

REV 1:9-20—THE REAL JESUS

INTRO: We've all seen pictures of Jesus from time to time: Jesus kneeling and praying, or carrying a lamb, or knocking on the door, or maybe you've seen the picture of Jesus knocking on the UN building. If he's knocking on a door it's usually sort of a limp-wristed, backhanded knock. Or, he has his two fingers in the air, and he's looking off into the middle distance. His hair is perfectly parted down the middle, every hair is in place, and his beard is perfectly trimmed. Clearly those are all accurate pictures of a guy who worked with his hands with wood and stone and spent his adult life walking by foot all over the dusty land of Palestine.

The movies portray him pretty much the same way—except the movies reveal that Jesus has a British accent. We would not have known that by just reading our Bibles.

Even pictures that try to portray Jesus in a more realistic image manner have a fundamental problem. The problem is that they all focus on the Jesus who walked this earth 2000 years ago. But that is not the way Jesus is now.

As we saw last week in **Rev 1:5**, Jesus is **“the ruler of the kings of the earth.”** So one of the things I think we need to do is get a better understanding of *this* Jesus. The last half of **Revelation 1** gives us the picture of Jesus as he is now—the real Jesus—not the limp-wristed Jesus of the pictures and movies.

[READ REV 1:9-20]

PROP: This passage is telling us: **Know the real Jesus.**

O/S: In this passage we will get to know the real Jesus as we see two main things: (1) What Jesus is like; and (2) What that means for us.

I. What Jesus is like (vv. 13-18)

These 6 verses give us an amazing picture of the real Jesus. But remember something important: **v.10** tells us that John was **“in the spirit.”** He had a *vision*. As we mentioned last week, this is a book of *symbols*. Symbols, by their very nature, use physical images to try to depict spiritual realities that cannot be fully described.

That's why John says again and again **“I saw something and it was like this.”** For example, **v.14** says “His head and hair were like this, and his eyes were like that.” **v.15** says, “His feet were like this and his voice was like that.” The symbols John uses do not describe what Jesus *looks* like *physically* but are describing what he *is* like; they show us how things *are*—*not* how they look to the physical eye.

So when we think of Jesus as he really is, don't think: “He really doesn't have dark hair; but he has white hair. And he really doesn't have blue eyes; but he has funny-shaped yellow or orange eyes that look like flames. And his tongue is not pink, but it's longer than Gene Simmons of KISS's tongue, and it looks like a sword.” Those are all symbolic portrayals that are trying to convey the essence of this amazing Jesus.

v.13-15 [READ] These images are taken directly from Daniel's visions in **Dan 7** and **10**. [READ **Dan 7:9, 13; 10:5-6**]. Notice something: in Daniel's vision, it was **“the Ancient of Days”** whose **“vesture was like white snow and the hair of His head like pure wool.”** Here in Revelation those same images are applied to Jesus. Jesus is both distinguished from yet identified with the Ancient of Days. This gets us back to the mysterious notion of the Trinity: there is only one God, but he is in three persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—as John previously hinted at in **Rev 1:4-6**.

His robe and sash suggest both kingly and priestly attire. That is consistent with **Daniel** where the Ancient of Days is sitting on the throne as king of the universe. On the day of Pentecost, Peter concluded his sermon in **Acts 2** by saying that Jesus is reigning even now as king. In the book of Hebrews, Jesus is called our **“great high priest.”** What we are seeing here in Revelation are pictures-visions-symbols that visually are portraying the truths we find about Jesus elsewhere in the Bible.

In v.14 it says “His eyes were like a flame of fire.” That suggests Jesus' role, not only as king and high priest, but as the all-seeing, holy, and righteous *judge*. In the Bible, fire often is a symbol of judgment. For example, **1 Cor 3** says that the nature of our works will be **“revealed by fire.”** The same symbol of Jesus having eyes like flames of fire is used again in **Rev 19:11-12** where Jesus returns to earth specifically to **judge and wage war.**

“Eyes like a flame of fire” also suggest that his eyes see not only the outside of things but burn down to the heart of the matter. That's exactly what Jesus himself says in **Rev 2:23**. There he says, **“All the churches will know that I am he who searches the minds and hearts.”**

In v.15 it says Jesus' “feet were like burnished bronze when it has been made to glow in a furnace.”

As we read earlier, that image comes from **Dan 10:6**. The image reinforces the picture of Jesus as judge because **eyes like flames of fire and feet like burnished bronze** appear together again in **Rev 2:18**. On that occasion they are immediately followed by Jesus' words, "**I know your deeds.**" And he then goes on to promise the church judgment or reward based on whether there is repentance or not—so Jesus is the judge.

But Jesus is a judge unlike any other judge—he is the judge who himself has been judged. The "feet" suggest one's "walk," IOW one's life. Jesus himself walked this earth as a man. When **v.15** says Jesus' "**feet were like burnished bronze when it has been made to glow in a furnace,**" bronze, like fire, suggests judgment. For example, in **Num 21:9** Moses made a bronze serpent which he lifted up, and all who looked to it were spared death when they were bitten by snakes. **John 3:14** applies that image to Jesus and says, "**Just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up on the cross.**"

Jesus was tempted and endured everything we are tempted by and have to go through—sexual temptation; the temptation to quit; the temptation to worship other things. He also endured all the stresses and pressures of this life, including poverty, being falsely accused and convicted. He endured pain and beatings and a cruel death. Yet he never once turned his back on God. He never once sinned.

As a result, Jesus did walk our walk. He paid the penalty for your sins and mine that otherwise we would have to pay, but never could. He himself went through the furnace of God's judgment that otherwise we would have to endure. Jesus' feet are indeed "**like burnished bronze when it has been made to glow in a furnace.**" So Jesus is the only one who can be a just judge.

v.15 concludes by saying that his voice is "**like the sound of many waters.**" That is another image that suggests Jesus is God himself, because in **Ezek 43:2** Ezekiel says, "**the glory of the God of Israel . . . his voice was like the sound of many waters.**"

v.16 talks about the "**seven stars.**" We will return to the seven stars later when we talk about what the real Jesus means for us. But look at where it says, "**out of his mouth came a sharp, two-edged sword.**" This image again reinforces the picture of Jesus as judge, because this same image is used in **Rev 2:16** and **19:15**. In both places the context is of Jesus judging and waging war with the sword of his mouth, the WOG.

And his face "like the sun shining in its strength" takes us back to the transfiguration, which was a prefigure of Jesus in all his glory. Matthew tells us that, at the transfiguration, Jesus "**face shown like the sun, and his garments became as white as light.**"

In **v.17** Jesus calls himself "the first and the last." This description again identifies Jesus with God Almighty, since in **Isa 41:4; 44:6; and 48:12** God described himself as "**the first and the last.**" This description as "**the first and the last**" indicates that Jesus is sovereign over time and history. Just as Jesus was in control of the world's beginning, so he is bringing everything to its preordained conclusion.

This is reinforced in **v.18** where Jesus calls himself "the living one," and describes how he "was dead" but is "alive forevermore." That, of course, is referring to his crucifixion and subsequent resurrection from the dead. Yet when he says "**I have the keys of death and Hades,**" what he is saying is that, through his own death and resurrection he defeated death itself. He gained the keys over death so that he can now unlock the grave and lead the dead to eternal life. And so, in **1 Corinthians 15** Christ is called the "**first fruits**" who will give all who are his resurrection, glorious new bodies, and glorious new lives, when he comes again.

That is the real Jesus. He is a being who knows us down to the very thoughts in our heads. He too was a man. But he transcends us as far as the ocean transcends a drop of water or as the sun transcends a candle flame.

And yet, despite his being sovereign over all time and over all people and over all of creation, Jesus gave everything he had for us. That is also the real Jesus. The only appropriate response to who he is and what he has done is to do what John did in **v.17**—"fall down at his feet"—not as a dead man, but in awe and worship.

Which leads us to the issue of:

II. What this means for us (vv. 9-13, 16-20)

Note how in **v.9** John begins by calling himself "**your brother and fellow partaker in the tribulation and the kingdom.**"

A. As to the kingdom, there is what is known as the "already, but not yet" nature of the kingdom. IOW, in one sense, the kingdom is now; Jesus inaugurated the kingdom at his first coming. Jesus said on one occasion, "**the KOG has come upon you**" (**Luke 11:20**). We are in the kingdom now; that is the "already" of the kingdom. But the kingdom has not yet been consummated. It is not yet in its final, perfect state. That is the "not yet" of the kingdom. That will come when Jesus returns.

What are the implications of the fact that we are in the "already" of the kingdom now? We mentioned last week that we—believers, the church—are to be an alternate kingdom to the kingdom of the world. That

implies that our values and priorities should be fixed around Jesus and *his* values and priorities. That should affect how we spend our time, how we treat people, and what we do with our money.

As a kingdom we are not just disconnected individuals. We are a body, a community. We need to be engaged as a body where God has placed us. Don't just "come to church" for an hour on Sundays, but get involved with the body. How can we claim to be a kingdom and a community if we have no relationship with the other members of the kingdom and community?

We are not here, in this time and place, by accident. One of the things that Pastor Wade is studying during his sabbatical is the very issue of how the church can be more missional, how it can have greater engagement with the community in which God has put us. It seems to me that today's message dovetails with what Wade is in the process of doing. Let us pray for him and his sabbatical study, and look forward with anticipation to what God may be showing him—because even now God is preparing *us* for what he has for us.

B. Just as there is an "already, but not yet" aspect to God's kingdom, so is there an "already, but not yet" aspect to the tribulation. Tribulation is stress, problems, oppression, persecution, and every other sort of evil that affects God's people. In **Luke 16:33** Jesus said, **"In the world you have tribulation."** Tribulation will characterize the *entire period* between Christ's first coming and his return. The nature, form, and degree of tribulation may wax and wane depending on circumstances, time, and place, but it will always be here.

Remember last week we talked about how "the seven churches that are in Asia" are representative of all the churches in all times and places. Here in **vv. 11 and 20** John again is referring to **"the seven churches."** So he is talking about the entire church, wherever and whenever it is located. Additionally, in **v.19** John is told to write **"the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after these things"**—IOW, past, present, and future. What Jesus is showing us in the book of Revelation applies throughout the earth and throughout time—and that includes tribulation. That is the "already" of the tribulation. But tribulation against the church probably will increase shortly before Christ's return. That is the "not yet" of the tribulation, which we will talk about more when we get to **ch.20**.

What are the implications of tribulation for us? For one thing, we need to resist evil by supporting financially, through prayer, and otherwise, our brothers and sisters overseas, and here at home, who are being persecuted or otherwise are facing evil or hard times. In previous sermons I have mentioned the Voice of the Martyrs and International Justice Mission which help people who are being oppressed. You may also have heard of the ministry Open Doors. Recently, Nancy and I got a mailing from Open Doors about a project they have to try to help Christians who are being persecuted by ISIS. You might want to check these ministries out.

Second, we need to look at how we respond to personal tribulation and evil. The thing we absolutely should *not* do is get bent out of shape, or lose our faith, or shake our fist and say "God, how could you let this happen," when evil happens to us or to those we love and care about—because it will happen. Jesus experienced evil and said that we will too. John said, **"I am your fellow partaker in the tribulation."** Since he is our **"fellow partaker,"** that means that we can expect tribulation, too.

This is why the word "perseverance" in v.9 (or as the ESV puts it, "patient endurance") is so important. That same word is found throughout Revelation, not only here but in **Rev 2:2-3; 2:19; 3:10; 13:10; and 14:12**. The reason is that Christians follow in Christ's footsteps. The way we do that is by being faithful witnesses all the way to the end, even to death, just like him. That is why the way we *respond* to evil is important. It is important because it reveals the nature and quality of our faith.

In December 1776 when the continental army was facing very difficult times in our fight for independence, Thomas Paine wrote in a pamphlet called "The Crisis": **"THESE are the times that try men's souls. The summer soldier and the sunshine patriot will, in this crisis, shrink from the service of their country; but he that stands by it now, deserves the love and thanks of man and woman. Tyranny, like hell, is not easily conquered; yet we have this consolation with us, that the harder the conflict, the more glorious the triumph."**

If that was true in the political and military arena, how much more true is it in the great battle we are engaged in now for the eternal destinies of men and women. The biggest problem for many Christians is that they don't even realize they are engaged in a battle at all. They only think, "I'm in the kingdom; I have my fire insurance policy; yea me!" That is why John is reminding us that he is our **"fellow partaker in the tribulation and kingdom and perseverance which are in Jesus."**

C. Just as there are implications for our lives from the fact that we are in the kingdom and implications from the fact that we are in the tribulation, there is one other aspect of this passage that is important for our lives. In **vv. 12-13** John heard the voice and saw the seven golden lampstands and turned and saw **"in the middle of the lampstands one like a son of man."** **v.20** tells us that **"the seven lampstands are the seven churches."** What

John is telling us is that Jesus is in the middle of the churches. It's like he said while he was on earth, **“Where two or three are gathered together in my name, I am there in their midst” (Matt 18:20).**

But this is telling us more. In v.16 it says that **“in his right hand he held seven stars.”** v.20 tells us that **“the seven stars . . . are the angels of the seven churches.”** A footnote in my ESV Bible says, “The Greek word [translated ‘angels’] means ‘messengers.’ It may refer to human messengers, specifically pastors of the churches, or to angels.” I think the latter meaning—angels—is correct.

A commentator I particularly like regarding the book of Revelation is Greg Beale who says:
“Addressing the churches through their representative angels is to remind the churches that already a dimension of their existence is heavenly, that their real home is not with the unbelieving ‘earth-dwellers,’ and that they have heavenly help and protection in their struggle not to be conformed to their pagan environment. And one of the purposes of the church meeting in its weekly gatherings is to be reminded of its heavenly existence and identity.” (Beale, *Revelation*, 218)

The churches don't just have angelic representatives, but Jesus is holding them in his right hand.

Traditionally, the right hand is the hand of power. All of this tells us at least two things:

- First, whatever hardship we or other parts of the great worldwide church may be having to endure, Christ is right here with us. We are not alone. We have not been abandoned. Jesus himself said: **“My sheep hear my voice, and I know them and they follow me; and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of my hand” (John 10:27-28).** Jesus did not choose those words by accident. He is closer to us than we imagine.
- Second, although Community Church is relatively small, and other church fellowships around the world are small, and poor, and oppressed, we have supernatural resources that most of us probably do not think about or even realize we have. If we start realizing this, and reflect on these things, I think it can help our prayer life. And I think it can help free us up—loosen our grip on our money, loosen the ties that bind us to the world and its ways—so that we can start living more proactive, Christian lives.

CONCL: The real Jesus is not the wimpy stereotype of the pictures and movies. The real Jesus is an amazing being unlike anything or anyone we have ever seen. But the real Jesus is intimately connected with his people, the church. That is true even when we think of him as a million miles away. He is not a million miles away. He is not only in our midst, but we are in the palm of his right hand.

So, as Jesus told John in v.17, “Do not be afraid”—regardless of what you may be going through. But more than that, recognize that we are part of a corporate body that is on earth but also is supernatural. And with confidence, as we come to know the real Jesus more and more deeply, let us loosen the ties that bind us or pull us away from him, and do the things he has given us to do, both individually and as a body and community of believers.