December 20, 2015

“The Revelation of Christ”

Revelation 1:9-20

**FCF**: Under pressure to give up the faith

**PROPOSITION**: (anchor) In order to remain faithful to our Lord,

(magnet) we need a “revelation” – from and of Him.

**SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION:**

Imagine with me what it must have been like for the Magi, the wise men, to make that journey to Bethlehem. In terms of the distance and duration of the trip from Babylon, that would have been 800 miles and a good 40 days. In terms of difficulty and danger, this meant numerous attendants and guards. And in terms of doubt, well, you could sympathize with them. “*What will we find when we get there? Did we get the signs right? Is this really going to be worth it?*”

These were historical figures. But their experience is symbolic of the journey of faith. There is always the temptation and pressure to give up, to turn back. What then will sustain us?

**SCRIPTURE READING**: Revelation 1:9-20

**PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION**

**SERMON INTRODUCTION:**

I mentioned the journey of the Magi to Bethlehem. Let me tell you something of my own this past January. It’s about a half hour drive by bus from Jerusalem. Bethlehem is part of the West Bank which means it’s controlled by the Palestinians. And that means that you have to pass through an Israeli checkpoint. The signs on the side of the road are ominous (READ quote):

This road leads to Area “A” under the Palestinian Authority. The entrance for Israeli citizens is forbidden, dangerous to your lives, and is against the Israeli law.

Well, that gets your attention. As does the 8’ concrete wall, lined with watch towers, cameras, and barbed wire. Your safety is assured. But the point is made. There is a lot of animosity.

I bring this up because of the setting of our text. The Apostle John is writing from exile on the Island of Patmos. It’s the late 1st century and he’s in his 90’s. He’s writing to the churches of Asia Minor in what we know as Turkey today. They are facing three things – deceptive teaching, ensnaring wealth, and violent persecution. Put another way, the dangers are intellectual, moral, and physical. The sporadic persecution under Nero, 25 years before, is done. These are the years of the systematic persecution under Domitian. Some Christians were nailed to crosses. Others were impaled, covered with pitch and lit. Limbs tied and torn by horses. Eaten by beasts. Holes drilled into skulls and molten lead poured in. Or perhaps just beheaded.

The historical record is plain. This is what the early Church faced. Their response? They forgave, rejoiced, and stood their ground. And stunned the Roman world. What enabled them to do this? What was given to them? What did they need to face such trials? What do we need in our own trials? Friends, the simple fact is this. In order to remain faithful to the Lord, we need a revelation – from and of Him. And that revelation, that unveiling, consists of two things. First, of His glorious person. And second, of His great promises. That’s what we need.

1. **HIS GLORIOUS PERSON**

First, let’s look at this revelation of Christ’s glorious person. We see this in vv.12-18.

1. *What Was Seen*

It’s worth noting how we should read and approach these words. John is attempting to describe something that no artist, no camera, no film could ever capture – the exalted Jesus.

1. Son of Man

John saw one “like a son of man”. This harkened to the vision of Daniel of one who receives universal and eternal dominion from the Ancient of Days. It was Jesus’ favorite self-designation.

1. His clothing

John also speaks of His clothing – the robes of a priest, girded with the sash of a king.

1. His appearance

His appearance – hair brilliant white implying divine wisdom. Flaming eyes meaning a piercing vision that sees through all facades. Feet of bronze symbolizing power and strength to crush any foe. A voice like waterfalls, like the breakers upon that island, overpowering all others. A face like the blazing sun pointing to unimaginable unendurable majesty and glory. The exalted Jesus.

1. *What Was Heard*

Such is what John saw. What did he hear? What words did Jesus speak?

1. The First and the Last

(READ Revelation 1:17b) This is Jesus identifying Himself as divine. “*I am the beginning. All things start with me. I am the context of your days. And I am the ending. All things end with me. I am to be your goal, your chief end. Never confuse me with a means to any other end*.”

1. The Living One

(READ Revelation 1:17b-18) Jesus has life, gives life, and is life. “*I died to redeem my people. And I rose again. Death has no hold, no power over me. Or over them. For they are mine*.”

That we would remain faithful, Christ has given us a revelation of His glorious person. For there is more going on than we can know or see. And He is more than we can know or see.

*Illustration:*

It’s like when a child gets hold of one of their Christmas presents and tries to guess what it is. He turns it, feels it, shakes it. Every one of his senses tells him it’s socks or underwear and not that toy he desperately wanted. But underneath all the wrapping, packaging, and padding, it is! It’s the very object of his heart’s desire. But his senses have fooled him. And he’s saddened.

*Application:*

Don’t you see? There is more going on than we can know or see. And He is more than we can know or see. That’s why we need this vision. It may not be what we think we need. Or even want. But it is. When your marriage is faltering. When your career is stalling. When your health is failing. When your plans are crumbling. We need this vision of the exalted Christ.

Why? It forces things on us. To forces us to face reality and the way we’ve been dealing with it. It’s said there are two ways to live – either with God as our beginning and end or with God as the means to our end. How do you know if God is but your means? Are you mad at Him? Are you disappointed, disillusioned with Him? Friends, that can only mean there is some non-negotiable thing in your life besides Him – your vision for the marriage, the career, your health, your plans. You feel what you deserve is being denied. So now you’re coming apart.

That we would remain faithful, Christ has given us a revelation of His glorious person.

1. **HIS GREAT PROMISES**

With that, we also have this revelation of His great promises. We see that in vv.17-20.

1. *His Presence with Us*

We have the promise of His presence with us – standing with us, walking with us.

1. Lampstands – image

Look again at the vision (READ Revelation 1:12-13a). Lampstands do not create light but hold it forth in a dark world. John goes on to say these lampstands represent the seven churches.

1. Lampstands – meaning

And Jesus is said to be standing in their midst. Meaning that He is ever present. We are not alone, despite how things may appear. He is with us, always seeing and knowing all about us.

1. *His Protection of Us*

So there is the assurance of His presence. And then His protection as well.

1. Stars – image

Again, look at the vision (READ Revelation 1:16a, 20). Literally, these are the “messengers” of these churches. Now we’re not sure if that would mean earthly or heavenly messengers. There’s no unanimous opinion on that. They may well be the churches themselves. It’s hard to know.

1. Stars – meaning

But here’s the point. Jesus is said to be holding them in His right hand. Meaning that they are clearly under His protection. The implication being He will preserve and never let them go.

That we would remain faithful, Christ has given us a revelation of His great promises.

*Illustration:*

Some of you may know this year marks the end of the great sesquicentennial of our Civil War. Certainly, one of the most prominent figures of that period was the Confederate General Thomas “Stonewall” Jackson. Jackson was a devout Presbyterian, a deacon in his church and a Sunday School teacher for slaves. He got his nickname “Stonewall” in the First Battle of Manassas in July 1861. He was later asked how he could be so steady in battle (READ quote):

Captain, my religious belief teaches me to feel as safe in battle as in bed. God has fixed the time for my death. I do not concern myself about that, but to be always ready, no matter when it may overtake me. Captain, that is the way all men should live, and then all would be equally brave.

Jackson had a sense of the great promise that we see here. And it emboldened him.

*Application:*

You see, if you take this to heart and apply it to your life, it will make you dangerous. Now by that, I don’t mean you’ll be violent and destructive. That’s not my point. I mean you’ll become radical and transformative. Why? You’re free from the shackles that once bound you.

You’ll be shameless. Meaning that in response to accusations – whether from inside your head or the lips of others – you’ll be able to say, “*Actually, I’m a whole lot worse than you can possibly know. But here’s the thing. Jesus loves me a whole lot more than you can imagine*.”

So you’re shameless. And fearless. You can live a transparent life. You can confess your sin to others. And confront others in theirs. Why? You’re not living for anyone’s approval but Jesus. And you have His. Pushing further, you can risk. You can take bold steps, knowing who is with you. You’re no longer frozen by worry, indecisive about what can go wrong.

That we would remain faithful, Christ has given us a revelation of His great promises.

**CONCLUSION:**

Christ is our friend. But He is more than a friend. He is the Lord – awesome in majesty, power, and purity. We need to see, know, and hold both these things together all the time.

I can hardly think of a better image for this than a scene from C. S. Lewis’ The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe. The Pevensie children have arrived in Narnia. Mr. and Mrs. Beaver have taken them in and are explaining how it’s “always winter and never Christmas” because of the curse of the White Witch. And then the topic of Aslan comes up (READ quote):

“Oh, yes! Tell us about Aslan!” said several voices at once; for once again that strange feeling – like the first signs of spring, like good news, had come over them.

“Who is Aslan?” asked Susan.

“Aslan?” said Mr. Beaver, “Why don’t you know? He’s the King. The Lord of the whole wood, but not often here, you understand. Never in my time or my father’s time. But the word has reached us that he has come back. He is in Narnia at this moment. He’ll settle the White Witch all right. It is he, not you, that will save Mr. Tumnus.”

“She won’t turn him into stone too?” said Edmund.

“Lord love you, Son of Adam, what a simple thing to say!” answered Mr. Beaver with a great laugh. “Turn *him* into stone? If she can stand on her two feet and look him in the face it’ll be the most she can do and more than I expect of her. No, no. He’ll put all to rights as it says in the old rhyme in these parts:-

Wrong will be right, when Aslan comes in sight,

At the sound of his roar, sorrows will be no more,

When he bears his teeth, winter meets its death

And when he shakes his mane, we shall have spring again.

You’ll understand when you see him.”

“But shall we see him?” asked Susan.

“Why, Daughter of Eve, that’s what I brought you here for. I’m to lead you where you shall meet him,” said Mr. Beaver.

“Is – is he a man?” asked Lucy.

“Aslan a man!” said Mr. Beaver sternly. “Certainly not. I tell you he is the King of the wood and the son of the great Emperor-Beyond-the-Sea. Don’t you know who is the King of Beasts? Aslan is a lion – *the* Lion, the great Lion.”

“Ooh!” said Susan, “I’d thought he was a man. Is he – quite safe? I shall feel rather nervous about meeting a lion.”

“That you will, dearie, and no mistake,” said Mrs. Beaver, “if there’s anyone who can appear before Aslan without their knees knocking, they’re either braver than most or else just silly.”

“Then he isn’t safe?” said Lucy.

“Safe?” said Mr. Beaver. “Don’t you hear what Mrs. Beaver tells you? Who said anything about safe? ‘Course he isn’t safe. But he’s good. He’s the King, I tell you.”

(READ Revelation 1:17) John’s response to this vision is understandable. It’s deafening to the ears and dazzling to the eyes. But note the response of this One John has known all these years. “*Whatever may happen to you, I am who I am. I have the victory and I am with you*.”

Friends, all the reliable historical accounts tell us that this sustained John. And his readers. It was the counterweight to the great heaviness they faced. Now here’s what we need to consider. If this was enough for what they faced, then surely it must be enough for us. I don’t say that to belittle what you’re going through. Not at all. But we need to take an honest look at this, at ourselves, and think it through. If this was enough for them, surely it is enough for us.

In order to remain faithful to our Lord, we need a revelation – from and of Him. And we have it. We have it still, given to us those years ago and preserved ever since. Merry Christmas.

**PROPOSITION**: (anchor) In order to remain faithful to our Lord,

(magnet) we need a “revelation” – from and of Him.