

Wheelersburg Baptist Church 4/15/01

Revelation 1:9-18 "The Real Picture of the Risen Christ" **

Proposition: This morning we want to see the risen Christ as He is today from the perspective of an eyewitness, John. We'll examine three scenes from John's encounter with the risen Christ, as revealed in Revelation 1:9-18.

- I. Scene #1: We're told what John heard (9-11).
- II. Scene #2: We're told what John saw (12-16).
 - A. In the vision, Jesus resembles a priest (13).
 1. He is our mediator.
 2. He is the link between sinful people and a holy God.
 - B. In the vision, Jesus resembles a king (14-15).
 1. He's eternal.
 2. He's all knowing,
 3. He's powerful.
 - C. In the vision, Jesus resembles a prophet (16).
 1. He cares for His people.
 2. He prevails by His Word.
- III. Scene #3: We're told what John did (17-18).
 - A. When you see Jesus as He is, you have reason to fear.
 - B. When you see Jesus as He is, you have reason to hope.
 1. There's hope because of who Jesus is.
 2. There's hope because of what Jesus did.
 3. There's hope because of what Jesus holds.

Response: Now that you've seen the real picture of the risen Christ...

1. You must accept Him as He is.
2. You must get ready to meet Him.

When I was a child I went to my grandparents' church one year for Vacation Bible School. It was a small country church. I don't remember much from the week, but one image remains. In the front of the building, on the wall behind the pulpit, hung a picture of a long-haired man wearing a robe. As I recall he was kneeling in prayer with his eyes lifted to the sky. The picture was supposed to be Jesus.

Today is Easter Sunday. Today we celebrate the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Answer this. What picture do you have in mind when you think of the risen Christ?

There's a problem today. I'm not opposed to pictures of Jesus, but for a lot of people that's the only Jesus they know. Many people know Jesus only from what is written in the gospels. That's reflected by the pictures of Jesus hanging on the walls of Sunday School rooms.

How is Jesus presented in the gospels? He's a great teacher. A miracle worker. A humble servant. A suffering Messiah. A crucified martyr. A resurrected Savior. Many look at the gospels and see only the humanity of Jesus. We see him sitting by the well at Samaria, hungry, and thirsty, and exhausted after a long day's trek in the hot Palestinian sun. We see Him weeping at the death of His friend Lazarus.

Again, the question, how do you picture the risen Christ? Listen. If you picture Jesus merely as I've just described Him, you have a *deficient* view of Jesus. Why?

We'll find out why this morning. God gave us another book besides the four gospels designed to "reveal" Jesus Christ as He is *now* and shall be *forever*.

If you were to see the resurrected Christ today, do you know what you would see? I want to present you with the actual testimony of a man who had such an experience.

**Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

This man had the awesome opportunity to actually *hear* and *see* the resurrected Christ. In fact, his encounter took place more than sixty years after Jesus gave His life on Calvary and conquered the grave. The amazing thing is that after seeing the resurrected Christ, he lived to write about it! He recorded his experience in the last book of the Bible.

The man, of course, is the apostle John. The book, as indicated in its first verse is called *The Revelation* [or, *Apocalypse*] of Jesus Christ (1:1).

This is so critical. How you *view* Jesus affects what you *do* with Jesus in your life. The viewing and doing are connected. I want you to see how John viewed Jesus.

Today I want to show you a picture of the risen Christ as He appears today, from the perspective of an eyewitness, John. We're going to examine three scenes from John's encounter with the risen Christ, as recorded in Revelation 1:9-18.

Allow me to offer some preliminary words about the book. You'll notice from Revelation 1:1 that this is "The revelation of Jesus." The term isn't plural (it's not "revelations"), but singular. This is *the revelation* of Jesus Christ. This book reveals a person, none other than Jesus Christ Himself.

This revelation was delivered to the last surviving apostle, John, around the end of the first century A.D. John in turn was given the task of passing this revelation on to seven local churches situated in Asia Minor (as verse 4 indicates; the locations of the churches are listed in verse 11).

In verses 4-8, John looks back to Jesus' earthly ministry, and offers some comments about the Lord's identity. He is the faithful witness, the first born of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth (5). What's more, He loves us, and has washed us from our sins by the shedding of his own blood (5). That's not all. He's also made us a kingdom of priests (6).

By the way, the Koran claims that Jesus only pretended to be dead. Not so. John said He died. And John would know! He saw the tomb and graveclothes.

Then John looks ahead in verse 7, "Look, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him." Two thousand years ago Jesus was pierced. He was a pierced Messiah.

But what about *now*? What picture does the Bible give us of Jesus now? John tells us about his encounter in verses 9-18. Let's look at scene #1...

I. Scene #1: We're told what John heard (9-11).

Verse 9, "I, John, your brother and companion in the suffering and kingdom and patient endurance that are ours in Jesus, was on the island of Patmos."

John tells us about himself. Remember he's writing to seven local churches in Asia Minor. He used to pastor the church in Ephesus. But he was exiled to an island called Patmos, and that's where he penned this book.

Patmos is a barren, rocky little island, forty miles off the coast of modern day Turkey. It's ten miles long and five miles wide. The Romans banished political prisoners there. Often that exile involved hard labor in the quarries.

John was no super-saint. He refers to himself as a brother and a companion in the suffering of Jesus. Are you interested in becoming a Christian? You need to know right up front what you will experience. A kingdom, yes. But also suffering.

John knew that firsthand. Why was he on Patmos? He tells us at the end of verse 9, "because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus."

For more than sixty years, this son of Zebedee had labored to make his Savior known. Now, because of his faithful service, he was tasting the fellowship of His sufferings.

Yet while on Patmos, John experienced something dramatic. Verse 10, “On the Lord’s Day I was in the Spirit, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet.”

There on Patmos John had an unusual encounter, a revelation. Notice the first sense affected. John says he “heard” something.

What did he hear? A *voice*. What kind of voice? He says the voice was “behind him.” He describes it as a “loud” or “great” voice. The Greek term is *megalane*. This was a *mega* voice, and its effect was both impressive and impacting.

In addition, it was a trumpet-like voice. That is, it was loud and penetrating.

Stop there. In the Old Testament, with what were trumpets associated? Trumpets signified majesty, royalty, judgment, and divinity. Trumpets were sounded to indicate you were in the presence of a king, a judge, or a warrior (like at Jericho in Joshua 6). Ultimately, the trumpet was used to portray the presence of God (like at Sinair when God spoke in the “voice of a trumpet”; Ex 19:16, 19).

Who was responsible for this voice? John will find out soon, but first he’s given an instruction in verse 11. The voice told him, “Write on a scroll what you see and send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea.”

The voice will repeat the command for John in verse 19 (and there give us the outline of the book of Revelation). It was obvious that this vision was not for John’s benefit alone. He wasn’t supposed to conceal his experience. Rather he was to write it down and pass it on to local churches—to specific local assemblies of Christians, to real churches in real places, just like Wheelersburg, to people who needed to hear what John heard.

What would you do if you heard a voice like that? Probably the same thing John did—verse 12, “I turned around to see the voice that was speaking to me.” Which brings us to scene #2...

II. Scene #2: We’re told what John saw (12-16).

John’s wording in verse 12 is interesting, “I turned around to *see the voice* that was speaking to me.” What did John hear? A voice. What did he turn to see? The voice.

But when he turned, what did he see first? Not the voice, but what? “And when I turned I saw seven golden lampstands (12b).”

The book of Revelation uses what’s called *apocalyptic* literature. In apocalyptic literature, the writer seeks to communicate the supernatural by use of the natural. That is, he uses images we’ve seen to represent realities that are literally *out of this world*.

Sometimes John actually interprets the images for us, as here. In verse 20 he gives us the identity of the seven golden lampstands. “The seven lampstands are the seven churches.” In this vision the seven lampstands represent the seven local churches to which the Lord told John to send the record of this vision.

That’s important. Why? Because of what John saw next. Verse 13 “And when I turned I saw seven golden lampstands, and among the lampstands was someone ‘like a son of man.’”

Just who is this one who is like a “son of man?” That phrase, as well as the imagery that follows, comes right out of the Old Testament.

Daniel the prophet had a vision similar to John’s more than six centuries earlier, and he recorded it in Daniel 7. Take a look at his description beginning in Daniel 7:9:

“As I looked, thrones were set in place,
and the Ancient of Days took his seat.
His clothing was as white as snow;
the hair of his head was white like wool.
His throne was flaming with fire,
and its wheels were all ablaze.
¹⁰ A river of fire was flowing,
coming out from before him.
Thousands upon thousands attended him;
ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him.
The court was seated,
and the books were opened...

¹³ “In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was *one like a son of man*, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. ¹⁴ He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all peoples, nations and men of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.”

Listen. John knew his Old Testament. When he saw that awesome scene which he describes in Revelation 1, he immediately thought of Daniel 7. He said, "I saw one like the Son of man, just like the One Daniel described!"

Who did John see? Let there be no mistake. He saw the risen Christ. And what position did Christ assume in John’s vision? John says he saw Him “among the lampstands,” that is, right in the midst of the local churches set to receive this book.

Do you know what that means practically? Do you know what Jesus Christ is doing right now? He's taking care of His Church! When John saw the risen Christ, He saw Him in the midst of seven local churches.

John lived in a day when pagan Roman emperors like Nero and Domitian hounded defenseless Christians. Christians lost their jobs, their homes, even their lives. Didn't anyone care? Was there anyone that even knew about the injustices endured by God's people?

Yes! Jesus knows. Jesus cares. “He has said, I will never leave you nor forsake you. So we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me (Heb 13:5-6).”

So John saw the resurrected Christ. Remember this is the same John that spent three years with Jesus, that reclined on the chest of the Lord the night before His crucifixion. This is the beloved apostle. But on that awesome day on Patmos, John saw Jesus in a very different light.

What did John see when he saw Jesus? Listen. The scene John describes in verses 13-16 is beyond the comprehension of our finite minds. It's staggering. It's also full of symbolic language, much of it deeply rooted in the Old Testament.

Beginning in verse 13 John uses words to paint a picture of the risen, glorified Christ. It's a "snapshot" of sorts. If you look carefully, you'll notice that John uses the term "like" some six times in this description (in the NIV).

--Verse 13: He saw someone *like* a son of man.

--Verse 14: His head and hair were white *like* wool, and his eyes were *like* fire.

--Verse 15: His feet were *like* bronze...and his voice was *like* the sound of rushing waters.

--Verse 16: His face was *like* the sun.

If you took a paintbrush, and tried to paint this picture literally, you'd end up with a bizarre looking portrait. That's not the purpose of this vision. The intent of the imagery is to show us in a visual way what Christ is like. In fact, in the vision we see that Jesus resembles three Old Testament images (or offices).

A. In the vision, Jesus resembles a priest (13). Notice the apparel. John says he saw someone "dressed in a robe down to his feet and with a golden sash around his chest."

Answer this. Who in the Old Testament wore a robe that reached down to his feet and a sash around his torso? Who wore that attire? The high priest in Israel did (Ex 28:4; 29:5).

That's interesting. What did the high priest do? He was the go-between, the mediator, the representative. He was the link between sinful people and the Holy God.

Well, why is the resurrected Christ wearing the attire of a high priest in John's vision? The answer is, because He is our great High Priest! In practical terms the imagery communicates two things to us about the risen Christ.

1. *He is our mediator.* And secondly...

2. *He is the link between sinful people and a holy God.*

Listen, dear friend. You don't meander into the presence of the holy Creator. You must either be perfect, or know someone who is who can take you there.

Right now Jesus is in the presence of God. He has opened up the way for sinners like us to be right with a holy God! He is our priest.

B. In the vision, Jesus resembles a king (14-15). "His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow." Stop there. That comes from the description of the "Ancient of Days" in Daniel 7:9, and gives us the first of three characteristics of King Jesus. First of all...

1. *He's eternal.* The white hair not only speaks of divine purity, but is symbolic of His age, in fact, His eternal existence. The king John saw is unlike any other king.

2. *He's all knowing,* "And his eyes were like blazing fire." His flaming eyes speak of His omniscience. Jesus' eyes see all.

3. *He's powerful.* "His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of rushing waters."¹

Jesus' feet of burning bronze depict strength, stability, and judgment. His voice which sounds like rushing waters represents His awesome authority.

Last summer our family traveled to Niagara Falls on vacation. It's a spectacular site to watch the water crashing to the ground below. But something else stands out—the

¹ There's a possible connection with Ezekiel 1:13, 27 and 8:2.

awesome *sound*. It's breathtaking to hear the sound of the rushing water. That's what John said he heard.

Listen. When John saw the resurrected Christ, he saw Him not only as the great High Priest, but also as the Almighty Ruler, the sovereign King of Kings!

C. In the vision, Jesus resembles a prophet (16). "In his right hand he held seven stars, and out of his mouth came a sharp double-edged sword. His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance."

Again, the spectacular imagery teaches us about the true nature of the risen Christ. We know what Jesus did in the past—He died and rose again. But what's He doing *now*? In verse 16 we learn about two of His continuing actions.

1. *He cares for His people.* What did John say he saw in His right hand? Seven stars—which according to verse 20 are the angels [or "messengers"] of the seven churches.

Beloved, the Church is precious to the Lord. He's in the midst of it according to verse 13, and He's holding its leaders in His hands as we see right here. The Lord loves His church. Do you? Listen. If you love Christ, you must love His church.

2. *He prevails by His Word.* Answer this. What object did John see in verse 16? A sword. Where do warriors usually carry their swords when in battle? Their hands, right? Where did John see Jesus' sword? In His mouth.

Why? Because Jesus prevails by His Word. Listen to Hebrews 4:12, "The Word of God is quick and powerful and sharper than any two-edged sword."

Do you remember what happened to the soldiers when they tried to arrest Jesus in the garden? John, who saw the event, tells us in his gospel. When Jesus *spoke*, the mob fell to the ground (John 18:6).

I don't think we realize just how powerful Jesus' Word is. How will He conquer the world? Through His Word. How does He conquer a sinner's rebel heart. Through His Word.

Know this. When we proclaim the Word concerning His death and resurrection, we are swinging a powerful sword, one that cuts at men's depraved hearts. Does the sword hurt? Yes—it pierces the human pride. But it also heals.

The climax comes at the end of verse 16. John sums it up and says seeing Jesus was like looking at "the sun shining in all its brilliance."

Have you ever looked at a photograph of someone and said, "That picture doesn't do justice to him!" Listen. If you know Jesus only as He's revealed in the gospels, you're not looking at His most recent picture! Yes, the gospels make it clear that Jesus is the Messiah. He came to suffer and die, to give His life as a ransom for many. When Jesus walked on the earth two thousand years ago, He put a veil on His majesty and glory.

But the book of Revelation reveals Jesus Christ in His full splendor. What a picture! Jesus is the great High Priest. He is the mighty King of Kings! He is the powerful Prophet! That's the true picture of the resurrected Christ!

Is that how you view Jesus? If you do, here's the next question. What's the right way to respond when you see Jesus like this? We find out in scene #3. We've seen what John heard and what John saw. In the third scene...

III. Scene #3: We're told what John did (17-18).

Verse 17, “When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead.” I find it amazing to look at the way people responded in the Bible when they saw the resurrected Christ. The disciples were terrified and frightened and held His feet (Lk 24:37; Mt 28:9). On another occasion, Thomas worshipped Him (Jn 20:28). Peter jumped into the water (Jn 21:7). Paul fell prostrate before Him (Acts 9:4).

And so did John. He fell on his face, as though dead. Which says this to us.

A. When you see Jesus as He is, you have reason to fear. How should people today respond when they see Christ as He is? How have you responded to the risen Christ? Have you admitted the ugly stain of your sin as you've beheld His spotless glory? Have you bowed your life to Him? Have you called out for His forgiveness? Are you worshipping Him with your life right now?

You see, we've got a problem. Modern Christianity—especially in America—is plagued by a shallow and deficient view of Jesus. We have quaint pictures of a dark-haired, dark-skinned Jew in mind. And no wonder our evangelism is so ineffective.

We tell people they need to believe in Jesus. They don't. Why not? They don't see the need. And why not? We've not given them an accurate picture of who the risen Christ really is!

Listen. When we see Jesus as John did, it will revolutionize our lives! When you see Jesus as He is, you have reason to fear. But that's not all.

B. When you see Jesus as He is, you have reason to hope. Both are true.

Yes, if we saw the resurrected Jesus as John did, our first reaction would be to *dread* Him—just like John did.

But what did Jesus do? He dispelled the *dread*. Verse 17, “Then he placed his right hand on me and said, ‘Do not be afraid.’”

Don't dread Jesus. Worship Him today!

How many times do we hear those words—“Fear not”—coming from Jesus' lips in the gospels? John's experience on Patmos reminds me of a similar event that occurred sixty years earlier. Look at Matthew 17...

In verse 1, Jesus took Peter, James, John with Him up on a mountain. While there, according to verse 2, He was transfigured before them. In fact, His face shown like the sun—sound familiar? Then in verse 5, a bright cloud overshadowed them and they heard the voice of God, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!”

How did the disciples respond? Verse 6, “When the disciples heard this, they fell facedown to the ground, terrified.” When was the last time God's Word had that kind of effect on your life?

I love what Jesus did next. Verse 7, “But Jesus came and touched them, ‘Get up,’ he said. ‘Don't be afraid.’”

How should we respond to the risen Christ today? Not with dread, but with worship. When you see Jesus as He is, yes, you have reason to fear. But you also have reason to hope. “Do not be afraid,” Jesus told John in Revelation 1:17. Why not? Here's why not, according to what Jesus told John, for *three reasons*...

1. *There's hope because of who Jesus is.* “I am the First and the Last.” Jesus is the great *I AM*. He had no beginning nor ending. He is eternally the same.

2. *There's hope because of what Jesus did.* "I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever (18)!" Did Jesus die? Yes. Is He still dead? No. He conquered the grave and is alive forevermore.

3. *There's hope because of what Jesus holds.* "I hold the keys of death and Hades (18b)."

What's the significance of keys? A key represents authority, power, and control. If you've got a key to my house, you can enter at will. Jesus holds the keys of death and hell.

That's why there's hope, beloved. It's because of who Jesus is, what Jesus did, and what Jesus holds. There's hope for those who know the *real* Jesus.

I agree with Warren Wiersbe, "What the Church needs today is a new awareness of Christ and His glory. We need to see Him 'high and lifted up' (Isa 6:1). There is a dangerous absence of awe and worship in our assemblies today. We are boasting about standing on our own feet, instead of breaking and falling at His feet."²

Let me put it as plainly as I can. You have no reason to fear today *only if* you know Jesus as John did, and *only if* you've bowed your knee and heart to Him. We've just seen the real picture of the risen Christ. What are you going to do with Him?

Dr. Seamands tells of a Muslim who became a Christian in Africa. "Some of his friends asked him, 'Why have you become a Christian?' He answered, 'Well, its like this. Suppose you were going down the road and suddenly the road forked in two directions, and you didn't know which way to go, and there at the fork in the road were two men, one dead and one alive--which one would you ask which way to go?'"³

Know this. Jesus went into the tomb, but Jesus also came *out of the tomb*. You've just seen His picture. A response is in order...

Response: Now that you've seen the real picture of the risen Christ...

You must do two things...

1. *You must accept Him as He is.* "But I don't like a Jesus that brings me to my knees," you say. "I want a Jesus that makes me feel good about myself." Dear friend, you must accept Jesus as He is, not as you wish Him to be. Indeed, why would you not want to submit your life to the One who gave His life to pay sin's penalty at the Cross? Why would you not want to receive as Lord and Savior the One who defeated death and the Evil One? It's unthinkable. You must accept Him as He is.

2. *You must get ready to meet Him.* Know this. You will meet Him one day. Every eye will see Him and every tongue confess that He is Lord. Are you ready for that day?

² Warren Wiersbe, p. 517.

³ Warren Webster, April, 1980, *HIS*, p. 13.