

Revelation 1:9-20

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Date: 14 April 2024

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[0 : 0 0] of God's word. We are in the revelation of John chapter 1 verses 9 to 20. Revelation 1 9 to 20. I, John, your brother and partner in the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance that are in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. I was in the spirit on the Lord's day and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet saying, write what you see in a book and send it to the seven churches to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamum and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea. Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking to me and on turning I saw seven golden lampstands and in the midst of the lampstands one like a son of man clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash around his chest. The hairs of his head were white like white wool like snow. His eyes were like a flame of fire. His feet were like a burnished bronze refined in a furnace and his voice was like the roar of many waters. In his right hand he held seven stars.

From his mouth came a sharp two-edged sword and his face was like the sun shining in full strength. When I saw him I fell at his feet as though dead. But he laid his right hand on me saying, fear not, I am the first and the last and the living one. I died and behold I am alive forevermore and I have the keys of death and Hades. Write therefore the things that you have seen, those that are and those that are to take place after this. As for the mystery of the seven stars that you saw in my right hand and the seven golden lampstands, the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches and the seven lampstands are the seven churches. This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. You may be seated.

Well good morning. Good morning and welcome to Christ Church Chicago. Just a brief personal word as we stand this morning between two seasons in the life of our church. If you've been with us, you're quite aware that for 16 months we were traveling the terrain of Matthew's gospel. We concluded that last week.

In other words, we were looking at life through the lens of Jesus while he was in our midst. But today you can already notice by the reading of scripture, we're in a different place.

We're just going to begin a short eight-week series, not following his life and ministry among us, but his word now that he has died and been raised and ascended, his word while he appears to be absent from us. For even from the heavens, he's got something to say to the church that remains here.

[3 : 2 8] That said, I know that many of you have been moved and are considering all the implications of his life while he was here. And we've just got a little gift for you if you fall into that category.

Just stop by the welcome table today and there's just a little book I wrote called Hope. Hope and it picks up on Mary Magdalene and where we were on Easter. Maybe you're wondering whether there's hope for someone you know that's encountered death. Or maybe you've been looking at the gospel and wondering about the question that we find in other gospels, is there really anything true?

And what did he have to say to us about truth? Some of you have been wrestling with doubts. I mean all kinds of doubts. And doubt isn't always a bad thing. All these little books are out there for you, but this one on hope we'd love to just give you. It's free.

And our prayer is that it would be useful to you. Some of you might know the name of Tim Keller. He was a friend and he and I served together on different things. He was a pastor in New York City and he was kind enough to read these little books that would give you help along the way. And he commented on this series that these should be read and distributed and given out. And that's all we're trying to do is to help you think through the great questions of life while Christ was among us.

But today we move. He's not among us. We're not in Matthew's gospel for the first time in 16 months.

[5 : 12] He's not here. And so we enter into a series of what does he have to say now, if anything. The social sciences have done us all a great service in recent years by pointing out the importance of being heard and being seen. You've probably found yourself actually taking in those thoughts or speaking them yourself. Am I heard? Am I seen? For healthy human relationships, being heard and being seen is critical. Being heard of being recognized. Anybody hearing me?

This sense of the awareness that others have of your presence. Someone who's heard has a foundation for building trust.

Being seen. Am I seen? Being seen is to be valued. It's in some sense to be accepted.

In one measure, if you're seen, you have a platform then that can build a sense of security. I am then looking at our text today under these words of, am I heard? Am I seen?

Am I seen?

[7 : 11] what I'm trying to say. Did you even hear me? Do you see me? When one doesn't have that sense in human relationships, you feel devalued. We feel diminished. We can feel abandoned.

We can feel alone. We can feel forgotten. Let me heighten the tension a level. If it's true for human relationships, it's likewise true for a relationship with God. The feeling, does God see me? Does God hear me? The effect is, is God concerned with me? Does God care about me?

This feeling of not being heard or seen represents the feeling of the seven churches that we're going to look at in the next eight weeks together. They had severe, real, experiential doubts that they were heard by God or seen. This book arrives in their midst some 50 years after the death resurrection and ascension of Christ. Let me just, let me just get you into the terrain of their mind.

The glory and excitement of Easter had long ago faded. Christ was risen, but all but a few of the followers who saw it were now dead. While Jesus was said to be reigning from heaven, the churches were well aware that they are relegated to earth. Jesus supposedly was sitting on a throne, but trials and tribulations were the summation of the experience that they had known. The angels had told them he would return, set everything right, but to this point the clouds had never opened, and he remained veiled from their sight. Simply put, at an experiential level, they didn't feel heard.

They didn't feel seen. They felt abandoned, forgotten, alone, as do many under the sound of my voice today.

[9 : 47] Interestingly, the early encouragement comes in the opening verse. Verse 9, I, John, I, John, your brother and partner in the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance that are in Christ Jesus. This relational lift me up. I know you don't feel heard, you don't feel seen, but I, John, am your partner in this. This relational sense of you're heard by me, you're seen by me. We are all in the same boat together. It seems to me that verse 9, if it's doing anything, is trying to say to those seven churches, at a human level, John wants you to know I can relate to you. I share the same circumstances as you. But the rest of the text provides much more encouragement. John isn't writing to merely commiserate with them. He's not writing to say,

I want you to know that misery loves company, and I'm with you. He's not even writing to merely say, I feel you, the way we use that today. John is writing to those who feel unheard and unseen to say that he has both heard something and seen something that once known will convince his readers that God does hear them and God does indeed see them. Do you see the words there? Look at verse 10.

I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day and I heard behind me a loud voice. John heard something. Or later you'll see it in verse 12. Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking to me and on turning, I saw something. John is going to, on these two points, make an everlasting argument to the churches throughout all ages that when you feel abandoned, when you feel alone, when you feel forgotten, when you're wondering whether God actually cares or is concerned, return to that which he heard and that which he saw because he is convinced that it will prove to you that he both hears you and sees you.

So what did John hear? And how would that encourage the early churches? And how might that give hope to you? Here's what he heard.

Verse 10. He heard something that said, write this down. Write what you see in a book and send it to the seven churches.

[12 : 38] To Ephesus, to Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea. What he heard was that he was to write down that which he was going to see. In fact, he's going to reiterate that very thing in verse 19 and 20.

Did you catch it in the reading this morning? Here it is in 19. Write, therefore, the things that you have seen. And then he says, send it to these seven churches. This is what he heard.

That whatever it is he saw was supposed to be put in a book and preserved in inscripturated text because it would be that which the church needs.

Fascinating to me. The encouragement to these churches first out of the gate was I got some mail and the mail's for you.

A mail day. That's what he heard. And in fact, then, what's really fascinating to me is that it's this notion of writing it down.

[13 : 55] I mean, where are you going to go to hear what God has to say? Evidently, according to the text, you've got to return to that which was written down.

God is not going to speak to you in the silence of your bedroom through some subjective experience to communicate that he's really there and hears you.

No, that's called, in one sense, prayer is you speaking to God. But in another sense, the scriptures, or that which is written down, is the way God speaks to you and to me.

If we want to hear his voice, we read that which John says came to him in the spirit, the spirit of God, and scripturated in the text written down, actually is what God has to say to the churches.

I mean, this is great to know because I've mentioned it before, but Ingmar Bergman, middle of the last century, wrote those trilogy of plays, and one of them was *The Silence* where he said he had the idea of it when he stood in a cathedral and looked at the stained glass of Jesus at the great shepherd and he walked in front of it and said, *Speak to me!*

[15 : 08] Of course, the stained glass didn't say anything, thank goodness. And he kept saying it, *Speak to me! Speak to me!* And he walked out and his supposition was, God doesn't speak.

God has nothing to say. God does not hear me. And he writes a play called *The Silence*. But what John is saying is that's the total wrong way to go about it. Don't walk into the cathedral and through your own subjective experience, expect for his voice to become ringing off the walls.

Rather, turn to that which he has written down because he has something meaningful to say. That ought to be an encouragement. Where do you go when you feel alone, forgotten?

Turn to God's word. For in his word, authored by his spirit, he speaks. Now, that sits on either end of the text, but it's not the emphasis of chapter 1, nor should it be then the supreme emphasis of our message because that which is written down has something in the middle, namely that which he saw.

So what did he see? Verses 12 to 16. He saw this amazing vision that is a portrait of the Lord Jesus Christ in all his glory, ascended from earth, now reigning from heaven.

[16 : 42] John knew that that which he had seen, Jesus, in all that glory, would convince his readers that he sees you too.

So what did he see? Interestingly, in verses 12 and 13, he sees that Jesus is walking in the midst of the church, just when they wondered if he had left them all together.

12 and 13, then I turned to see the voice that was speaking to me, and on turning, I saw seven golden lampstands, and in the midst of the lampstands, that's the key phrase, in the midst of the lampstands, one like a son of man, clothed in all his glory.

And these lampstands, later in the text, are indicated to be the very churches. So he is actually communicating by way of a vision that Jesus is in your midst, that he does walk your aisles, that he does sit in your pews, that he does attend your worship.

He sees Jesus in the midst of the churches, and the churches are in his hand. What a powerful thing to consider, that Jesus, while at the right hand of the Father, not only hears us, has something to say to us, and writes a letter to us, but that Jesus, while ascended to the right hand of the Father, is mysteriously present among us through his word.

[18 : 39] This is the portrait. You're not alone, even this morning. So let's just see, who is this one who stands in the midst of his own church?

Let me tell you, verses 12 to 16, he is awesome and anything but absent. Take a look. The Son of Man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash around his chest.

The hairs of his head were white like white wool, like snow. His eyes were like a flame of fire. His feet were like burnished bronze, refined in a furnace. And his voice, like the roar of many waters.

And in his right hand, he held the seven stars from his mouth, came a sharp two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining in full strength.

This is the portrait. This is the portrait of Jesus that John would place before the seven churches.

[19 : 53] He wants you to see this. Now, interestingly, and those who have read the Bible for a considerable length of time have discovered that that portrait of a son of man with those visible characteristics was actually put forward in the scriptures in the book of Daniel by one who had lived thousands of years ago.

let me put it as clearly as I can. John sees something that he can communicate only in terms of that which Daniel previously had put down.

In Daniel's world, he saw the Ancient of Days, namely God, in distinction from, but connected to, one that he saw like the son of man.

And in Daniel's day, all the characteristics of God, the Ancient of Days, who sits in judgment, actually were like described as as Father Time in a way, but with all power yet in his midst.

His hair was like wool, his eyes were like fire, his feet were burnished like bronze, from his mouth comes a sword. In other words, all those characteristics were directed toward God.

[21 : 27] And then Daniel also saw a human agent, one like a son of man, to whom the kingdom was given. And this human agent had like divine-like agency, but was distinct from God.

What John is now saying is that when he saw after the death, resurrection of Jesus and his ascension, he now interprets Daniel to say, in Jesus, you have the God, man, the characteristics of the Father and the Son are united in ways that when you see Jesus, you're not only seeing a human agent like Ezekiel of old, who was characterized as a son of man, but you're seeing one that carried divine agency in ways that would equate him with God.

What John is painting then is a picture before the church that says, I want you to see Jesus. You're wondering if he sees you? Let me show you him.

He's enormous in stature. He's the fulfillment of all of God's divine promises. He's God himself. Indeed, he's one, even by his own words, who is called the first and the last and the living one.

I mean, these are terms that are only to be equated with God as if Jesus wants to reiterate in the vision itself, yes, John, you are seeing me correctly.

[23 : 02] You are painting me with the bold colors that are worthy of me. I am the son of man who received the kingdom and has all authority over all people for all time and I am nothing less than God himself.

John sees this and he puts it up on the wall for a church who wonders whether God sees them at all. What a portrait.

So what does it do for you and me? Can you imagine how helpful this vision would be if we saw this in every season of our trials and our tribulations?

hair white like wool like snow.

That's a God of all wisdom. Need wisdom today? Wonder if God hears you today. Wonder if he sees you today. He's painted on the canvas of scripture as the one who has all wisdom.

[24 : 24] That's not the only characteristic that's here. I mean look at the power of his hand. It says he actually holds us in his hand. Wonder if God can hold you.

Wonder if you can take it. Wonder if you can stand. Here he is. Jesus holding the church in his hand and if he holds the church he holds you.

Your life is in his hands. I mean we just sang it. We heard it sung. It's the truth of these very verses.

Standing here today under the trials and tribulations of perhaps death itself. Wondering about the prognosis over your own life or your loved ones.

Recently having experienced the loss of family members and wondering if there is hope. Wondering if you're heard or he sees or he knows or he cares.

[25 : 28] Here's one who Jesus then says I have the keys of death and Hades. This is the one that we place ourselves in his hands as we die.

As we commit our spirit and we all will on one day. We will give up the ghost. We'll lay this body down.

And this portrait would be above the wall of my nursing home bed or the home of those who care for me. This is the portrait that brings comfort.

This is the portrait you need to know. Here's the all wise one who has defeated death who's ready to meet you in the midst of every trial. He's here. And not only that can you imagine how helpful this vision would be not only in your seasons of trials and sufferings but what about your seasons of temptation and the times we succumb to sin.

I think it was Kierkegaard but don't hold me to it who wrote something to the effect that when we're tempted God somehow becomes hidden from view.

[27 : 02] We don't think he's there. And therefore all of our sin is done because we feel he is absent or he doesn't see.

And I'm free in this moment from his gaze. And it's incredible to me how through 63 years of life many of them after having trusted Christ the age of 17, 18 myself.

How in those moments of temptation you can be captivated because you've forgotten that this is the portrait that hangs over the church. I mean look at the description of his eyes.

His eyes were like a flame of fire. fire. This is the vision we need to see not only in ways that we're comforted but in the ways that will keep us from a concerted lengthy walk away from him.

His eyes are like fire. There's a big difference between the portrait in Revelation 1 of Jesus and the painting that was done of Jesus in 1940 by Salmon.

[28 : 23] Some of you will know it hangs in many churches. It hung in the Norwegian Scandinavian Evangelical Church of my youth. A big portrait by a guy by the name of Salmon.

Jesus, beautiful, flowing hair, you know, kind of like Matthew McConaughey look in contemporary language. This particular picture, you know, humorously even places him with blue eyes, you know, this first century Palestinian Jewish man.

Jesus the Nazarene is now captured in all of this beauty and his gaze is there as if, you know, he's just one-to-one affinity with a young Norwegian boy attending church.

Hey, that's not this. That's not this. This is eyes like fire. fire. Oh, that this would be emblazoned on the eyeballs of our memory.

Oh, that this portrait would come to mind in the hour of temptation. Oh, that we would see the eyes of fire. He sees us all the time.

[29 : 46] and the irrational nature of the evil one is in a moment to convince you that he doesn't, that he's left the building, that in this sense you're so glad you've been forgotten.

Not so. Here he is eyes. And his feet, his feet are like burnished bronze. I mean, even, even Alan Edmund's best can't capture the refining nature of where his feet have trod.

They've never gone places you and I have gone. They're perfectly refined. He walks where he's supposed to walk.

He's clear of all the muck, of the interior makeup of our soul. His eyes are fixed upon me and his voice, did you catch it?

The roar of many waters. This isn't like, oh, that was good preaching today, I wish you'd never stopped. No, the roar of many waters, you want to get indoors from that.

[31 : 01] This is Adam and Eve in the garden when the voice came and they hid themselves. This is the people of Israel at the base of the mountain and said, I can't hear this anymore. I've got to get away from this.

This is too big for me. This is too powerful for me. This is too rightly judgmental upon me. This is larger than me. He's got all of this.

So this portrait, in one painting, one vision is beautiful for a church that's in need of comfort, wondering whether you're heard, and the church that's needing correction because they've forgotten that he does hear and that he does see.

Which is why over the next seven weeks, an aspect of this painting is going to be affixed to each of the words to the seven churches is because John does not want the church to get a word from God without this portrait in their mind.

Here he is then, in all his glory. Stained glass can't hide him. Double domes can't secure him.

[32 : 20] He walks in our midst through the power of that which he has written down. John heard something and we read it.

John saw something that we might live under it. I ask you this morning, what vision of Christ do we need more than any other vision?

after the Easter season where he has purportedly left us and now rains on high. This is it.

May this one comfort you when death sits on you. May this one provide wisdom for you when you're at an absolute loss as to where to go.

may this one secure you because he's the living one. May this one deter you because he's the all seeing one.

[33 : 37] May this one enable you and me and us to learn what it is to live in the fear of the Lord.

What a vision. What a word. And so you say does he hear me?

John says he does. does he see me? John says oh yes he does.

And may that vision be your comfort and your correction until we see him face to face.

Our heavenly father we are your church left on earth relegated here amidst deep and long seasons of trials and tribulations.

[34 : 44] Thank you for this morning's word that even the apostles and John the writer here can identify with us in our questions.

But thank you most of all for allowing him to hear something and see something that would strengthen our sense that you hear us and you see us.

May we then over the next seven weeks listen attentively to your word to these seven churches for in each one I believe in all the fullness of your glory you will have something to say to us week by week.

We give ourselves to that in Jesus name. Amen. Amen.