



The Great Vision
Revelation 1:9-20
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If you spend too much time listening to talk radio and/or watching the news and opinion programs on television, you probably have bouts of anxiousness, concern, worry, and possibly even depression. Some say the America we currently know will be long gone before the current political administration is done. The freedoms we have are being stripped away day by day.

We all experience dark times in our lives when we feel like we are being attacked and beaten down at every turn; times when one thing after another seems to get dropped on your shoulders. We go through periods of times and even seasons where it appears as if nothing is going your way. You feel lonely in the middle of a crowd of people you know and love, and at least for short spurts of time, your life and your world don't make sense.

Let's take things a step further; you are going through all of this when as best you know how you are following God's call on your life; you are obeying the Lord's commands, you are lining your life up with God's Word, and everything falls apart in your view of things anyway. As much as you try not to question God and as much as you attempt to remain faithful through it all, questions flood your mind and your concept of God's involvement in your life gets a little shaken if not jaded.

I am sure that even in a crowd the size of ours this morning, many of you are shouting on the inside, "*Been there, done that!*", or "*I'm there right now!*" But I am also sure that most, if not all, of you have also come through those dark times; and I am sure that some have also seen God use those times to give you a fresh vision or perspective on things.

The Apostle John watched, as one by one, all of his fellow Apostles were martyred. John was the only one of the Twelve left on this earth; though not without many scars.

But in the midst of this seemingly unfair treatment for being a faithful follower of Jesus Christ for some sixty to seventy years, John receives a great vision from the Lord; probably the greatest vision any human has ever received. At the very least, this vision rivals the visions of Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel.

Turn with me in your Bibles to the Book of the **Revelation**.

Revelation 1:9-20

Let's pray.

Revelation 1:9a

John identifies with those who are persecuted and going through difficult times by calling himself their **brother and fellow partaker in the tribulation and kingdom and perseverance**.

The **tribulation** or suffering refers to all manner of trials, whether they are the daily difficulties and afflictions of life or they are severe persecution. John wants them to know that they are not alone in their distress; possibly reminding them of the words of Jesus

when He said, “**In the world you have tribulation**” (**John 16:33**) – or possibly the words of Paul when he said, “**Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted**” (**2 Timothy 3:12**).

A quick application point for us is to understand that the struggles and trials we face are common among committed believers, and that our handling of these struggles and trials can be used by God to encourage and strengthen others (**2 Corinthians 1:3-5**).

The **kingdom** reference is a word of encouragement to remind them of what lies ahead; to help them see the big picture and know their suffering is not in vain.

The **perseverance** reference is to instruct them to endure to the end; to follow the example left for us by Jesus Christ to patiently endure anything that comes your way in this life.

Revelation 1:9b

Patmos is a rocky and somewhat barren island in the Aegean Sea between the coasts of Italy and Turkey. It is approximately eight miles long and four miles wide. There is no official record but it appears to have been some sort of natural prison-island/rock-quarry where the Romans dropped offenders off and left them there to eventually die. The vegetation and wildlife is sparse and the island is about forty miles from any other land mass. Most would die of starvation or from exposure to the elements within a relatively short period of time if indeed they were exiled there with no help of any kind.

If this was a penal colony of sorts where they were completely exiled, it is a mystery as to how John happens to have parchment and ink to write what we now know as the Book of Revelation. It is also a mystery as to how this letter was then distributed to the seven churches as it states. These mysteries do not diminish the message or the authenticity of this Book but more so confirms that God’s hand was in this. It is obviously also possible that the Romans patrolled the island and at least gave some minimal provisions to those who were sent there, if only to prolong their agony on this uninhabited island.

Revelation 1:9c

The reason John is in exile on this rock jutting out of the sea is because he was preaching **the Word of God and the testimony of Jesus**. Did you get that? John is following the commands of Scripture and he is exiled to die on this desolate island in the middle of nowhere.

And we whine and moan when the temperature in the church is not quite where we would like it to be, or when the music is too loud or too soft or too upbeat or too mellow, etc. We gripe and grumble when things aren’t done the way we like it to be done or when the church leadership makes a decision you wouldn’t have made.

Revelation 1:10a

Notice John’s response to his tribulation and circumstances: He worships! Some try to read into what it means to be **in the Spirit**, but Jesus Himself made that clear in **John 4:23** when He said, “**the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth.**” So the phrase, **in the Spirit** is simply telling us the John’s response to his predicament is to worship God. How refreshing!

And beloved, even if this phrase means something more intense than simple worship, even if it means he is in some way supernaturally possessed of the Holy Spirit, it is still brought about by worship, which leads to the next section of this passage:

Revelation 1:10b-11

In this state of pure worship, John's spirit is prepared to receive a vision from the Lord. John is communing with God on such a level, he is content with his circumstances at such a level, and he is open to whatever the Lord has for him at such a level, that he says, **"I heard behind me a loud voice like the sound of a trumpet."**

I truly believe most Christians do not hear from God today because they are so wrapped up in their own lives and in pursuing their own comfort that they are spiritually deaf. Our lives are filled with so much "noise" that the blast of a trumpet and the sound of a loud voice is drowned out by our own voices crying out for more, more, more! Nobody is content, nobody is worshiping in the midst of minor inconvenience, let alone severe trial and tribulation, and nobody is communing with God on such a level that the worship of self is set aside.

How lost would we be if we didn't have the Book of Revelation to show us how things will eventually turn out? And would we have the Book of Revelation if John was not humble enough and content enough and in communion with God enough to receive this vision in the midst of severe tribulation?

The message to John is to **"Write." Write in a book what you see, and send it to the seven churches.** I understand the charge to write. The reason I write devotions, and write out these sermons, and write on Facebook, and write newsletters, and write the bulletin is for the same reason John was told to write: So others can maybe gain something from it. My writing is obviously nowhere near what John wrote under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, but it is a call to write nonetheless.

Some see my calling as that of being a pastor, but beloved, that is not my calling. My calling from God is to communicate His Word in every way possible that He allows for me. Being a pastor is a major part of that but it is not the only part, so I write.

John's call was to write what is about to be revealed to him for the benefit of the seven churches listed here. For all we know, John had no clue that what he was about to write would go any further than that; nothing in the Scripture indicates that he knew these writings would be part of God's Word that would be handed down through the ages and find its way into your hands today. He was just told to write and he simply obeyed.

Revelation 1:12a

Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking with me. Nothing is in the Bible by accident, and while this may just be a descriptor of John's immediate response, I also see it as a reminder for us today: Identify the voices you listen to.

All too often we listen to and adhere to voices that sound good but really are not worthy of our attention, let alone our allegiance. Be careful that you are not blindly following voices. Make sure you are discerning what is being said along with who is saying it. Christians have a tendency to fall in love with certain preachers and evangelists to the point of accepting every word they say as gospel truth; don't do it.

The Bible tells us to “**examine everything carefully; hold fast to that which is good; abstain from every form of evil**” (**1 Thessalonians 5:21-22**). It doesn’t say to examine everything carefully except what you hear from preachers you like, no, it says to examine everything carefully – even what you are listening to this morning.

So turn and see the voice that is speaking to you.

Revelation 1:12b

John then saw **seven golden lampstands**, which is identified in **verse 20** as **the seven churches**. It is important for us to note that the number **seven**, in Scripture, represents completeness (**Exodus 25:31-40; Zechariah 4:2**). The reason this is important is that it shows us that besides the fact that these were seven actual churches in operation at the time of this writing, they also are symbolic of the kinds of churches that exist through all of church history. Our church and every other church shares the characteristics of one or more of these churches at any given time; which is why the study of these churches beginning next week is vitally important.

Revelation 1:13a

The One John sees is the glorified Lord of the churches. The vision is one of Christ moving in the midst of His churches, which He promised when He said, “**Behold, I am with you always, even to the end of the age**” (**Matthew 28:20**). We do not worship a well-meaning martyr or a dead heroic religious leader. The living and indwelling Christ leads and empowers His church.

Jesus also promised His specific presence in another passage in Matthew that gets misapplied quite often; so let’s take a very brief moment to veer off our current topic and turn there.

Turn with me in your Bibles to the Gospel of **Matthew**.

Matthew 18:15-20

Many Christians take **verses 19-20** as a separate unit and totally ignore the context of the passage. Jesus, through the Holy Spirit, is present with us at all times, so this passage is not saying He is with us even more when we agree together, nor is it saying that somehow what we agree on in prayer is automatically blessed by Him. The immediate context and the primary application is our agreement on church discipline by confronting sin. When we follow through with the mandate to confront a brother or sister in habitual unrepentant sin and they either come to repentance or we remove them from the church, Jesus is there with us in agreement with our actions.

A secondary application could be squeezed in here as to our agreement in other issues, but if and only if we are agreeing in tandem with Scripture. It’s not as if Jesus appears when two or three are gathered in agreement and then He leaves when we are done.

Okay, let’s get back on track; I just hear this verse prayed so often I want to make sure we understand what we are praying.

Revelation 1:13b

We probably miss the significance of the clothing described in this verse. During the time John wrote this, a **robe reaching to the feet** was only worn by royalty. The **golden sash** was part of the wardrobe of the high priest in Old Testament Israel.

The Book of Hebrews shows us in vivid detail that Jesus is the ultimate King and High Priest, and this imagery in this verse simply affirms what is already known, but also makes the identity clear of this One standing in the midst of His churches.

Revelation 1:14a

The physical description that John gives us of the glorified Christ is one of supreme and utter holiness, and is a reminder to us of our call to be holy like Him.

In **Matthew 5:48**, Jesus said, **“Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”**

In **2 Corinthians 11:2**, the Apostle Paul wrote, **“I betrothed you to one husband, so that to Christ I might present you as a pure virgin.”**

Speaking of the love Jesus has for the church, Paul also wrote in **Ephesians 5:26-27**, **“so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless.”**

The Apostle Peter reminds us, **“but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior; because it is written, ‘You shall be holy, for I am holy’” (1 Peter 1:15-16).**

The word used for **white**, in the description of Jesus, has the sense of bright, blazing, and brilliant. It symbolizes Christ’s eternal, glorious, and holy righteousness; the model we are to pursue with a godly passion.

Revelation 1:14b

His eyes were like a flame of fire represents the searching, revealing and infallible gaze that penetrates to the very depths of His church. Jesus is not oblivious or unaware of the willful and mischievous sin His church commits; He doesn’t miss when we do things for our own glory or when we try to hide our own iniquity.

Jesus said, **“...there is nothing concealed that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known” (Matthew 10:26).**

Hebrews 4:13 says, **“And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do.”**

The omniscient Lord of the church will not fail to recognize and deal with sin in His church.

Revelation 1:15a

His feet were like burnished bronze, when it had been made to glow in a furnace. The red-hot glowing feet of our Lord represents His crushing and blazing judgment and authority, ready to move on those in His church who refuse to repent of their sin.

And just so you do not get the wrong idea, the judgment we are speaking of is His judgment on the church, His children, when they refuse to repent. But this is also a judgment out of sincere and perfect love, as depicted in **Hebrews 10:5-10**, where God is depicted as a loving Father who only chastens those whom He loves so they would turn back to Him and away from their sinfulness.

Revelation 1:15b

And His voice was like the sound of many waters. This is the voice of sovereign power and supreme authority. It is the voice that calls forth the dead to rise. It is the voice that brought creation into existence out of nothing. It is the voice that knocked down the Roman soldiers that came to arrest Him.

When Jesus Christ speaks, the church must listen; we must listen! How often do we ignore His voice? How many times do we tell the Lord to hold on for a minute while we take care of more urgent matters? How often do we hear His voice and then deem it not important enough for us to take immediate action?

Revelation 1:16a

In His right hand He held seven stars. Verse 20 reveals to us that the **seven stars are the angels of the seven churches**. Have you ever pictured Jesus holding seven angels in His right hand? Before we go there though, there are some problems with interpreting this as literal angels, for they, along with the churches, are commanded to turn from their sins in the next two chapters. Nowhere in Scripture do we have holy angels sinning after the fall of Satan.

The Greek word for angels can also be translated as messengers and is probably in view here. These messengers are much more likely to represent the pastors of these seven churches. So let me rephrase the question: Have you ever pictured Jesus holding seven pastors in His right hand?

Christ is the head of the church. Christ rules the church. Christ reigns over the church. The reason the standard for church leadership is so high is because of these things. When Christ appoints leaders for His church, they had better be leaning on Him for every decision and not depending on their own ingenuity or ideas. More often than not, the things Jesus directs His church to do go against the grain of the ideas we have. Human logic almost always flies in the face of what the Lord tells us to do. We can't look at numbers and statistics to determine what the best course of action is. Jesus doesn't care what the bank balance is when He directs His church to move on something. The Lord isn't impressed with money in the bank and clean budgets that hinder His leading at times.

In His right hand...

Revelation 1:16b

And out of His mouth came a sharp two-edged sword. Jesus will defend His church whether the attacks come from without or within. Those who attack the Lord's church, those who would sow lies, create discord, or otherwise harm His dear children will be personally dealt with by the Lord of the church.

Matthew 16:18 says, "...upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it." It may at times seem as if the world is having its way with the true

church of Jesus Christ, but beloved, do not believe it for one moment! The Lord Jesus Christ, the King of kings, the Lord of lords, the Almighty One, the Prince of Peace, the Alpha and the Omega will always, always, always defend His church! He suffered and died for His church and He will never in all of eternity turn His back on His true, redeemed, blood-bought church!

Revelation 1:16c

And His face was like the sun shining in its strength. The radiant glory of the Lord Jesus Christ shines in and through His church, reflecting His glory to all the world.

This is what we are to be; we are to be the reflection of the Lord's glory to this evil and dying world around us. Don't get so involved in the busyness of ministry that you miss this one underlying and unifying purpose of the church; to reflect the glory of the Lord.

Revelation 1:17-20

The Lord of the church is with us. Do not be afraid. Whatever He tells you to do, do not be afraid for He is with you. No matter how bleak your circumstances may be, do not be afraid for He is with you.

Let's pray.