

The Glory of Christ

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- [0 : 0 0] And friends, in just a few minutes, we're going to have a baptism. But before that, we're going to turn to God's Word.
- So would you turn with me to Revelation chapter 1. That's page 965 in the Pew Bible. We began our Revelation series last week with an introduction, looking at verses 1 through 8.
- And there we saw that this book is for the servants of God, that is, all followers of Jesus. And we saw that this book is from the triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
- And lastly, we saw that the book is ultimately about Jesus Christ and God's kingdom. So we're going to pick up where we left off last week at verse 9 of chapter 1 and go through the rest of the chapter.
- So let me pray as we turn to God's Word together. God, indeed, you have no rival and you have no equal.
- [1 : 0 2] You are the first and the last, the beginning and the end, the one who is and who was and who is to come. And we praise you this morning.
- We thank you for the deep privilege that it is to open up your Word and to hear what you are saying to us, that we might behold you in your glory and worship you and live lives for you and for your kingdom and the power of your Spirit.
- Jesus, all of this is possible because of you, because of your incarnation, for your perfect life, for your death, for your resurrection, for the fact that you're ascended and seated at the Father's right hand and coming in glory and we give you praise.
- Help us now as we understand this Word that you've given to us, your church. In your mighty name we pray. Amen. All right. Revelation chapter 1, verses 9 through 20.
- Let me read this for us. 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.
- [2 : 0 7] 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 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.

[3 : 26] 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 God's Word. So, when you're facing a problem or when you're facing a trial or even suffering of some kind, what's the one thing that you need?

Well, perhaps you'd say, The one thing I really want is for the problem to go away, right? I want the suffering to stop. But if that doesn't happen in the midst of pain, suffering, and trial, what's the most important thing you can have?

And that's really what our text is pointing us toward. But before we look there, what are some of the things you might say you need? Perhaps the presence of caring and supportive friends, people to walk with you.

[4 : 37] That's a good thing. Or maybe a strategy for overcoming the trial, a plan to eliminate the source of pain. Nothing wrong with that. If you're jobless, you need a good resume workshop maybe and a few practice interviews.

If your marriage is in trouble, a good marriage counselor and some communication exercises to work on. Some sort of strategy in the midst of trial. Or, you know, on the other hand, maybe the one thing you really want or really need is answers, right?

Some sort of reason why you're going through what you're going through or at least some potential reasons to help you understand why or what's really going on. And of course, all these are good things, right?

They're not bad in themselves. But our text today points us to something even greater. It points us to the most important thing for us to have when we're in the midst of trial or about to undergo some sort of trial.

And if I were to put it simply, what Revelation 1, 9 through 20 is telling us is this. What a suffering Christian, what a suffering church needs most is a renewed vision of the glory of Christ.

[5 : 51] When we're facing trials or when we're about to face trials, what we need more than anything else is a renewed vision of the glory of Christ. So let's take some time to unpack that.

The first thing we see in our passage in verses 9 through 11 is we see the fact that Christians indeed suffer. They face trials or problems or persecutions.

They experience distress and loss. Look again at verse 9. I, John, that is the Apostle John, he says, your brother and partner, that is someone who shares deeply in something together with you, your partner.

In what? In the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance that are in Jesus. Look at those last three concepts, tribulation, kingdom, endurance in Jesus.

This is how John is summarizing the Christian life. First, tribulation. That word means suffering, distress, intense hardship. As a follower of Jesus, there will be trial and hardship and often on account of being a follower of Jesus.

[6 : 57] Look at the rest of verse 9. He says, I was on the island called Patmos on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. Because John had been faithfully following Jesus, bearing witness to God's word, bearing witness to all that was true about Jesus, the testimony about Jesus, he was exiled and in prison on the island called Patmos.

Now, Patmos is a tiny little island off the western coast of modern-day Turkey. And at the time, in John's day, it was used as a Roman penal settlement. It was a place where they put people who were dangerous to the good order of the empire.

They shipped them off to spend the rest of their days in exile on Patmos. It was a prison colony. Now, we today may not experience exactly the same thing, but notice that John says, I'm your brother and partner in this tribulation in Jesus.

He writes to these churches saying, this trial, this hardship, it's expected, and we share in it together. After all, do you remember what Jesus himself said in the Gospel of John?

He says, in this world, you will have tribulation. It's the same word that John uses again here in Revelation. But John doesn't summarize the Christian life as only suffering, right?

[8 : 18] As only tribulation. He says in Jesus, we also share in the kingdom that is the reign of God, the in-breaking, liberating rule of the triune creator and redeemer.

The tribulation and the kingdom in Jesus. Now, there's a balance here, isn't there? Christianity isn't just tribulation.

You know, if that was the only thing we thought about following Christ, that would be pretty defeatist or pessimistic or despairing. But it isn't just the kingdom, right? That would be pretty triumphalistic.

No, it's both. It's about God's kingdom that progresses even through tribulation. And it's about tribulation that will one day be swallowed up and healed by God's kingdom.

It's both. So what we see in this first paragraph of our text is that all Christians will experience both the kingdom and trial.

[9 : 17] At some point in our walk with Jesus, we will face trial and suffering and hardship. That doesn't overthrow all the joys and blessings of knowing God in Christ, the kingdom, but we can expect it.

Now, some of us don't need to be reminded of this fact. Maybe you've experienced all sorts of hardships in this life, physical, emotional, relational, spiritual. Maybe you've been ridiculed for your faith in Christ.

Some Christians in the world today are being physically harmed and put to death for their testimony to Christ, as John puts it here. But even so, I do think many of us are surprised when hardships come.

We may think for one reason or another that we're entitled to a pain-free life or that being a follower of Jesus should somehow get us out of it. Now, don't get me wrong.

Following Jesus will save you a whole lot of heartache. To listen to Him, to know Him, to follow Him, that sort of life is full of joy. It is full of what John calls the kingdom.

[10 : 19] But it also means suffering at times, and we must not be surprised. Peter wrote in his first letter, the Apostle Peter in the book of 1 Peter says, Beloved, don't be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you.

So friend, I wonder, are you experiencing a fiery trial today? And are you uncertain how you will stand in the face of it? Jesus told John to send this book off to seven churches in Asia Minor.

That's Western Turkey, and they're listed there in verse 11. In fact, they're listed in the order that the kind of main road would take you if you were delivering a letter like that. First, you would land at Ephesus on the coast, and then you would go up to Smyrna, and then you would start to kind of circle around to the rest of those cities.

And those churches, as we know, and as you'll find out when you read chapters 2 and 3, were about to undergo persecution and suffering. Some of them had already started to experience it.

Rome was about to become more aggressive in the years to come. The emperor was beginning to demand not just respect, but worship. And following Jesus was about to be more costly than ever.

[11 : 39] And as you read through the seven letters in chapters 2 and 3, you see what they're up against. Not just physical harm from unjust rulers, but in the midst of that pressure, internal theological confusion, moral breakdown, even spiritual complacency.

All things that threaten us as the church today. And John wants to call them and us here to this third thing he lists. He wants to call us to patient endurance.

That's what he lists and mentions in verse 9. And notice how all three of these words are strung together. We participate in the kingdom by virtue of our union with Christ, right?

We participate and we undergo tribulation by virtue of our union with Christ. These things are in Christ. But then we also have patient endurance.

Endurance. The patient endurance to remain faithful comes also by virtue of our union with Christ. Again, he says the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance that are in Jesus.

[12 : 53] And the rest of the chapter starts to give that to us. Where do we go to get this endurance in the midst of trial? Well, we see in the rest of the chapter we get it from a vision of the glory of Christ.

In verses 12 through 16 we see the glory of the person of Christ. And then in verses 17 through 20 we see the glory of the work of Christ. Now, if the word glory is a confusing one or not very clear in your mind, look at the description of Jesus in verses 12 through 16.

I admit it's a little strange at first, isn't it? You know? White hair, swords coming out of your mouth, all that sort of stuff. But John's trying to use finite human language to capture something that exceeds our language.

As you look over this, what are some of the themes that you might catch? First, Jesus is radiant, right? His face is shining like the sun. His feet are like burnished bronze, refined in a furnace.

His hair is gleaming white. His eyes are on fire. Even his clothes are resplendent. He's got a golden sash around his chest. From head to toe, Jesus is blazing and bright.

[14 : 04] This is the one who said, I am the light of the world. So first, the glory of Jesus here is his brilliance. It's his beauty. It's his radiance. But second, it's his power.

His voice is like the roar of many waters. His right hand is holding seven stars, and we'll get to what that means in a minute. Out of his mouth comes a sharp two-edged sword. That's a striking image, isn't it?

It's as if to say, here is one so powerful that his mere word is penetrating and effectual. What he says happens. What he says goes. The judgment that he renders is always true.

He doesn't just declare verdicts, but his voice creates and recreates. It's roaring like waters and cutting the air like a trumpet, as John said in verse 10.

So the vision of Jesus here, his glory, is one of intense beauty and one of perfect power. When do we ever catch a glimpse of beauty and power combined?

[15 : 17] You know, in this life, we often only behold one or the other. In this life, beautiful things are often fragile, aren't they? You know, flowers wither, sunsets quickly disappear, and powerful things are often, well, not very beautiful, right?

I remember years ago watching the world's strongest man contest. Do you remember those? You know, they were pretty awesome. You know, these dudes with names like Lars and Dietrich would like pull cars and throw logs and do all sorts of crazy feats of brute strength.

But you know, I wouldn't necessarily say that those guys were the picture of beauty, you know, right? But here in Jesus Christ, we see both.

Ravishing beauty and unparalleled strength. As John reaches for metaphors to capture what the risen, ascended Jesus is like, he often turns to nature, its hair like wool, like snow, like a snowstorm covering the earth in layers of white.

There's power and beauty. His voice like the roar of many waters. The ocean is vast and limitless. As the waves pound the shore, there's power and beauty.

[16 : 35] His face like the sun shining in full strength. The sun, the stars, again, beauty and power. But in describing the risen and ascended Jesus, John isn't just finding pictures from nature.

You know, he's also, and more importantly, pulling images from the Old Testament. You know, these various images describing the glorious Christ come from places like Daniel 7 and Daniel 10 and Isaiah 60 and Ezekiel 1.

In fact, Jesus appearing like a son of man is a direct allusion to Daniel chapter 7. And listen to that passage. Daniel 7, 13 and 14.

Prophet Daniel says, That's Daniel 7.

And what John is saying here in Revelation, what Jesus is revealing himself, as Jesus is revealing himself to John, is to say, I am that son of man.

[18 : 02] Jesus ascended to the Father, the Ancient of Days, and the Father has given him an everlasting kingdom that will never pass away. And it will be a kingdom for all peoples, nations, and languages, and it will never be destroyed.

Now, how, how then, does this vision of the glory of Christ's person help us endure in trials?

Well, it's because this Jesus, this one who is the sum and source of beauty and strength, this one who fulfills the Old Testament longing for God himself to come as king, this one, friend, his kingdom will never end, and it will never be destroyed.

No matter what is shaking you right now, it will not, and it cannot, take the best away from you.

If you belong to Christ, then you belong to the one whose beauty and power cannot fade. What you have in him, no amount of suffering can steal. What you have in him, no hardship can diminish.

[19 : 08] The vision of Jesus here, this is Jesus right now, at the Father's right hand, living, ruling, reigning, coming again, this is the one through faith that you are united to, Christian.

So even if your health fails, even if your earthly dreams are shattered, you have him. Imagine a house full of artwork, but every single piece of artwork in that house is just a print.

It's a reproduction. It's a poster, except for one. Upstairs in the spare bedroom, there hangs a genuine Monet worth millions, beautiful to behold.

Now imagine that same house one night is robbed. Every single piece ripped from the walls while the owner is away. You know, you can imagine the owner coming home, seeing the front door sort of swinging open, and in he goes, seeing all of his pictures gone, and his heart starts to beat, and he hurries through the rooms, and where is he going, right?

He's going to the stairs. He's going up to the bedroom, and there he sees it on the wall, in its place. The Monet, it's still there. They'd taken everything else, but not the one of real worth, not the one that had real lasting value.

[20 : 28] That one, he still had. Friends, it's the same with Christ. It's the same with you and Christ. Every pleasure, every good, every joy we experience in this life, the real, earthly created goods, at the same time, they're just prints and reproductions pointing us to him, the source of all good, whose face shines like the sun.

And if we have him, then we can lose nothing. You know, some of those prints in the house might have had some good associations for the owner, but he had the thing that was of real worth.

Now, John doesn't just show us the glory of Christ's person here. He also shows us the glory of Christ's work. In verse 17, John falls to the ground as though dead, but Jesus reaches out his right hand puts it on John and says, 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.

When Jesus, the ever living one, died and rose again, he conquered sin and death for all who believe. And now he holds the keys of death and hell.

[21 : 55] You see, friends, because Jesus died and rose again, there's no suffering, no death that a Christian will undergo in this life that will not be overcome and turned for their good, either in this age or in the age to come.

Jesus died on the cross taking our worst, taking our sin, taking the punishment our sins deserve, taking the hell and wrath that was ours. but in his resurrection, what were we given in exchange?

His righteousness, his life, his reward. Jesus takes our worst down into death. He is the one who died but he is the one who lives again.

So whatever trial we face here, we know that with a Lord like this, whatever trial we face, it's not some mistake in the plan.

No, God will ultimately use all of our trials for our good and he will make us more like Jesus through them. Fear not, Jesus says, I hold the keys of death and Hades.

[23 : 03] I died and behold, I am alive forevermore. And notice that Jesus is here standing among the lampstands and holding the stars in his hands. Now the lampstands, John tells us, Jesus tells John in verse 20, are what?

They're the churches. Jesus is in the midst of the church and it says that the stars are the angels of the churches. Now perhaps angels there are just that, angelic beings, a representative part of the heavenly host with a special ministry to the churches.

Or perhaps angels there could mean just messengers. Angel literally means a messenger. Maybe it's the human messengers of the churches themselves but either way, isn't the picture the same?

That Jesus is dwelling in the midst of his church. He's present among them. He's active among them. He's here right now even if we don't see him. The living one dwells among his people.

He dwells amidst his people, the ones he purchased with his own death and he's ever present to lead, to guide, to teach, to warn, to protect. So this is what we need in times of trial.

[24 : 13] A fresh vision of the glory of Christ. When we see his person, when we see his beauty and his strength, we realize that he is our greatest good and nothing can take him or his kingdom away from us.

And when we see his work, his death, his resurrection, his reign for us, we realize that every bad will be turned for our good and we need not fear. Now let me conclude then with two applications.

One for those who are not Christians and one for those who are. First, we've been saying this morning that those who believe in Jesus can face trial and suffering with the utmost endurance because of who Jesus is and because of what he's done.

But friend, don't you see, if you're here today and you've not placed your trust in Jesus, then these things are not true of you. Without a saving relationship with Christ, the one who died and rose again, suffering actually will steal your best in this life.

Your friends, your possession, your worldly status, your health, none of these things are immune from death and decay. And the bad things that happen to you, they will never ultimately turn for your good.

[25 : 32] apart from Christ, your best days will be forever behind you, slipping further and further away. And as you head forward, you are destined for more loss and more fear.

But the risen Lord Jesus says to you right now, fear not and come to me. He's standing at the door and he's knocking.

open to him and put your heart's trust in him and the one who holds the keys of death and Hades will be your Lord and your protector from this point forward forevermore.

And he will come into your life and a little later in Revelation, he'll say, I'll sit down with you and I'll dine with you and I'll make you my own. And then you can live without fear.

And if you have done that, if you are a Christian, then I want to encourage you by way of application to seek the means of renewing this vision of Jesus in glory.

[26 : 43] Seek the means of renewing the sense of the glorious Christ in your own mind and heart. You know, you probably won't have an actual vision like John had here, right? That's okay. But what are the means that God has given us to make the truth about Jesus more real to our hearts?

Well, first, notice that John, even in exile, is worshiping on the Lord's Day. Now, when John says the Lord's Day, he's referring to Sunday.

This is one of the earliest references to Sunday as a special day for Christians, as a day for worship. This is the day, the Lord's Day, Sunday, when Jesus rose from the dead. This is the new day of Christian worship, no longer the seventh day under the Old Covenant, but now the first day under the New Covenant, the day when the God of Israel inaugurated his worldwide reign in the resurrection of Jesus, the Messiah, the Christ.

And here is John worshiping in the Spirit on the Lord's Day. Friends, by way of simple application, that is an example for us. What we do on Sundays isn't some rote ritual.

It's not checking off a list of spiritual to-dos. It's gathering in the Spirit of God to set our minds and hearts upon the One who died and rose again for us to bring us to God. Regular rhythms of gathered worship are essential to keeping and renewing our vision of Jesus' glory.

[28 : 10] You know, it's easy to drop off coming to church on Sunday when things get hard, but that's precisely the time when we need it more than ever. Because in gathered worship, Jesus is present in a special way, helping us to recapture a vision of His glory.

But also consider your times of private prayer. And in your times of private prayer, brother, sister, do you take time not just to pray all of your needs to God, though that is important and good, but you also take time to actually set your heart on God and enjoy Him.

You know, this practice in our own private times of prayer is another means of keeping our vision of Jesus' glory fresh and real to our hearts. Find a truth about God or Christ in your regular Scripture reading and pause over it and think over it and slow down and worship God for it and enjoy God for who He is.

By way of example, think about Psalm 21. Verse 1 of Psalm 21 reads, O Lord, in Your strength the King rejoices. Maybe you read a passage like that in your morning reading or your evening reading.

And if you encounter a line like that, pause to rejoice in God's strength. Think about the way He parted the Red Sea, the way He stilled the storm of Galilee, the way He rose and power from the dead, and the way that He's worked mightily in your own life.

[29 : 45] That's what it means to meditate on God's Word. And the Holy Spirit will use that to refresh and to renew your vision of Jesus' glory and to give you more of that endurance that we have in Him.

Let me mention just one more way that we can do this. What are the means that God has given us to renew our sense of Jesus' glory? Well, one other mean I'll mention, but there are more.

One other mean is through the ordinances or through the sacraments. In the New Testament, we see that Jesus gave us two symbolic actions to fuel our faith in Him, baptism and the Lord's Supper. And Jesus gave us these practices in order to keep our minds and hearts renewed in the glory of what He's done for us.

Now, we know that the Lord's Supper is this ongoing act for Christians, right? Jesus told us to take two simple things, bread and a cup, and through those simple elements we're taken into the infinite depths of what He's done for us on the cross.

We eat the bread to remember His body broken for us. We drink the cup to remember His blood poured out for us. And Jesus offers us those things saying, remember me, eat with me, take what I've done down into the depths of you and let me comfort you and strengthen you and change you.

[30 : 58] The Lord's Supper is that ongoing act for those who place their faith in Christ. baptism, on the other hand, is a one-time act for those who have placed their faith in Christ.

We see in the New Testament that after someone hears the gospel, places their faith in Christ, they're then baptized, they're immersed in water, they go down and back up again.

And this going down and coming back up again symbolizes our union with Christ by faith. After all, it was Christ on the cross who went down into the waters of judgment, down into the grave for us, and on the third day He rose again.

And when we are baptized in Jesus' name, it's as if we are saying, what Jesus did is now the most true and important thing about me and who I am.

As Paul says in Galatians, I've been crucified with Christ. It's no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me.

[32 : 04] Baptism is that act of publicly proclaiming this great truth of our union with Christ by faith. So Christian, today as you face trials, as you face hardship, what this chapter of Revelation is telling us is to look to the glory of Christ, take hold of the means to see Christ in all His glory.

glory. There's an old hymn that goes like this. It says, O soul, are you weary and troubled? No light in the darkness you see? There's a light for a look at the Savior and life more abundant and free.

Turn your eyes upon Jesus. Look full in His wonderful face and the things of earth will grow strangely dim in the light of His glory and grace.

Let's pray. Lord Jesus, we confess that oftentimes our thoughts of You are so small and so diminished.

Jesus, give us a fresh sense of who You've revealed Yourself to be in this passage, the One Mighty, the One Beautiful. All Your judgments are just.

[33 : 22] All Your ways are good. You are the prize above any. Oh, Lord, pull our hearts out from earthly things and the small little cares and concerns that we become so occupied with and lift our gaze to You again so that we might worship You and so that we might be strengthened to run this race with endurance.

We pray this in Your name. Amen.