

## Series Revelation

### This Message #2 Revelation 1:9-20

Last week was our introduction to the book of Revelation. In the first 8 verses we learned that this book was a revelation by God the Father. It was His purpose to unveil information which would provide hope and encouragement for His people.

Another lesson from the previous lesson is that the book is the Revelation of Jesus Christ. That's the title, and we are informed that Jesus will return to earth to complete His work of bringing all things in the physical creation under the authority and control of the Father. All the, as yet, unknowns about Jesus, who has been exalted to the highest place in heaven and given the name that is above every name, will be revealed at the end of the age. He will be recognized as the Lord of lords and King of kings.

We also learned who the book is for: it is a prophecy "to show to the servants of Jesus what must soon come to pass." In providing the information in this book, the Father was preparing the followers of Jesus for the end of the age.

The contents of this book were provided by God the Father; they concern Jesus Christ, and are for the enlightenment of believers, to provide for them comfort and encouragement. Believers who read, study, and take to heart what is written in the book are promised a blessing.

Let's remember that the overarching theme of our study is "**The Victory of Christ and His Church Over Satan and the World.**"

As I said previously, the theme verse we will use in our study is from chapter 17: "They (the forces of evil) will make war against the Lamb, but the Lamb will overcome them because he is Lord of lords and King of kings, and with him will be his called, chosen, and faithful followers" (*Revelation 17:14*).

The passage for today describes the first vision given to John. This vision introduces us to the glorified person of Jesus Christ and His concern for the spiritual health of the Church which is under His control and care.

## **Read Revelation 1:9-20**

Most scholars agree that the Apostle John is the author, although there is some uncertainty about this because John never identifies himself as an apostle, but rather refers to himself as a “servant/slave,” or a “prophet,” and, in verse 9, as the “brother and companion” of believers who were suffering because of their faith in Jesus. Scholars also point out the significant differences which exist in the grammar and style between the Gospel of John and Revelation, leading to the conclusion, in some of their minds, that these two Scripture portions were written by two different men. However, the early church leaders were almost unanimous in ascribing both the Gospel and Revelation to the Apostle John.

John explained that he was on the island of Patmos when he received the vision. Patmos was a volcanic and rock strewn island just 10 miles long and 6 miles wide in the Mediterranean Sea about 50 miles off the coast of Asia Minor, in what is today modern Turkey. There was a mining industry on the island, but it is not known if John was forced to work in the mines as part of his exile.

John wrote that he was “on the island of Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.” In the time of Emperor Nero, Christians were suspected of promoting a new and, from the standpoint of the Romans, potentially dangerous religion. Apparently John’s influence as a highly respected church leader brought him to the attention of the Roman authorities. He would have been in his early 80s when he was sent to Patmos. One of the Jewish historians reported that John was banished to the island in the year A. D. 95, but was released 18 months later by Emperor Nerva, the Roman emperor between 96 and 98 A. D.

John emphasized his identity with his readers. As a “brother and companion” in the Lord, he mentioned three areas of commonality: “suffering,” “kingdom,” and “patient endurance.” The first of these words signifies “affliction,” “distress,” and “persecution.” The word is often translated “tribulation.” In the last part of the 1<sup>st</sup> Century, believers in several areas of the Roman empire were beginning to experience social ostracism, economic exploitation, harassment and threats of judicial action, imprisonment, and, in some cases, like that of John, exile.

The middle area of commonality was “kingdom.” The recipients of this letter understood that the “kingdom of God” had to do with the rule of God in their lives. During His years on earth, Jesus had thoroughly explained the characteristics of God’s rule to His disciples, starting with the Sermon on the Mount. He frequently made detailed comparisons between the attitudes and behaviors of hypocritical religious leaders and members of God’s family. After the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit confirmed the rule of God in the lives of those who placed their faith in Jesus. Believers understood they had citizenship in heaven while they lived on earth. They understood that they were “to serve God” in the midst of this evil age.

Jesus had also explained that Godly living in this world would bring suffering and persecution. All the New Testament writers pointed out that the proper response for the believer to suffering and persecution is “patient endurance.” That was the third term mentioned by John. The term means to, first, be faithful to God in the face of oppression by the enemies of God and, second, to persevere against the temptations and evil of the world. The vertical aspect is faithfulness to God and the horizontal aspect is “patient endurance” and “perseverance” in the world. “Patient endurance” is a theme which is emphasized throughout the book of Revelation.

John stated that he was “in the Spirit” when the vision began. This phrase signifies that he was linked in some special way with the Spirit of God and was therefore able to see and hear but not necessarily with physical eyes and ears. While “in the Spirit” John heard an unusual “voice like a trumpet” which commanded him to “write on a scroll what he saw.” His writing was to then be sent to seven of the churches in the province of Asia. There were actually more than seven cities with church fellowships in Asia Minor, but the church fellowships in these particular designated cities were apparently chosen because they were representative of the conditions of other fellowships. Next week, when we begin to study the individual fellowships, we will discover that each one had its own particular set of problems and served as an example for other church fellowships.

When John turned to discover the source of the voice, he “saw seven golden lampstands and among the lampstands someone ‘like a son of man.’” A 1<sup>st</sup> Century lamp was a receptacle with a reservoir for oil and a spout with a small hole through which a wick would protrude. Lampstands would typically have branches for as many as seven lamps. According to verse 20, the seven lampstands represented the seven churches.

The position of the “son of man” in the midst of the seven golden lampstands was the most striking feature of this vision. John’s attention was drawn not only to the glorious appearance of the person who was there, but to the central place He had in the life of the churches.

The description of “a son of man” who was standing among the lampstands was originally given in the book of Daniel. Daniel, in one of his visions, saw “one like a son of man coming with the clouds of heaven” to “approach the Ancient of Days” from whom he was given “authority, glory, and sovereign power.” It was announced in Daniel’s hearing that the dominion of the “son of man” was “an everlasting dominion that would never pass away, and his kingdom one that would never be destroyed” (*Daniel 7:13-14*). Several centuries later, John looked upon the same person that Daniel had seen.

There are 8 successive statements about the appearance of this “son of man.” Each description is drawn from the Old Testament and introduces themes that will carry throughout the remainder of the book. We must not think of John’s description as literal. The separate descriptions were intended to “trigger” memories and make “spiritual associations” in the minds of the readers of this letter with Old Testament writings. The accumulated images portray not the actual visage of the “son of man” but His glory and power.

The long robe and golden sash was similar to that worn by the priests in the Old Testament tabernacle (*Exodus 28:4*) and would evoke thoughts of Jesus as the great High Priest of believers. The head and hair were “white like wool, as white as snow.” Wool and snow were the closest equivalents of pure dazzling whiteness that people in the 1<sup>st</sup> Century had. John’s readers would understand what the wool and snow represented, and they would also recall Jesus’ appearance when He was transfigured in the presence of Peter, James, and John. Mark wrote in his gospel account: “His clothes became dazzling white, whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them” (*Mark 9:3*). The whiteness represented the glory and dignity of the “son of man.”

The “eyes were like blazing fire.” They were eyes that penetrated deeply into the center of every spiritual circumstance. We might imagine eyes that are like the x-ray vision of Superman, only more effective. Nothing is hidden from the view of the risen Lord. He is able to scrutinize every human thought and action. The eyes are associated with judgment in later chapters. The “son of man” can recognize and will act against every incident of disobedience and rebellion.

His “feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace.” The imagery depicts the life of Jesus in both its absolute purity and its strength. There are no specific verses to which the imagery of the feet can be linked, but some scholars suggest it is a picture of Jesus coming through the fires of justice which were poured out on Him while He was on the cross bearing the sins of humanity. Others suggest the blazing feet are a picture of the righteous holy path He walked while on earth.

Next we read that “his voice was like the sound of rushing waters.” In other places of Scripture, the “roar of rushing waters” is likened to thunder or crashing waves. On the island where John was, the roar of the ocean was nearby and always in John’s hearing. “Rushing waters” and “crashing waves” imply power and authority. The voice that John heard at the beginning of the vision was “like a trumpet.” It was loud enough to capture his full attention.

“In the right hand of the son of man were seven stars.” In Scripture, the right hand symbolizes authority and control and ownership. In verse 20, the stars are identified as “the angels of the seven churches.” These “angels” belonged to the “son of man.” The word “angels” also means “messengers,” and it is not known conclusively if these angels were heavenly creatures who watched over the church fellowships, like guardian angels, or if they were humans who served as church leaders. We don’t know for sure. However, the word for “angels” appears 67 times in this book, and in every occurrence the word refers to supernatural spiritual beings, so this is the most likely interpretation.

*[Note: there is an interesting possibility suggested in Daniel. Near the end of Daniel’s final vision, he was informed that “those who are wise and impart wisdom to others will shine like the brightness of the heavens and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever” (Daniel 12:3). It is possible that the “stars” in the right hand of the “son of man” were His witnesses in the church fellowships.]*

“Out of the mouth of the ‘son of man’ came a sharp double-edged sword.” This sword will be mentioned several other times in this book. In each case, it is associated with judgment. We must not associate this symbol of the sword with the sword-swallower act at the circus. Biblically, the sword of the Lord is a symbol of His Word. Think about all the significant events in creation history which have come about as the result of the spoken Word of God: each step of creation was spoken into existence; Jesus spoke and storms were stilled, lame people were healed, and dead people were raised.

The words of the “son of man” will be especially effective at the end of the age. The Apostle Paul wrote that Jesus will destroy the “man of lawlessness” with the breath of His mouth (*II Thessalonians 2:8*). When the kings of the earth assemble their armies for battle against Jesus, they will be destroyed with the sword which comes out of the mouth of Jesus (*Revelation 19:21*). The point is that the words of God are more powerful and authoritative than any weapons in human hands.

The last description of the “son of man” was of the appearance of His face. It was “like the sun shining in all its brilliance.” John had actually witnessed this phenomenon on a previous occasion. At the transfiguration on the mount, Jesus’ “face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light” (*Matthew 17:2*). The shining appearance was an indication of His divine glory.

I’m sure you noticed that John had to use similes when writing up the report of what he saw. A simile is a figure of speech involving the comparison of one thing with another thing of a different kind. John did not have human words adequate to describe what he saw, so he had to resort to statements such as “his hair was like wool,” his “eyes were like blazing fire,” his “feet were like bronze,” “his voice like the sound of rushing waters,” and “his face like the sun.” It is impossible for us to comprehend the appearance of the glorified Jesus.

What John saw caused him to “fall down as though dead.” This has been the natural reaction of many of God’s people through history. An encounter with deity is so awesome that not only is breath taken away but also the life force of a person. There is no physical strength remaining in the body. It required the touch of the “son of man” to revive John, and provide comfort and reassurance to him.

The name of the “son of man” is not given in the passage, but verses 17 and 18 remove any doubts about who He is. He is, first of all, the “I am” of the Bible. This was the name by which God revealed Himself to Moses and the people of Israel — the name by which God revealed His eternal nature. In the Gospel of John, Jesus described Himself as the “I am” in several ways, such as: “I am the bread of life” (*John 6:48*), “I am the light of the world” (*John 8:12*), “I am the Good Shepherd” (*John 10:11*), “I am the resurrection and the life” (*John 11:25*), “I am the way, the truth, and the life” (*John 14:6*).

Here in the book of Revelation, John was given two additional “I am” statements by Jesus: “I am the First and the Last,” the One who was before all things and who will remain forever, and “I am the Living One; I was dead but now, behold, I am alive forever and ever.” The emphasis in both of these statements is on the eternality of Jesus. He and God the Father share existence from “before all things” to “remaining forever.”

The final description of Jesus refers to His power over cosmic forces of death and Hades. It was through His suffering, death, and resurrection that He won the right to have the “keys of death and Hades.” Keys grant their holder access to storage places and areas which are excluded to everyone else. In the New Testament the word “Hades” is used in two ways. It can refer to the place of all the departed dead, including the righteous dead (*Acts 2:27, 31*) and, hence, is synonymous with “the grave.” More commonly, the word “Hades” refers to the place of departed wicked people (*Luke 16:23; Revelation 20:13-14*). The point here is that Jesus, having Himself overcome death and escaped Hades, is now in the position to determine who will come out of death and Hades to be with Him and who will stay there. The entire matter of eternal death and eternal life is under the authority of Jesus.

I hope this awesome picture of the glorified Jesus will linger in our minds. We need to let the reality of Jesus sink into our thoughts. The picture of who He is needs to occupy our thoughts throughout each day. He is the Lord of lords and King of kings. He needs to live in us as the Lord and King of our lives. We need to bow before Him and honor Him.