**I AM THE LIVING ONE**

(THE VISION OF THE GLORIFIED JESUS)

June 23, 2019

Revelation 1:9–20

Key Verse 1:18 “I am the Living One; I was dead, and now look, I am alive for ever and ever. And I hold the keys of death and hades.”

The theme of Revelation is the majestic revelation of the exalted, glorified Son of God after his ascension in heaven and in his second coming. This vision of the glorified Jesus Christ must have been a monumental encouragement to the persecuted, distressed, discouraged believers in Asia Minor who first received this great book. They were undergoing persecution which under Domitian had resulted in John himself, the author, being exiled and banished to the island of Patmos. In this very difficult time when it looked as if things were bleak for the church, it was a wonderful thing to receive a book which predicted the glory of Jesus Christ not only in the future but also described the present glory of Jesus Christ as we see it here in this passage. This vision of Jesus Christ is not a future vision, it is a present vision. It is not one that says this is what Jesus Christ will be like and what he will do in the future, it is one which says this is what he is like now and this is what he is doing now. It depicts Jesus Christ in majestic glory in the present ministry to his church, which was going on even then and is going on even now and shall be until he comes again. My prayer for you as we look at this vision is that it will open your eyes to see the glory of our Lord, the Lord of the church.

Look at verse 9. “I, John, your brother and companion in the suffering and kingdom and patient endurance which are ours in Jesus, was on the island of Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.” We learn from these words what Christian life is like. Today some say that if we believe in Jesus, we will live our best, most blessed life, because God will shower down riches and honor upon us. That may be true in some cases. But here the Apostle John tells us that we are all supposed to be sharing in “the suffering and kingdom and patient endurance that are ours in Jesus.” Why is that? The Bible tells us that everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted (2Ti3:12). It tells us we are called to follow in the footsteps of Jesus, who suffered for us (1Pe2:21). It says we are called not only to believe in him but also to suffer for him (Php1:29). It is not a popular message, but it is the truth. A major theme of Revelation is “patient endurance” (e.g. 13:10; 14:12). Often, when people begin to suffer, they can’t handle following Jesus, and they are quick to fall away (Mk4:17). But when we suffer, God wants us to patiently endure and be faithful to Jesus.

John was exiled to the island of Patmos. Patmos is a barren place, a rocky little island. It was about forty miles west of Miletus. Doomed to a rock of exile, John was given the most extensive revelation of future things ever given. Look at verses 12-16. “I turned around to see the voice that was speaking to me. And when I turned I saw seven golden lampstands, and among the lampstands was someone like a son of man, dressed in a robe reaching down to his feet and with a golden sash around his chest. The hair on his head was white like wool, as white as snow, and his eyes were like blazing fire. His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of rushing waters. In his right hand he held seven stars, and coming out of his mouth was a sharp, double-edged sword. His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance.” John saw the vision of the glorified Son, and he saw the Lord of his church, and he saw him in the midst of his church.

What is this picturing for us? It is the ministry of the glorified Son in his church - here and now, not some future time. The voice is the voice of the risen, glorious Christ. “I turned around to see the voice that was speaking to me.” And as he turns, instead of seeing only the glorified Christ, he sees first of all, seven golden lampstands. Verse 20 says that they are the seven churches. So he is seeing a vision of the churches. These were portable lampstands, made of gold, that would be set around a room, and at night, a little oil lamp would be set in them for light. The church, then, is seen as God’s lampstand from which the light of life shines. The church is the light of the world. God’s people are assembled in churches so that they can shine forth the light. Each church is a light in its own location. So John sees the glorified Lord in the midst of his precious church. In this picture, we can see what the glorified Christ does for his church, what he was doing then, what he has been doing for two thousand years, what he is doing for his church now, what he is doing for us, what he is doing for you.

**First**, he empowers his church. Look at verse 13a again. “Among the lampstands was someone like a Son of man.” Son of Man is the messianic title for the Lord Jesus Christ and John sees him, the Lord of the church. What is he doing? He is moving in the midst of his church. It pictures him there with his presence amidst the church. The great promise that Jesus Christ gave his apostles was that he would never leave them and he would never forsake them but he would always be with them. In Matthew 28:20b, Jesus said, “Surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” What you see here is the living, exalted, glorified Christ in the midst of his church. Why is he there? To empower his church. We are empowered by the indwelling living Christ. He is present to empower his church. We do not worship some crucified martyr. We do not worship some dead heroic religious leader. We do not worship lifeless idols like stones or golden stature. We have continual communion with the living Christ.

**Second**, he intercedes for his church. Verse 13b says, “…dressed in a robe reaching down to his feet and with a golden sash around his chest.” It indicates Christ in his priestly role. The priests in the Old Testament wore on their chest, a little above their armpits, a sash. Jesus is our High Priest. Hebrews 4:14-16 says, “Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to emphasize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just we are—yet he did not sin. Let us then approach God’s throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.” He is interceding for us before God now. He has unequalled capacity to sympathize with us in all our dangers and sorrows and trials and temptations. He was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin, so he knows the path of victory in every temptation. What comfort this is for the persecuted church, to know they have the high priest moving in their midst, seeking their blessing! So we see the glorified, exalted Christ is present to empower his church, He is present to intercede for his church.

**Third**, Jesus purifies his church. Look at verse 14. “The hair on his head was white like wool, as white as snow, and his eyes were like blazing fire.” He is seeing the blazing, white, brilliant, shining glory of Christ, and coming out of it like two lasers, one from each eye, come the very flames of fire. What is this? This is the holy, glorious, exalted Lord with searching, penetrating gaze, looking to the depths of his church. In Revelation 2:18, the Son of God there also is seen with eyes like a flame of fire, penetrating in to see the church. When Christ moves through his church in his holy glory, his penetrating eyes see absolutely everything. There are no secrets. There is nothing hidden from him whatsoever. The Lord of the church is holy. The Lord of the church sees everything, and he will deal with the sin of his church.

**Fourth**, Jesus controls his church. Look at verse 16a. “In his right hand he held seven stars.” According to verse 20, the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches. They are messengers. Each of those churches has a representative messenger, somebody who represents the church, and Jesus controls them. Most likely they are seven prominent leaders in the church - elders, pastors. And Christ is saying, “I hold you in my hand as a symbol that I hold all the leadership of that church in my hand.” Each must be a significant leader to be held in the hand of Christ.

**Fifth**, Jesus protects his church. Look at verse 16b. “…coming out of his mouth was a sharp double-edged sword.” The Lord of the church has a sword, and he wields it in defense of his church. He will protect his church. He doesn’t mean to fight the battle on the outside. He means to fight it on the inside. Anybody inside the church that threatens the life of that church, anyone who tries to sow lies, any unbeliever who comes in to corrupt the church, Jesus says, “I will take my sword out and I will use it.”

How did John respond to this vision? Look at verse 17a. “He fell at his feet as though dead.” He thought he had seen the glory of God, so it must be his time to die and go to heaven. But look at verses 17b. “Then he placed his right hand on me and said: ‘Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last.” What does John have to fear? The Holy God in the form of the living, glorified Lord of the Church reaches down and touches this sinner and says, “Do not be afraid.” The touch is the touch of comfort. Amazing reassurance because it comes from the eternal I Am, the one who alone is life and gives life, the one who has died and conquered death, and the one who controls life and death. “John, you have nothing to fear.” Likewise, anyone who loves Jesus has nothing to fear. No matter how unworthy we feel, no matter how deserving of the judgment of God, no matter how fearful of death, Jesus touches us and says, “Do not be afraid; you belong to me. I, the eternal God, have determined your destiny. I have paid the price for your sin. You have nothing to fear.” We need to have fear – holy fear – but balanced with a tender touch of assurance. But if God is for us, who can be against us? How wonderful that the God-man touched John himself and said, “Do not be afraid.”

Look at verse 18. “I am the Living One; I was dead, and now look, I am alive for ever and ever. And I hold the keys of death and Hades.” The living One is a title for God in the Bible. In Joshua 3:10, God is called the living One. In Psalm 42:2,God is called the living One. In Hosea 1:10, God is called the living One. Matthew 16:16 says, “Simon Peter answered, ‘You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.’” Jesus says, “I am the living One.” This is a claim to deity. He is saying, “I am God, the living One.” What does it mean? He is not a dead idol. He is not made out of stone or wood or metal. The glorified Lord of the Church is the eternally living God who was before all gods and will remain after all gods. He is the I Am. Isn’t it mind boggling that the living God is the one who touches the sinner and comforts the sinner?

Then Jesus reminds John, “And I hold the keys of death and Hades.” Death and Hades, in a way, are synonyms, although if you want to make a distinction, death is the condition, and Hades is the place. Hades would be the equivalent of Old Testament Sheol, the place of the dead. He says, “I have the keys.” What does that mean? Keys mean access. Keys mean authority. A key gives someone the power to open and close, and the living, exalted Christ says, “I am the one who controls the door to death and Hades. I have the keys that open it and let people in. I have the keys to close it. I decide who dies and when. I decide who lives.” What a statement! The early Christians may have felt like their persecutors held the keys of death, but in fact, Jesus holds those keys. We won’t go until he calls us. And he calls us to bring people to faith in him, so that they can get out of the dungeon of death and Hades.

In verses 19-20 John is commissioned to write this letter to the precious people Jesus redeems. Even John in his old age had more to do for God. We learn that Jesus is glorious in heaven, but he is also deeply concerned about his churches in the real world today.

What should we do with John’s glorious vision of Jesus? It may seem impractical compared with all the pressing problems we are facing in our lives. But the glorious vision changes our hearts and transforms us. 2 Corinthians 3:18 says, “And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.” Here the word “contemplate” means to look at as in a mirror, or to behold. Looking at the glory of Jesus gives us a clear vision. It points to our glorious hope in his kingdom. It strengthens and renews us. It makes us bold. It takes away our fear. We need to stop rushing through life and take the time to really contemplate his glory, to take it all in. When we do, we are slowly transformed into his image. So what are you looking at? When you think too much about this world, about its leaders and problems, or about people in your lives, or about material things or even about yourselves, you tend to get dark and depressed. But when we contemplate the glory of Jesus, we become bright and strong like him, and faithful and true witnesses like him.

May God help us through our study of Revelation to really contemplate the glory of Jesus.