

Seeing Christ

Text: Revelation 1.9–16

Theme: The majestic splendor of Christ's glory demands our obedience

Introduction – First impressions make quite an impression, don't they

- think back to the first time you met someone important
- what did you think? Did they meet your expectations before you met them?

In 1987, I had the opportunity to meet Billy Graham

- he had come to lead the Red River Valley Crusade in Fargo, ND
- for months, the churches had been preparing, training getting equipped for follow-up
- then, the evening before the crusades were to begin, Graham wanted to meet all pastors
- senior pastors, youth pastors, etc came to the NDSU stadium to hear Graham challenge us
- then we all got to go through a receiving line
- I was understandably nervous, and somewhat in awe of the man
- he was just shy of 70 at the time, 6'2" and still vibrant in his spirit
- it came my time to greet him & be greeted
- he shook my hand, thanked me for my work in the local church & in the crusade
- he asked that God bless me, as well as all the others
- and then I moved on: less than 30 seconds
- it was a delightful moment, one I'll never forget

That, however was nothing, compared to what John was given to see in Rev. 1.9–16

- this was, of course, not the first time John had seen Jesus
- he saw him on the shore of the Sea of Galilee
- he spent the better part of three years with Jesus, hearing Him, watching Him
- he saw Him die on a cross, crucified by the Jews & Romans
- then three days later, he witnessed the resurrected Jesus, come back to life
- 40 days following that, he observed Jesus ascend into the heavens
- and yet, he had never seen Jesus like he was seeing him now

This vision of the resurrected, ascended, and glorified Jesus captured him

- when told to write down all that he was seeing and would see, of course, he obeyed
- and this is what happens when we encounter Jesus, isn't it?
- to see, with the eye of faith given us by God through the Holy Spirit...
- to comprehend who Jesus is, what He's done, arrests our attention
- He commands our spirit, becomes Lord over all our life
- and this is exactly what we see here, and the rest of Revelation
- the majestic splendor of Jesus Christ's glory demands our obedience
- and it is this which will see us through any and all trials and tribulations

So, this morning, as we consider this text, let's use that "eye of faith" and see Jesus

Before we see Jesus though, we learn of...

I. John's Brotherhood & Partnership

- John uses these two words to describe himself
- in doing so, he leaves no room for error as to who he is, and why he's writing
- he also identifies so closely with the members of the seven churches, they pay attention now

1. Brother

- this is common language in the NT for each one who is born again
- when you receive Jesus, you become part of the family of God
- and when members of a close family rejoice or suffer, the whole family does likewise
- so John lets them know he is right there with them in their struggles

2. Partner

- the word John uses here is literally, “I am fellowship in your tribulation and so forth”
- this is true fellowship; more than coffee time at church, fellowship is a shared experience
- it is going through something together, holding on to each other as you hold each other up

3. Tribulation, Citizenry, and Endurance

- John makes it very clear he is a brother and partner in these three things

1) tribulation

- tribulation was nothing new to John
- he’d endured it while being with Jesus on earth, over 60 years previously
- he’d come under it while serving the churches in Asia, some of which he helped start
- and, under Roman emperor Domitian, he had suffered cruelly
- tradition tells us that the emperor had John boiled in oil, but miraculously, he did not die
- so he was sent into exile on this small, rocky island 40 miles off the coast
- he was there as a political exile, but don’t doubt for a moment the true reason
- “on account of the word of God & the testimony of Jesus”
- Domitian wanted to be worshiped as a god; if you confessed him as Lord, you were fine
- John could not, would not do so; and thus, here he is in exile

2) kingdom

- *“Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and put you to death, and you will be hated by all nations for my name’s sake.”*

(Matthew 24:9 ESV)

- this was expected as a citizen of God’s kingdom
- *“through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.”*

(Acts 14:22 ESV)

- when you trust Jesus to forgive you of your sin, cleanse you of your guilt, you become a citizen
- as such, you become aware that you will not be experiencing your best life now
- no, your best life will come when the skies are split by the shout of the archangel
- when you suffer much tribulation, patiently endure whatever afflictions you’ll face in life
- when you follow in the footsteps of those before us, including Jesus, then your life will shine

3) patient endurance

- this is what is required by all who face tribulation: endure! Persevere
- this is a mark of all the citizenry of God’s kingdom: endure! Persevere
- this will be a key theme in entire letter to seven churches: endure! Persevere
- indeed, it is a part of the song of Revelation: a call to patient endurance of tribulation as we await the coming of Christ’s kingdom in all of its fullness

4. What John received

- note now, in **v. 10**: *I was in the Spirit*
- this is a frequent occurrence in Scripture for a prophet when God uses him

- some have described it as a trancelike state; I don't know what it would have been like
- I do know this is what it truly means to be carried along by the Spirit receiving Word of God
- note also: this occurs on the Lord's Day
- John has probably been worshiping God, either with fellow exiles or on his own
- but it is significant because this was the day on which Jesus rose again
- and he is about to see the resurrected Christ again...but in a far different way than on earth
- then this thundering voice speaks: **v. 10b**
- and John writes; indeed he must for as he sees the majesty of Christ's glory, he cannot do other
- the seven churches have been mentioned in his greeting, but now they are named
- now, let's move into the next portion and see...as well as hear what John did

II. Seeing Christ

- just one quick mention of how to receive this description of Jesus
- John is attempting to put into human words that which cannot really be done so
- and so, he says, I saw what looked like...and it was like...and it's like
- he uses human grammar—metaphor and analogy—to help us, the readers, to understand
- vv. 12–16

1. Son of Man, v.13

- John saw someone who looked human
- indeed, Jesus had come to earth and took on human flesh...Christmas, first Advent
- but it wasn't just while He was on earth: He's still Son of God in human flesh now
- but He is no ordinary human being like you and me this morning
- you may remember Jesus' prayer in John 17.5
- *"And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed."*
(John 17:5 ESV)

- here in Revelation 1, we see that prayer answered and fulfilled
- yes, Jesus still has human flesh, but it is glorified as the risen Lord that He is
- we also hear a reference to the OT again, don't we
- *"I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him.
And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed."*

(Daniel 7:13–14 ESV)

- here He is: Jesus the risen Christ: commanding, redeeming, all-glorious
- we have this from John because Jesus wanted us to see Him as He is with our eye of faith
- so many times we have a picture of Jesus in our minds
- but I dare say, it is seldom like this one...and it should be for this is who He is this moment
- and in the rest of the phrases of these few verses, we see where Jesus prefers to be
- *"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."*

(Revelation 1:13 ESV)

2. His preferred place

- in the midst of the lampstands: thanks be to God we don't have to wonder what this is
- the lampstands represent the churches
- so here is Jesus, standing in the midst of His churches

- can you imagine how comforting this would be to these and other churches?
- facing tribulation, persecution, death and terrors of all sorts
- yet here is your Lord right there with you, walking in your midst
- He keeps the fires of the gospel burning
- He watches and strengthens you and the leaders of each church
- don't ever be ashamed to be part of the church: Jesus surely isn't, no matter what

3. His priestly work

- clothed with a long robe: this is a description of a priest
- and what kind of priest do we have in Jesus?
- *"For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin."*

(Hebrews 4:15 ESV)

- He is perfect, the ultimate High Priest; we'll never need another anywhere at any time
- see the picture here? Here in our midst, even now, is our Mediator
- He represents us before the Father at this very moment and always
- he intercedes for us, protecting us from any accusation brought against us
- add to that this *"golden sash around His chest"* and you have a complete picture of Jesus
- this is the garb of a king, and is Jesus not that also?
- He is the perfect king, ruling over kings on earth
- when you're in the middle of fierce suffering, you want to know He rules over your gov't

4. His perfect wisdom

- *"the hairs of His head were white, like white wool, like snow"*
- today, elderly people are not highly respected; usually mocked or disregarded
- but in the days of the Bible, the aged were highly regarded for their wisdom
- He Jesus reveals His eternal wisdom
- again, John's readers would have been drawn back to Daniel
- *"As I looked, thrones were placed, and the Ancient of Days took his seat; his clothing was white as snow, and the hair of his head like pure wool; his throne was fiery flames; its wheels were burning fire."*

(Daniel 7:9 ESV)

- by this connection John is saying clearly: Jesus is God, the Ancient of Days
- therefore, He is all-wise, all-knowing, pure and right

5. His penetrating gaze

- *"His eyes were like a flame of fire"* — there it is again: "like", not literally, but still!
- can you imagine John gazing into Jesus eyes?
- how could he hold that look, surely it made him feel shallow and small and impure
- here is the Christ: not just looking upon a man, but into him as well
- the flame of pure righteousness will burn away that which is meaningless and frivolous
- He will do this to Thyatira in ch. 2
- but don't think for a minute these fiery eyes are angry eyes; no, no, no
- these eyes of Jesus should make us want to run TO Him
- we welcome Him as He burns away the last of our impurity

6. His permanent foundation

- look at this Son of Man's feet: burnished bronze, refined
- iron is strong, but rusts; copper is weak, but endures
- mix the two and you get bronze: the best of both metals

- this and the refining process is to say that Jesus' foundation of power is true, tested, enduring
- again, given the shifting winds of change for the worst then & now: what a comfort

7. His powerful voice

- **v. 15b:** *"His voice was like the roar of many waters"*
- before we're told what the glorified Christ says, we're told about His voice
- have you ever been to Niagra Falls? When you're near it's base on the tour...wow!
- the roar of water is such that you can barely hear yourself think, let alone others' voices
- when Jesus speaks He cannot be ignored!
- you know people that make you wish you had a remote with volume control
- not so with Jesus; you couldn't if you wanted to, but why would you?
- you want to hear every word the risen Lord says to you

8. His prized possession

- *"In His right hand He held seven stars"*
- again, we don't have to wonder what these are: we are told in **v. 20:**
- *"the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches"*
- each church is represented in heaven
- but more than that, we read there in **v. 20:** *"in My right hand"* — in Jesus' powerful hand
- He holds His church always and forever
- the gates of hell will never, ever stand against it; against us!

9. His penetrating word

- *"from His mouth came a sharp two-edged sword"*
- this image gets used three more times in this letter
- each time it is a metaphor for words of judgment spoken by Jesus
- these words penetrate—it is a sharp sword, after all
- but it has two sharp sides; it cuts both ways—judgment and salvation
- judgment upon the unbeliever, and life and salvation for the believer
- give thanks to God often and always for this word from Christ

10. His personal radiance

- *"His face was like the sun shining in full strength"*
- this is what Moses was exposed to, so even his own face took on some of the radiance
- this would have reminded John's readers of Aaron's blessing
- *"the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you;"*

(Numbers 6:25 ESV)

- do not we who live in central Minnesota in the cold of winter love the bright sunshine?
- we bask in its glory; it reminds of us the warmth of summer
- imagine this face of Jesus shining down upon you...for it is!

Conclusion – as we draw to a close on this glorious vision of Jesus, see v. 17a

- *"When I saw Him, I fell at His feet as though dead"*
- it would be that way if you saw Jesus at this very moment
- we're not ready, not glorified, not finally purified yet
- we still have sins to confess & repent of
- we have thoughts and motives that we ought to be ashamed of knowing Jesus sees them
- yes, fall at His feet as though dead!
- however, look at the very next words: *"But..."*
- oh, the power of contrast: *"But He laid His right hand on me, saying, Fear not."*

- Fear not—these words from the majestic glorified Lord will sustain us
- through harsh words from a doctor, through pain from a spouse
- through wayward children, horrendous work conditions and so much more
- He is Christ! He is Risen! He is all-glorious!
- He is here in our midst, loving us, protecting us, strengthening us
- Behold: the Son of God became a man that the sons of men might become the sons of God
- and He is our Lord. Even so, Amen!