

CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

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Series:	Special Messages		Pastor/Teacher
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Text:	Revelation 1:9-18		
Date:	April 13, 2014 a.m.		

The Glorious Son of Man

The well-known hymn "In the Garden" is not one of my favorites – and that's an understatement! In addition to dripping with excessive sentimentalism and an unbiblical mysticism, it gives an equally unbiblical impression of the Person of Christ. Simply compare the lines of this hymn to the first chapter of Revelation. The English essayist and literary critic Charles Lamb once said to the poet Robert Browning: "If Shakespeare was to come into this room, we should all rise to meet him, but if Christ was to come into it, we should all fall down and try to kiss the hem of His garment." Lamb's comments are reflective of John's response to seeing the glorified Lord.

I. THE REVELATOR AND THE RECIPIENT

John's response is one of holy terror. "I fell at his feet as though dead" (cf. Daniel 10:7-9). He was completely overwhelmed by what he saw. Why was John so overpowered?

A. Christ's Holiness

Like Isaiah 6:1-8, John's sight of the holiness of Christ cause him to see his own sinfulness. This is *always* the response of people when they are confronted with the presence of God (cf. Exodus 3:5,6; Ezekiel 3:22-23; 43:2-3; Luke 5:9).

B. Christ's Glory

When the disciples (this included John) beheld Christ's glory on the Mount of Transfiguration, they shook with fear (Matthew 17:6). The reverential fear of God will *always* accompany any true vision of Christ's glory (I therefore dismiss without hesitation all the bogus reports of those who claim to have been transported to heaven and to have carried on casual conversation with Jesus!) *Fearing God*, although presently out of vogue with many people including an alarming number of Evangelicals (who prefer a user-friendly model for God), is the beginning of a true knowledge of God (cf. Proverbs 1:7; Ecclesiastes 12:13).

There is an eloquent doxology that describes Christ's achievements with special focus on His priestly work. In fact as one writer has pointed out, "The entire book of Revelation is saturated with the thought of redemption by His blood. It opens with ascriptions of praise "unto him that loved us and washed us from our sins in his own blood." Everywhere on its pages the epithet most frequently given Him is 'The Lamb,' the symbol of atoning sacrifice. In the midst of the throne He is beheld, 'a lamb as it had been slain.' The redeemed are represented as having 'washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.' It is said 'the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them and lead them unto living fountains of waters.' This great multitude which 'stood before the throne and before the Lamb... cried with a loud voice saying, Salvation to our God which sitteth on the throne and unto the Lamb.' The victorious hosts are represented as 'overcoming by the blood of the Lamb.' The redeemed church is 'the bride, the Lamb's wife.' Their names are written in 'The Lamb's book of life.' The New Jerusalem is described as having no need of sun, 'for the glory of God did lighten it and the Lamb is the

light thereof'; and 'the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it.' The river of the water of life proceeds 'out of the throne of God and of the Lamb.'"¹

C. Christ's Reassurance

The glorified Christ gives John *three* reasons not to be afraid:

1. He identifies Himself as the *Living One*, the first and the last (cf. Isaiah 41:4; 44:6; 48:12). "It is the expression," notes Trench, "of absolute Godhead...He is from eternity to eternity, so that there is no room for any other."²
2. He was dead and became alive again – no mere man could conquer death, only Christ Jesus, the incarnate Son of God could.
3. He has the keys of death and Hades; He is the Sovereign One and the destinies of all humanity rest in His jurisdiction.

Jesus' self-identification as "the living one," even the one "living unto the ages of the ages," refers to his resurrection from the dead and proves that he has this sovereign attribute as "the first and the last." He is able to control even the historical forces of death. "First and last" also includes the characteristic of eternity and it therefore an interpretation of Christ's portrayal as the "Ancient of Days" (1:14), which has now been demonstrated by his resurrection. The threefold formula describing the resurrection in v. 18a ("living...dead...living") cannot be accidental but is designed as a legitimation of the transcendent attribute of v. 17b, being modeled on the threefold temporal formula of 1:4 and 1:8, to which v. 17b itself is closely related. From this similarity of the threefold clauses the careful reader should discern that Jesus' death and resurrection was an integral working out of the divine purposes in history and established that he himself was guiding history. For Christ to say that he is "the one living unto the ages of the ages" is another ascription of deity, since this was a repeated phrase for God in the OT (Deuteronomy 32:40; Daniel 4:34).³

D. John's Commission

The revelation given to the Apostle is to be given in turn to the Seven Churches. He is to write: WHAT YOU SEE (the vision of the Glorified Christ), WHAT IS (the state of the Seven Churches), WHAT IS TO TAKE PLACE (the consummation of human history and eternal state).

CONCLUSION: James Ramsey, the noted 19th century Reformed commentator summarizes our passage.

"'Fear not;' for His dominion is universal, extending over the invisible world. 'I have the keys of hell and of death.' Hell here is not the word used to express the place and state of eternal punishment; but the state of the dead – the unseen world with all its secrets of glory and woe, with all its mighty powers of good and of evil, everything beyond the grave. Death is His servant. Its sting is removed. It can no longer injure the soul united to Christ. Its very nature to them is changed, so as to become a means of final deliverance from the curse; or rather a process by which the body so polluted and cursed by sin shall be laid aside, to be in due time renovated and fashioned like unto Christ's glorious body. Death – the dissolution of the body – is the form in which Christ comes to sever the last link that binds His redeemed to the first Adam, and through which the curse was inherited. It had already been severed as to the soul, and so the claim of the curse even to the body had been annulled. Christ's holding the keys of the unseen world and of death, beautifully expresses His presence and agency in the whole process of dissolution and transition. Disease and violence, in whatever forms they may come, though in those most appalling to mere nature, are not the agents; they are the mere forms which *He* in His wisdom chooses, to effect the change, and in them He would have His presence recognized. Not a soul can pass from this world to the next, except just at the time and in the circumstances which He ordains. He presides over the whole process of your departure, believer, and that of those you love; His own loving hand must fling back the

bolt that holds you a prisoner here; death, which is the form of the curse as it relates to the body, is thus, as the result of redemption from the curse, compelled to place the crown upon the believer's brow, compelled with His own hands, as it were, to sever the last tie which binds the curse upon the redeemed. That tie severed, the all-seeing eye of this Redeemer watches the sleeping dust, till His voice shall call it forth in a form of eternal youth and vigour.

“Not only its entrance, all the power of that unseen world are under His control. All those vast domains where mighty spirits transact the stupendous concerns of the spiritual world; the hosts of rebel angels, and of ministering spirits unto the heirs of salvation, are under His eye and hand; and neither angel nor devil wings his flight of mercy or of wrath but by His power and at His will.

“Thus from the chamber of death and the gloom of the grave, and the mysterious powers of the unseen world; from all nature and providence, as well as from the cross of Calvary, and the blood of Jesus, and the majesty and glory of the Mediator's throne, there arises in universal harmony this one assurance to every believer, ‘Fear not.’ It is the voice of our Redeeming God in all His works and ways, to all His church and each of His fearful saints.”⁴

ENDNOTES

¹ S.L. Morris, *The Drama of Christianity: An Interpretation of The Book of Revelation* (rpt. Baker, 1982), p. 15.

² R.C. Trench, *The Seven Churches* (rpt. Klock & Klock, 1978), p. 51.

³ G.K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation* (Eerdmans, 1999), p. 214.

⁴ J.B. Ramsey, *Revelation: an Exposition of The First 11 Chapters* (rpt. Banner of Truth, 1977), p. 67.