

Sermon – 19/11/2006 pm

I am Alive for Evermore

Study Text: Revelation 1:17-20

When Isaiah saw the Lord, he said *woe is me for I am undone* (Isaiah 6:5). When Ezekiel had visions of God he fell on his face and heard a voice telling him to stand on his feet and listen (Ezekiel 2:1). When Daniel had a vision of one like a man, he also fell on his face in fear (Daniel 8:17). John stands in the line of these men of God who had visions of the living God.

Fell At His Feet

Apart from being in exile, life had been going on as usual for John. It was the Lord's Day, and John may well have been worshipping God; he may have been reading the Scriptures or praying. But on this particular day he was caught up in the Spirit. He heard a loud voice behind him. As he turned to see who was speaking he saw this amazing sight. It was awesome, it was terrifying. Filled with fear, John fell at his feet as though dead (1:17).

How do you think you would respond if the Lord appeared to you in a vision? One day you will see him in all his glory (1 John 3:2) – how will you respond? These days all sorts of fearful men-like creatures are portrayed on the screen as men play with their computers and their imagination. You might think that people will be immune to visions awesome men, but there will be no mistaking the appearance of the Son of Man.

Nothing in this world, or on the screen, can compare to what John saw and what you will see. And what you and all people see will not be on a screen. It will be real. His thunderous words will strike fear in every heart. *At the name of Jesus every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord* (Philippians 2).

Fear Not

As John was prostrate and motionless before the figure of the risen Jesus in all his glory, Jesus reached out and touched him with his right hand, saying *do not be afraid* (1:17). As awesome and frightening as the figure was with eyes like fire and a sword protruding from his mouth, he was kind and gracious. He reached out to John and spoke gently to him.

The emperor Domitian made an 8m high statue of himself at Ephesus, which John may have seen. Kings of men who want to be feared and worshipped often make huge statues of themselves. Remember the giant statue of Saddam Hussein that was toppled when he was overthrown. Proud men envisage themselves in this larger than life manner when they want people to worship them. John does not say how tall this figure of the risen Jesus was but it was more awesome than any man could make. Yet he reached out to comfort, and encourage, a fearful servant of the Lord.

Moreover, unlike the statue of Domitian, the figure John saw was alive. *I am he who lives and was dead, and behold, I am alive for evermore* (1:18). The figure John saw identified himself as the 'First and the Last' or the 'Alpha and Omega'. This title variously refers to God the

Father (1:8, 21:6) and Jesus (1:17, 22:13). The 'I am' is also an allusion to the divine name by which the Lord God made himself known to Moses.

The one who was dead but now *alive for evermore* is unmistakably Jesus Christ. John was a disciple of Jesus during his time on this earth. He watched him die on the Cross, but also saw him after he was risen from the dead. John had also briefly seen Jesus in his heavenly glory on the mountain where he was transfigured. In this vision he sees Jesus in his heavenly glory and sovereign power.

This vision reminded John that Jesus was not dead but alive. Being in exile and knowing his brothers were suffering intense persecution, he may have asked 'where is Jesus'? Many a follower of Jesus has asked this question even before they are persecuted. Maybe you have asked this question during a time of distress or pain. Maybe you have felt intensely lonely and abandoned at some time in your life. Well keep these words ever before you. Jesus lives. *He ever lives to make intercession for those who are saved* (Hebrews 7:25)

Some who call themselves Christians even deny the resurrection altogether. For them being a Christian is just an intellectual thing, or a way of life. As we approach the end of the year we will see nativity scenes everywhere and hear many singing Christmas carols. People will make their second or third visit to church for the year. Do they believe that Jesus rose from the dead and that he lives today? Do they believe that he is coming again? They are to be pitied more than anyone those who think they are Christians when they do not believe that Jesus rose from the dead, and that he lives today.

Jesus is alive and he holds *the keys of Death and Hades* (1:18). The one who has the keys has the power. Jesus is able to free whom he chooses from this place. He has this power by virtue of his resurrection. On the Cross he satisfied sin's demands and by his resurrection he conquered death.

What or where is Hades? It is not Hell. The word translated Hell in the New Testament is *gehenna*. This word *Hades* is the transliteration of another Greek word. It is the equivalent of the Hebrew *Sheol*, the place of the dead or departed spirits. In this book we always read of death and Hades together. It is associated with the first death.

In Revelation 20:13 we read *the sea gave up the dead who were in it and death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged*, before being cast into the lake of fire, the second and eternal death. Those who believe in Jesus *shall not come into judgment for they have passed from death to life* (John 5:24).

The risen Jesus told John he was alive and that he had authority over death. This message would have been of great comfort to him and his brothers in the tribulation. It appeared that the ruthless and violent Emperor in Rome had all the power as he put to death those whom he wished. But they were reminded not to fear him who can kill only the body. Rather, fear God who can destroy both body and soul in hell (*gehenna*) (Matthew 10:28).

Fail Not

John was reminded to write down the things which he had seen (1:19). The loud voice which he first heard had told him to write what he saw in a book and send it to the seven churches

(1:11). John went on to describe what he saw in this vision. He had further visions (4:1, 17:18, 21:9) which he also wrote down and included in this letter.

The things he saw was Jesus showing him what must shortly take place (1:1). These visions of the future were related to what Jesus had already accomplished. At the Cross he was victorious, conquering the ruler of the world. From his throne in heaven Jesus now rules over heaven and earth. He sees those whom he loves, he sees his covenant children and knows the tribulation they face. He tells them to hold on, he is coming soon. He tells them in these visions what heaven is like, and what is going to happen as the end of the present earth approaches.

Many scholars see verse 19 as an outline of this book, but they do not agree just what this outline is. Are there two or three elements in this outline? If the first 'and' is omitted, as in the NIV, you have a twofold division. John saw *things that are and things that will take place after this*. On this basis chapters 1-3 are separated from 4-22. But the 'and' is in the original so there are three divisions. What are these divisions? Not all agree but most say chapter 1 is what he saw, chapters 2-3 things that are, and chapters 4-22 things yet to take place.

We will look at some divisions in the book another time. What this verse tells us is that John was to write down all that he saw. Most of this related to things yet to take place – 17 chapters out of 22! Yet all of this was in one letter sent to seven churches that John knew well. It was a message to comfort and encourage them in their tribulation, not a merely a mathematical or scientific puzzle.

It is apocalyptic writing. It is a mystery, an uncovering of hidden truth. Jesus uncovers the truth of the seven stars and the seven golden lampstands immediately (1:20). The symbolism has begun and continues throughout the book. The light from the rest of Scripture and from the Holy Spirit himself will enable us to understand these symbols, to crack the code as it were, and realise the blessings that flow to those who read the words of this prophecy.

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