a good idea because you can damage your eyes that way. This was what the disciples saw on the Mount of Transfiguration. (Matt. 17:2) Jesus was transformed before them, so that "His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became as white as the light." In fact, it was so overwhelming that the disciples, like John here on the Isle of Patmos, fell on their faces in worship. Why? Because the face of Christ is simply the most glorious sight that human eyes can see. Revelation 20:11 says it will be so glorious that heaven and earth will flee away from Him in terror.

But that is not His desire for us. Instead, His desire is to comfort the Apostle John saying in verse 17: "Do not be afraid; I am the First and the Last. I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore. Amen." Maybe this is what John was looking back on when he wrote, "There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears is not made perfect in love." Just as comforting is His statement, "I have the

keys of Hades and Death.” In popular culture, the devil is in charge of hell. But Jesus corrects that misconception. The truth is that the devil is just a creature, whereas Jesus is the Creator in control of everything that happens in His universe. Therefore, if we belong to Him, we never need fear death or hell again. Those of you involved in jail ministries can appreciate this. Once that door clangs shut behind you, you want to be sure the jailer remembers you and that your name is on his list. Why? Because he is the one with the authority to let you out. Similarly, we who belong to Jesus Christ don’t need to fear death anymore. Why not? Because He holds the keys to both death and hell. And finally, consider one more fact about Christ.

4. His Assignment

In verse 19, John is given an assignment: “Write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after this.” To miss what John is told here is to fail to understand everything else that is written in this book, for this is the key verse and outline for everything that follows. To summarize it, John was told to write about three things: (1) “The things which you have seen.” This refers to his vision of the glorified Christ in chapter 1. (2) “The things which are.” This refers to the events of the seven churches which he will address in chapters 2 and 3. This part of the outline will be helpful when we try to decide when Jesus is returning for His church—whether it’s before or after the Tribulation—for in chapters 2 and 3, much is said about the church on earth. But in chapter 4, when John begins to write about (3) “the things which will take place after this” (the third major division of the Revelation), nothing more is said about the churches on earth. This should make us wonder. If the church is still on earth going through the Tribulation, then why is there nothing more said about the church until we read about the Bride of Christ at the end of the Tribulation? (Rev. 19:7-10)

One other fact I must point out, though it is not found in chapter 1. While there is only one revelation in this book—the Revelation of Jesus Christ—there are actually two prophecies. Revelation 1:19 records the first prophecy, which is a chronological account of the Church Age, the Tribulation that follows, and the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. An outline looks like this:

Prophecy #1—Revelation 1:19

1. The Things Which You Have Seen—Revelation 1
 - A. The Introduction to the Revelation—1:1-11
 - B. The Vision of the Glorified Christ—1:12-20
2. The Things Which Are—Revelation 2 to 3
 - A. The Letter to the Church in Ephesus—2:1-7
 - B. The Letter to the Church in Smyrna—2:8-11
 - C. The Letter to the Church in Pergamum—2:12-17
 - D. The Letter to the Church in Thyatira—2:18-29
 - E. The Letter to the Church in Sardis—3:1-6
 - F. The Letter to the Church in Philadelphia—3:7-13
 - G. The Letter to the Church in Laodicea—3:14-22
3. The Things Which Will Take Place After This—Revelation 4 to 11

- A. The Worship of the Church in Heaven—4:1-11
- B. The Seal Judgments—5:1—7:14
- C. The Trumpet Judgments—8:1—11:14
- D. The Return of Christ and the Hallelujah Chorus—11:15-19

But jumping ahead to Revelation 10, we find the second prophecy of this book. John is told to eat the “little book” that lies in the angel’s hand. This is all that remains of the seven-sealed scroll that Christ has opened. When he eats it, he is told, “You must prophesy again concerning many peoples, nations, tongues, and kings.” This is a characteristic of Jewish writing. Having been given a chronological outline of the last days, John is now told to go back and fill in the details. In other words, chapters 12 through 22 is a topical study giving us details about characters and events like the Antichrist, the Battle of Armageddon, the Return of Christ, the Thousand-Year Kingdom, the Judgment of Satan, and the New Jerusalem. He is an outline:

Prophecy #2—Revelation 10:11

1. War in Heaven Between Lucifer and Michael’s Angels—12:1-17
2. The Beast and the False Prophet—13:1-18
3. The Lamb and the 144,000 on Mount Zion—14:1-20
4. The Bowl Judgments—15:1—16:21
5. The Judgment of Religious and Political Babylon—17:1—18:24
6. The Return of Christ to Earth—19:1-21
7. Thousand-Year Kingdom of Christ and Great White Throne Judgment—20:1-15
8. The Advent of the New Earth and the New Jerusalem—21:1—22:21

It happened one spring day just prior to the Civil War. A young man stopped by Wrothy Taylor’s farm looking for work. The farmer knew nothing about him except his name was Jim and he claimed to be a hard worker. So he gave him a job milking cows, cutting fire wood, and doing other odd jobs. Jim ate in the kitchen, slept in the hayloft, and as summer passed, found himself falling in love with the farmer’s daughter. So he summoned up the courage and asked him, “Mr. Taylor, may I marry your daughter?” “No,” was his reply. “You have no name, no money, no prospects for the future.” And he roughly sent him away. Thirty-five years later, the farmer decided to build a new barn. So he tore down the old hayloft where Jim had slept. And there wouldn’t you know it, the farmer found that Jim had carved his full name on one of the rafters—“James A. Garfield”—who went on to become the 20th president of the United States.

We tend to overlook the meek and humble, regardless of what might lie beneath the surface. That is especially true of the One many of us worship today. For 20 centuries, mankind has seen Him as the ever-patient Lamb of God, slain for sinners. But that perception is about to change. Jesus is coming soon, and when He does, we will see Him in all His glory. What will be our reaction? We will fall on their faces in worship, confessing that Jesus is Lord to the glory of God the Father. But it will be too late for salvation then. Today is the day of salvation! So if you have not yet given Him center place in your life, do so today. It will bless you both for time and all of eternity!