

# High River Christian Reformed Church

Sunday, October 11<sup>th</sup>, 2020

## Scripture Reading – Revelation 1: 9 – 20 (ESV)

<sup>9</sup> 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. <sup>10</sup> I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet <sup>11</sup> 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."

<sup>12</sup> Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking to me, and on turning I saw seven golden lampstands, <sup>13</sup> 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. <sup>14</sup> The hairs of his head were white, like white wool, like snow. His eyes were like a flame of fire, <sup>15</sup> his feet were like burnished bronze, refined in a furnace, and his voice was like the roar of many waters. <sup>16</sup> 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. <sup>17</sup> 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, <sup>18</sup> and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades. <sup>19</sup> Write therefore the things that you have seen, those that are and those that are to take place after this. <sup>20</sup> 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.

## Who Is Jesus?

Revelation 1: 9 – 20 (ESV)

We are in a series, as noted last Lord's Day; Part 3 of This Same Jesus, focussing on the fact that this book before us is, first and foremost,

<sup>1</sup> The revelation of Jesus Christ... Revelation 1:1 (ESV)

That, in itself, is complex enough that John will write 22 chapters (as we know them) between that opening statement, and his closing benediction,

<sup>21</sup> The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all. Amen. Revelation 22:21 (ESV)

Having said that, the book begins with Jesus, it ends with Jesus, and in a very real sense, everything that comes in between is simply,

<sup>1</sup> The revelation of Jesus Christ... Revelation 1:1 (ESV)

That's the point of the book, and to go looking for anything that is not a part of that is, in some sense, to miss the point. And I think this is maybe more important than ever. While studying for this sermon, Pastor Matt and I ran across a video in which young adults from several

countries around the world were asked the question, “Who is Jesus to you?” Here are some of their answers.

One young man said,

Personally, I don’t believe in Jesus. That’s just a personal opinion. I don’t know.

And another

I think Jesus is a religious figure. We all have our own belief. Some believe in Buddha and others will believe in Jesus.

A young woman answered,

So, Jesus to me, Is a gift giver.

Another went on to say,

Who is Jesus to me? Probably he is God.

There was a man who said,

I’m not religious, but I would say, all those prophets they have respect from me. Jesus or any of them.

And a young student in China said,

I think Jesus is a man and we have learned about him in our textbooks, but he is just a man.

Even “Groundwork” is jumping in on this—hopefully with more insight than all of the above—their ad in bulletin today read, “Jesus Christ Is – If you want to know who Jesus is...join Groundwork as we begin our study of the fourth gospel with John [chapter] 1.” Which is certainly a better place to start than some, but the same John was the author through whom Jesus gave “The Revelation...” and it too can be said to finish the statement, “Jesus Christ is...”

And John, of all people, had reason to think of Jesus in other terms. As we saw last Sunday, Jesus had been a very close friend (if not his best friend) during the years that they walked together in Galilea and Judea. They were so close, as a matter of fact, that John never refers to himself by name. 19 of the 23 times that someone named “John” is mentioned in John’s Gospel, it is referring to John the Baptist, and the other 4 times speak of the apostle Peter’s father, also named John. But 5 times, John refers to “the disciple whom Jesus loved”. On those occasions, he’s speaking of himself. So, John knew Jesus. John heard him speak. John saw the miracles. He even opened his first epistle by writing,

<sup>1</sup> That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life— <sup>2</sup> the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us— <sup>3</sup> that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you... 1 John 1:1–3 (ESV)

In other words, as his beloved friend and companion, John knew Jesus. In fact, his final reference to himself in John 21, verse 20 reads,

<sup>20</sup> Peter turned and saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following them, the one who also had leaned back against him during the supper... John 21:20 (ESV)

John knew Jesus, but he knew him, as we saw last week, during that time when Jesus had

<sup>7</sup> ...emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, [and] being born in the likeness of men. Philippians 2:7 (ESV)

He knew him during his “time of humiliation...” He knew him as he was then, and in Revelation, chapter one, he met him as he is now,

<sup>5</sup> ...Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth. Revelation 1:5 (ESV)

Or, as we read earlier, John wrote,

<sup>10</sup> I was in the Spirit on the Lord’s day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet <sup>11</sup> saying, “Write what you see in a book and send it to the seven churches...” Revelation 1:10–11 (ESV)

Then he turned, to see the one who was speaking, and on turning he...

<sup>12</sup> ...saw seven golden lampstands,

But it is not the lampstands that demand his attention.

<sup>13</sup> ...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. <sup>14</sup> The hairs of his head were white, like white wool, like snow. His eyes were like a flame of fire, <sup>15</sup> his feet were like burnished bronze, refined in a furnace, and his voice was like the roar of many waters. <sup>16</sup> 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. Revelation 1:12–16 (ESV)

And time would fail if we tried to chase down every aspect of this vision. Jesus himself will interpret the lampstands and the stars, telling John in verse 20,

<sup>20</sup> 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 [or messengers] of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches. Revelation 1:20 (ESV)

The rest of the description derives entirely from various Old Testament passages. The long robe and the golden sash hearken back to the official dress of the Priests of Israel, described in Exodus and Leviticus, taken together with various visions of the glory of God described by the prophets. As the Old Covenant priests were responsible for tending the lamps that burned continually before the throne of God. Jesus, the Great High Priest of the order of Melchisadech, walks in the midst of the church, tending to them, like lamps in the temple of God.

The descriptions of his hair, eyes, and feet, speak to his holiness, and are connected to Daniel's vision of the throne and glory of God himself, for this High Priest was chosen,

<sup>16</sup> ...by the power of an indestructible life... Hebrews 7:16 (ESV)

And is, in fact God, the Son, our Great High Priest, and also, "the ruler of kings on earth."

His voice, "like the roar of many waters," the stars in his hand, the sword from his mouth, and the brightness of his countenance, all have to do with the prophetic message, and speak to Jesus' role as **the** prophet of God.

So, in this glorious vision, Jesus, the Son of Man (his favorite title for himself), is established as **the** priest, **the** king, and **the** prophet, to which all other prophets, priests, and kings merely pointed by faith.

It's also worth a mention, as we noted last week, that Jesus didn't stroll over, give John a noogie, and say, "Where've ya been, John? It's been years." Instead, John writes,

<sup>17</sup> When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead.

Only then did Jesus touch him. Verses 17 and 18,

...he [Jesus] laid his right hand on me [wrote John], saying, "Fear not, I am the first and the last, <sup>18</sup> and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades. Revelation 1:17-18 (ESV)

So then, priest, king, and prophet, but also, (by allusion if not direct reference at this point), the true Lamb of God, slain to take away the sin of the world, as John had written some years before, now risen, ascended, and holding the keys of death and the grave. And, as it says in Romans 6,

<sup>9</sup> We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. <sup>10</sup> For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. Romans 6:9-10 (ESV)

And there's something there that we need to grasp, because every other person scripture describes as having been raised from the dead, from the widow of Zarephath's son, to Lazarus of Bethany, and Eutychus of Troas—every one of them—had to die again. They came out of their various deaths, unchanged, and mortal. But Jesus, the Christ, the Son of the Living God did not come out of his tomb unchanged. The life that was restored at the resurrection was not merely a continuation of the life that he lived before. It was something altogether new. To borrow a phrase from Paul, that which was perishable was raised imperishable, and that which had been, for a time, mortal, was raised to immortality, as Christ, "the firstborn of the dead", was raised up from the tomb and seated at God's right hand to reign in the midst of his enemies, ruling the nations with a rod of iron until the last enemy, death, has been subjected beneath his feet.

And as the writer to the Hebrews exhorted, we are to look to Jesus,

<sup>2</sup> the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and **is** [right now, today, at this very moment] seated at the right hand of the throne of God. Hebrews 12:2 (ESV)

See, the question is not really, “Who is Jesus to you?” There may be as many different answers to that question as there are people to answer it. But the real question—the question that matters—is simply, “Who is Jesus?” Again, last week I referred to a song we sing occasionally (and it’s really a prayer), “Show us Christ...O God, reveal your glory, through the preaching of the Word. Show us Christ.” Not as we might wish him to be (especially not that). And not even as he was. It would be a terrible error to conflate Jesus' past state of humiliation, with His current state of glorification. No. Show us Christ, we must pray, as he is now, seated at the right hand of God’s throne, and walking in the midst of the church, “The first and the last, and the living one.” He who died, and yet is “alive forevermore, holding in his hand “the keys of death and hades.”

And this is the revelation of Jesus Christ, “Son of God and Son of Man”.

Why does it matter? well, I don’t want to go too far beyond the text, but how many times did Jesus, during the days when he walked with his disciples, say to them, “Fear not!” It was a word they heard over and over from their teacher and friend. Yet, John, in his gospel, chapter 20, verse 19 tells us, that on the evening of the day when Jesus rose from the dead, the disciples had gathered in a room,

<sup>19</sup> ...the doors being locked where the disciples were **for fear** of the Jews... John 20:19 (ESV)

It’s undoubtedly true that after their encounter with the risen Christ, that particular fear fell away—we’ve seen that in our study of the Book of Acts—but when Jesus laid his hand upon John in Revelation chapter one, and all through this book, the Lord of heaven and earth is saying, to the seven churches, and to all his people, everywhere, “You don’t need to fear **anything** at all. There is nothing in this world of which you need to be afraid.”

One of the online songs that we’ve used lately puts it so well. “Be still and remember,” we sing, “the worst that can come but shortens our journey and hastens us home.”

Speaking under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the Apostle Paul said it even better,

<sup>31</sup> What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? <sup>32</sup> He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? <sup>33</sup> Who shall bring any charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies. <sup>34</sup> Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. <sup>35</sup> Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? <sup>37</sup> ...No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. <sup>38</sup> For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, <sup>39</sup> nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Romans 8:31–39 (ESV)

This same Jesus who said to John, and (I believe) to all his people.

**“Fear not,** I am the first and the last, <sup>18</sup> and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and **I have the keys** of Death and Hades. Revelation 1:17–18 (ESV)

Even so,

<sup>5</sup> ...To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood <sup>6</sup> and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. Revelation 1:5–6 (ESV)