

Sermon – 12/11/2006 pm

Vision of the Son of Man

Study Text: Revelation 1:9-16

Some years ago I was preaching at an Easter dawn service. The gathering was in a park. As I spoke the sun slowly rose and shone into my eyes. It was so bright I could not see the crowd seated before me. I was blinded by the brightness of the rising sun. The apostle John had a vision of the risen Jesus. The face of Jesus was *like the sun shining in its strength* – not the morning sun but the midday sun! John was stunned and fell at the feet of this *One like the Son of Man*.

This is the first vision recorded in this book. One day while in exile John was caught up in the Spirit. He heard a voice and turned to see a figure standing behind him. The voice told him to write what he saw in a book and send it to seven churches, churches in which John had ministered. His fellow believers were suffering intense persecution, probably during the reign of the Emperor Domitian.

Venue

John was on an island called Patmos when he had this vision. This small island off the coast from Ephesus was a barren outcrop of rocks, an ideal place for a penal settlement. John was not there as a tourist. He was there *for the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ* (1:9). He was there because he had been preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ in Ephesus and these other churches. The authorities must have arrested him and exiled him to this island.

It was the Lord's Day when he heard the loud voice behind him. Christians began meeting together on the day that Jesus rose from the dead, the day after the Sabbath. This was the day on which John would usually have been gathered with the church in worship. Even though he was not with them in body he was with them in spirit. Maybe he was praying or praising God when he entered this ecstatic or trance like state, and had visions of the Lord and of heaven.

Isaiah (6:1), Ezekiel (1:1), and Daniel (7:1) all had similar visions of God and of heaven. The apostle Paul was caught up to the third heaven *and heard inexpressible words* (II Corinthians 12:4). He did not write these words down. But John was told to write down what he saw and heard. He wrote in a book or scroll which he sent to these seven churches in Asia (1:11). The seven churches mentioned in his greeting are here named.

John had already written a detailed doctrinal greeting to these churches. As he records his visions he again greets them warmly as a brother in Christ, and as a *companion in the tribulation* (1:9). It was tough being a believer in those days. At their meetings believers did not share about how the Lord had blessed them with a new car or a new house. They reported how their house had been ransacked, and how they had been beaten for going to church. Some were locked up in prison, and others, like Antipas from Pergamos, were put to death for refusing to worship the Emperor (2:13).

We might wonder what such persecution would do to the church today. What church you might ask? Indeed Satan has decimated the church of God in this land, without having to

resort to persecution. *The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life* (I John 2:16) have been very effective in turning people from worshipping Jesus to worshipping Satan. Even within some churches money is the chief object of worship.

Behind human history are mighty spiritual powers in conflict with each other – the kingdom of God and the power of Satan. The church stands between the two. We are in a war zone. And as the end approaches the conflict will intensify.

John was also a companion in the *kingdom and patience in Jesus* (1:9). *Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God* (Acts 14:22). Current tribulation would pale into insignificance in light of the coming kingdom of God. *For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us* (Romans 8:18). John saw Jesus in all his glory. He saw him as a royal figure. Jesus is not dead but alive, and he is coming soon.

Life for believers in this world will not get easier. What we need is patient endurance, patience that is found in Jesus and him alone. Paul often spoke of being ‘in Christ’. He once said *I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me* (Philippians 4:13). He was speaking in the context of suffering and distress. We will need the strength of Christ to endure to the coming tribulation. *He who endures to the end will be saved* said Jesus (Matthew 10:22, 24:13).

Voice

While in the Spirit, John heard a loud voice behind him. It sounded like a trumpet. At Mt Sinai Moses and the people heard the loud sound of a trumpet as the Lord came down and spoke to them (Exodus 19). When the Lord speaks his people hear him. He speaks loudly and clearly; he does not mutter in confusion like other gods and false prophets. When the Lord comes, every eye will see him and every ear will hear his words of judgment.

Whose voice did he hear? It was that of the *Alpha and Omega, the First and the Last* (1:11). Previously this title referred to God the Father (1:4, 8). Now it applies to God the Son, for when John turned around he saw *One like the Son of Man*. If you believe that Jesus is equal with the Father you will not be surprised at this, but this is a ‘rock of offence’ for those who deny the deity of Christ.

What did John hear? He heard words, words he could understand and write down. The words from God were for the edification and strengthening of the churches. These were not beautiful words to tickle the ears, words that made no sense to those who read them. These words were food for the soul, words to strengthen struggling Christians.

Vision

The voice came from behind, so John turned to see who was speaking to him. What he saw was supernatural and breathtaking. He was dazzled by the brilliance of *One like the Son of Man*, the risen Jesus, standing in the midst of seven golden lampstands. *The Son is the radiance of the Father’s glory, the exact representation of his being* (Hebrews 1:3). Moses saw a bush suddenly burst into flame as he tended sheep on Mt Sinai. As he looked in amazement the Lord spoke to him from the midst of the bush. *Truly God dwells in unapproachable light* (I Timothy 6:16).

One like the Son of Man reminds us of the vision which Daniel had of the Ancient of Days (Daniel 7). He saw the Ancient of Days in a garment as white as snow, with hair like pure wool, on a throne like a fiery furnace. One like the Son of man came to the Ancient of Days on his throne. John saw One like the Son of man with a long garment and golden sash, white with hair like wool or snow, and eyes like fire. His feet were like fine brass.

‘Son of Man’ was what Jesus called himself during his life on earth. So this title links Daniel with Revelation through Jesus himself. The title also served to hide the identity of Jesus from those not having ears to hear or eyes to see. This letter may well have fallen into hostile hands.

Jesus appeared in heavenly glory and majesty. The golden sash and brass feet gave the appearance of royalty. Out of his mouth went a sharp two edged sword. What does this mean? Swords are not usually seen in the mouth. Out of the mouth come words, so this sword refers to the word of Jesus. *The word of God is living and powerful, sharper than any two edged sword* (Hebrews 4:12). The word which Jesus speaks will be like a sword. He will purge his churches and punish those who persecute his chosen. His word will accomplish what he intends.

In the vision Jesus was standing in the midst of seven golden lampstands (1:12). Every Jew was familiar with the seven golden lamps of the candelabrum in the temple. Moses was told to make a lampstand with seven branches. The seven lampstands surrounded Jesus, reflecting the light from his fiery eyes and radiant face.

These seven lampstands represented the seven churches to which John was told to write (1:20). His message to Ephesus included a threat to remove their lampstand if they did not repent (2:5). The church only exists if Christ is present. If the truth of Jesus, the truth of his incarnation, crucifixion and resurrection, is not upheld, Jesus is not in that ‘church’. The glory of the risen Lord must be clearly reflected in churches that have Christ in their midst.

In his right hand Jesus held seven stars (1:16). What do these represent? Well, he told John that they are the angels of the seven churches (1:20). But who are these angels? The word for ‘angel’ means ‘messenger’, so some people see these as human messengers sent by John to the churches. Others think they represent the leaders of these churches. But angels are heavenly beings, or *ministering spirits* (Hebrews 1:14). It is best to see these angels as somehow being heavenly representatives of the churches. Daniel spoke of the angelic prince Michael watching over the people of God (Daniel 12:1).

This message from John was actually a message from God sent by an angel (1:1). The churches were to regard this letter as a message from heaven, not just the writing of a man called John. Do you regard the words of the Bible as a message sent from heaven; the words of God himself? These are living and powerful words. They search the deepest recesses of the human heart. They are words that will not fail. As you read them and as you pray, reflect on the vision of the risen Christ you have seen today.

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