

CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

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THE VISION AND THE VOICE TO THE POSTMAN OF PATMOS

The book of Revelation, as Poythress has pointed out: “is addressed to *his servants* – not just prophecy buffs, Ph.D.’s, experts, or angels, but *you*. If you are a follower of Christ, this book is for you, and you can understand it. The third verse says, *Blessed is the one who reads the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it, because the time is near*. God knew that some of his servants would hesitate over this book. So he gives extra encouragement to our reading by pronouncing an explicit blessing. Revelation is the only book in the whole Bible with a blessing pronounced for reading it!”¹ The last book of the Bible opens with the words, “The revelation of Jesus Christ. . . .”² That is its title or inscription. What follows is a statement about the book’s scope and design -- the unfolding of God's purposes in human history and its consummation. The prologue of the book is unique because it contains a blessing for the reader (one who reads out loud) and for those (notice the change from the singular reader to the plural) who hear. In the early church the epistles were read out loud to the congregation. However, more than just listening is involved in the blessings, for we note “and take to heart what is written in it, because the time is near.” Verses 4-8 constitute the greetings to the seven churches and one of the doxologies of the book of Revelation. Notice that “grace” and “peace” are extended from Him “who is, and who was, and who is to come” (an allusion to Exodus 3:14 in the Septuagint), “and from the seven spirits before his throne.” This probably refers to the Holy Spirit in His sevenfold fullness (cf. 3:1; 4:5; 5:6; comp. with Isaiah 11:2)³, “and from Jesus Christ.” A statement regarding Christ's preeminent Person and glorious work as redeemer concludes the doxology, and the first declaration concerning the Alpha and the Omega (comp. 21:6; 22:13) finishes this section. On this glorious theme, Liddon has written: “This is the hymn of the whole visible creation, and to it a response comes from the inmost circle of adoring beings, ratifying and harmonizing this sublime movement of universal life: *And the four creatures said, Amen*. And how does the redeemed Church on earth bear her part in the universal chorus of praise? *Unto Him That loved us, and washed us from our sins in His Own Blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and His Father; to Him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen*. It is surely impossible to mistake the force and meaning of this representation of the adoration of the Lamb in the Apocalypse. This representation cannot be compared with the Apocalyptic pictures of the future fortunes of the Church, where the imagery employed frequently leaves room for allusions so diverse, that no interpretation can be positively assigned to a particular symbol without a certain intellectual and spiritual immodesty in the interpreter who essays to do so. You may in vain endeavour satisfactorily to solve the questions which encompass such points as the number of the beast or the era of the millennium; but you cannot doubt for one moment Who is meant by *the Lamb*, or what is the character of the worship that is so solemnly offered to Him.”⁴ Our task now is to examine verses 9-20: the glorified Christ’s appearance and special commission to John.

I. **THE RECIPIENT OF THE REVELATION.** The writer identifies himself again (1:1) in verse 9. That this John is the same John who wrote the Gospel of John and the three epistles that likewise bear his name is widely accepted by evangelical scholarship.⁵ The fact that he does not call himself an apostle is in harmony with his reticent style, as evidenced in his Gospel (John 21:20). His only badge of identification is that he is “your brother and companion in the suffering and kingdom and patient endurance that are ours in Jesus.”

- A. **His Location.** John was on the island called Patmos in the Aegean Sea. This little 5 by 8 mile pile of rocks sets about 35 miles over the coast of Asia Minor (Turkey). As the crow flies, it is about 60 miles southwest of Ephesus. Ancient tradition states that John, the last of the Apostles, was banished to the penal colony of Patmos by the Roman Caesar Domitian. Verse 10 tells us why.
- B. **The Time.** We cannot give an exact calendar date, but John declares that the vision came to him “on the Lord's Day”⁶ while he was “in the Spirit,” an expression not to be confused with Paul's language in Romans 8:9. By this, John refers to an experience much like that which Paul describes in 2 Corinthians 12:2 (cf. also Revelation 4:2; 17:3; 21:10).

II. **THE REVELATOR: THE GLORIFIED CHRIST.** Having given his circumstances, John now details the substance of the revelation by first describing the VOICE and then the Person in the VISION.

- A. **The Voice.** The voice was heard behind him. It was like a trumpet, that is, loud and clear. This is the voice of Christ, not the angel mentioned in verse 1. In verse 15 the voice “was like the sound of rushing water,” literally a voice of many waters. The thought is of “the deep, awe-inspiring sound of masses of moving waters (cf. 14:2; 19:6; Daniel 10:6 in the Septuagint).”⁷
- B. **The Vision.** In it, John saw the ascended Lord of the Church who is walking among the seven golden lampstands. His appearance is envisioned under the following symbols.

1. **Long Robe with Golden Sash** -- The robe was worn by both Prophet (Zechariah 3:4) and Priest (Exodus 28:4; 39:29). The sash is like that described in Daniel 10:5 which rounds out the three-fold offices of Christ of Prophet, Priest and King.
2. **His Head and His Hair** -- They are white “like wool, as white as snow.” This speaks of more than just purity. “This is not meant to represent Jesus’ sinfulness or his holiness, but his deity. Christ shares this feature with God the Father himself (Daniel 7:9), whose raiment is white as snow and the hair of his head like pure wool. In Daniel, these features belong to the *ancient of days*. John used them to show that Christ shares eternal existence with the Father.”⁸
3. **His Eyes** -- His eyes “were like blazing fire” (cf. Daniel 10:6). Fire is everywhere in Scripture a symbolism of Divine anger (comp. Genesis 19:24; Isaiah 9:18,19; 10:17; 30:27; Ezekiel 38:19,22; Daniel 7:9; II Thessalonians 1:8; Hebrews 10:27; 12:29; Revelation 11:5; 20:9). His eyes are the eyes of Omniscience -- comp. 19:12.
4. **His Feet** -- His feet were like “bronze glowing in a furnace.” J.A. Seiss writes that this “presents an image of pureness which is terrible. And upon these feet of

dreadful holiness that our Lord walks among the churches, and shall tread down all abominations, and crush Antichrist and Satan, and all who unhappily set aside his authority and his claims.”⁹

5. **His Voice** – “like the sound of mighty waters.”
6. **In His Right Hand** – “he held seven stars” (cf. verse 20).
7. **Out of His mouth** – “a sharp double-edged sword” (comp. Hebrews 4:12 and Revelation 19:5). By His Word He commands and it is done; He speaks and it is so.
8. **His Face** – “like the shining of the sun in all its brilliance;” the eternal glory of Christ, a glimpse of this glory was seen by John before (Luke 9:28-32; comp. 2 Peter 1:17-18).

Dennis Johnson comments: “Jesus reveals himself to John in the language of prophetic symbolism, not in a literal description of his resurrection body as he now sits at God’s right hand. We are not to think that the glorified body in which Jesus ascended to heaven now has a sword in place of a tongue, snow-white hair, or a face so overpowering with physical light that it cannot be viewed with joy by the pure in heart (see Matt. 5:8; Rev. 22:4). The symbols seen by John in the vision reveal not what Jesus looks like but what he is like – his identity as the searcher of hearts, full of consuming holiness and boundless wisdom, the perfect priest standing for his people before the Father, the perfect king defending them against the devil by his invincible Word. Revelation’s visions show us how things are, not how they look to the physical eye.”¹⁰ Trench, in his masterful study, carefully notes: “This description of the glorified Lord, which has now been brought to a conclusion, sublime as a purely mental conception, but intolerable, if we give it an outward form and expression, and picture Him to ourselves or to others with this sword proceeding from his mouth, these feet as glowing brass, this hair white as wool, and the rest, may suggest a few reflections on the apocalyptic, and generally the Hebrew symbolism, and on the very significant relations of difference and opposition in which it stands to the Greek. Religion and Art for the Greek ran into one another with no very signal preponderance of the claims of the former over the latter. Even in his religious symbolism the sense of beauty, of form, of proportion, overrules every other, and must at all costs find its satisfaction; so that the first necessity of the symbol is that it shall not affront, that it shall satisfy rather, the aesthetic sense. Rather than it should offend this, it would be moulded and modified even to the serious injury of the idea of which it was intended to be the exponent. But with the Hebrew symbolism it is altogether different. The first necessity there is that the symbol should set forth truly and fully the religious idea of which it is intended to be the vehicle. Thus the New Jerusalem *lieth foursquare; the length and the breadth and the height of it are equal* (Rev. 21:16). A city, constituting thus a perfect cube, is simply inconceivable to us; but the divine Seer did not care that we should conceive it; he was only careful to express the fact that this was a City which should never be moved; and of this fact the tetragon was the aptest symbol. In the present, as in so many other cases, how the idea would appear when it clothed itself in an outward form and shape, whether it could clothe itself in this at all, and, if it could, whether it would find favour and allowance at the bar of taste, as satisfying the conditions of beauty, this all was a secondary consideration. Nay, we may affirm that this was not a consideration at all; for indeed, with the one exception of the Cherubim, there was no intention that the symbol should embody itself outwardly, but rather that it should remain ever and only a purely mental conception, the unembodied sign of an idea – I may observe, by the way, that no skill of delineation can make the Cherubim themselves other than unsightly objects to the eye. Thus in this

present description of Christ, sublime and majestic as it is beyond all conception of ours, it is only such so long as we keep it wholly apart from any external embodiment.”¹¹

SUMMARY: “The entire description gives us first an overwhelming impression of omnipotence, and then certain symbols pointing to judgment.”¹² It is one of the single greatest passages in Scripture in revealing the Deity of our Lord Jesus Christ.

ENDNOTES

¹ Vern Poythress, *The Returning King: A Guide To The Book of Revelation* (P&R, 2000), p. 12.

² The words *iesou christou* may be objective or subjective genitive. If objective, it would be the revelation about Jesus Christ; if subjective, the revelation by Jesus Christ. The words “gave him” favor the subjective genitive, as Beale has observed: “The opening expression (*revelation of Jesus Christ*) could mean that the *revelation* is given by or from Jesus (subjective genitive or genitive of source). However, the phrase may also include the idea that the revelation is about Jesus (objective genitive), since *Jesus* could be understood in this sense in a number of passages in the book (1:9; 12:17; 14:12; 17:6; 19:10a, b; 20:4; cf. 6:9; 12:17; 19:10), though this is contested by many. The immediate context does favor the subjective genitive: (1) the following clause says that *God gave* (or revealed) the revelation to Jesus; (2) Christ is set within the chain of revelation, so that he is one of the agents who reveals (see below); (3) in the NT and Revelation prophecy comes from Christ to a prophet, and the content of the message is not always information about Christ. Rev. 22:16, 20 confirm this by portraying Jesus as the One who bears revelatory testimony through his angel to the churches. G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: The New International Greek Testament Commentary* (Eerdmans, 1999), p. 183.

³ “The designation of Christ as having the seven spirits (3:1) and of the seven Spirits as belonging to both God and Christ (4:5; 5:6) is in keeping with New Testament usage which identifies the Holy Spirit with the Spirit of God, and the Spirit of Christ, cf. Romans 8:8.” I. T. Beckwith, *The Apocalypse of John*, Baker reprint 1979, p. 425.

⁴ H. P. Liddon, *The Divinity of Our Lord* (rpt. Klock & Klock, 1979), p. 383.

⁵ Justin Martyr (A.D. 150) and Hippolytus (A.D. 190) both attest to John as being the Apostle, cf. D. J. Theron, *Evidence of Tradition*, Baker, reprint 1980, pp. 88-91.

⁶ Some have tried to refer this expression to the eschatological Day of the Lord, but it refers specifically to Sunday, as most commentators agree *kuriakei hemerai* (literally “the day belonging to the Lord”) is not the same as *hemera kuriou* (“day of the Lord,” 2 Peter 3:10).

⁷ Beckwith, p. 439.

⁸ G. E. Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John* (Eerdmans, 1972), p. 33.

⁹ J. A. Seiss, *The Apocalypse* rpt. (Zondervan, 1970), p. 40.

¹⁰ D. E. Johnson, *Triumph of The Lamb: A Commentary on Revelation* (P&R, 2001), p. 60.

¹¹ R. C. Trench, *The Seven Churches* (rpt. Klock & Klock, 1978), p. 46.

¹² Wilbur Smith, “Revelation” in *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary*, eds. C. F. Pfeiffer and E. F. Harrison (Moody, 1962), p. 1502.