

If I were to ask you to close your eyes and try to picture (in your mind's eye) Jesus... standing before you... what would He look like...? And what would help you form your impression of Him...? ...Famous paintings...? ...Sunday School art...? ...A recent Hollywood movie...? ...A stained glass image that you have seen...? (The church that I grew-up in had impressive stained-glass windows that brightly depicted several scenes from the Gospels.)

(You know) ... its interesting that the New Testament writers speak **not one word** concerning His physical appearance — whether He was short or tall... dark or light... lean or stout.

Now... Isaiah... the prophet... **did** record for us (but in very general terms)... what His physical would be...

**Isaiah 53:2 (ESV)**

*...he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him.*

Isaiah says that His physical appearance would not stand-out. People would not be attracted to Him for His looks... There would not be anything too memorable about His outside features. ... Why is this...? ... Because He is the “Son of man” — He is the *representative* man... and most of us have no beauty that others should desire us – either... (OK...maybe I should only speak for myself.)

The omission about Christ's appearance changes in our passage of study this morning. In fact... not only will we be given specific details... but we are encouraged to know how Jesus looks as something that is **important** for us to know.

Today we will come to a verse where Christ will clearly outline everything He wants John to write in the Book of Revelation. Jesus gave John **three** things that He wanted him to emphasize. ... And **one**... of the three important categories... of this entire book... is the vision John had of Jesus.

John was told to record what Jesus looks like... and will continue to look like. ... **Now**... our knowing how Christ looks **is** important. (Before... it wasn't... but now it is!) ...As we delve into the passage this morning... you will see why. ... But at this point... let me just say... that we may need to change our perception of Him... because it is to have a tremendous impact on the way we worship and serve Him. A correct vision of Christ is just as important (if not more)... than knowing about future events.

In Revelation 1:9-20 (our passage today)... the risen Christ appears to John to commission him to write this prophecy of Revelation. ... John sees Jesus in the full splendor of his majesty. ... John has been exiled to the island of Patmos because of his testimony to Jesus... and he writes to churches facing tribulation and persecution. ... The message that Jesus communicates through John is that they are to endure faithfully... and that message is made compelling by the glory of the risen Christ.

### **Revelation 1:9-11**

It is the Apostle John... who records this book of prophecy for us. During Christ's earthly ministry... John and his brother James asked Jesus for special places of honor on the right and on the left of His throne. The Lord told them that they would have to merit their thrones by sharing in His suffering. ... James was the first apostle martyred (Acts 12:1-2)... John

was the last of the Apostles to die... but he suffered on Patmos before his death.

While banishment to Patmos was a lesser penalty than execution... we should hardly think John's sentence light. ...He may have been treated less harshly than his brother James and others... but banishment involved a great deal of suffering and a loss of honor.

John had been exiled for his strong stand for Jesus. (Verse 9 declares that it was on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.)

He had been pastor of the church at Ephesus... but now is sentenced to exile on the Isle of Patmos. Patmos is an island located 50 to 60 miles southwest of Ephesus. Situated in the Aegean Sea... it was barren... treeless and rocky. ... No doubt Domitian intended John to live out his life there. ... However... one year later... after the death of Domitian in a.d. 96 he was later allowed to return to Ephesus.

But as John wrote Revelation... he partook of persecution sufferings... just like what his fellow believers were experiencing. ... He was not exempt from persecution.

*"Tribulation"* here is not "the Great Tribulation"... that will be described a little later... when John records "the things that will be"... These are the cruel persecutions that the Roman Emperor... Domitian... brought onto Christians... all over the Roman Empire. ... Almost all believers were socially, politically, or economically suffering... and some were even being killed for their faith. ... John was exiled to Patmos because he refused to stop preaching the Good News.

So John identifies with his readers in at least three ways... which he mentions here in verse 9. He is a partner with them in 1) the current tribulation 2) the Kingdom of God and 3) the patient endurance that is in Christ Jesus.

Patient endurance is called for in believers... And yet... we tend to be so quick to retaliate (or lash out) whenever we first sense that we have had our rights stepped upon.

But Scripture says that it takes much patience for believers to realize the promises of God in our lives.

**Hebrews 6:12 (ESV)**

*...so that you may not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith **and patience** inherit the promises.*

**James 5:7 (ESV)**

*Be patient, therefore, brothers, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient about it, until it receives the early and the late rains.*

If John were impatient... I doubt what he describes in verse 10 could have ever happened. John's patience allowed him... to be so enraptured by prophetic and divine ecstasy... that he was (literally) under the control of the Holy Spirit... And while he was in such a state... he heard a magnificent voice. It was so astounding - that it was like a trumpet.

The reference to "*a loud voice like a trumpet*" adds to the impression of God's special revelation... reminding us of the very loud trumpet sound that accompanied God's message to Moses on Mount Sinai (Exod. 19:18-19). ... .. This expression presumably refers to the clarity of Jesus' voice... a

distinctly authoritative voice... that could strike terror into the hearts of the unprepared.

The powerful voice of authority told John to write to the seven churches... and now they are specifically named. ... Last week I told you what I believe - *about only seven churches being mentioned* - was all about. In verse 4 they are referred to as "THE seven churches of Asia." However Asia had more than seven churches at that time. Colossae was an important church... and so was Troy... but these two (or any of the other churches) are not included under the heading of THE seven churches.

The number seven is used more frequently throughout Revelation than any other. It speaks of completion or perfection. God completes His work in cycles of seven. We see this in nature and in Scripture. (I mentioned several examples last week... but here are yet a few more...) ... Seven colors make a perfect spectrum. ... Seven musical notes make up the scale. ... Seven days constitute one week. ... At the fall of Jericho there were seven priests... seven trumpets... and on the seventh day... the people marched around the wall - seven times. ... And then... there are seven set feasts of Jehovah (Leviticus 23); and seven sayings of the Savior from the cross. ... In Revelation the number seven appears forty-nine times... or seven times seven. Again... seven speaks of completion or perfection.

John was told to write to these seven churches because in each one... they faced situations and characteristics that would represent the conditions of the complete church of Christ (seven distinct periods of church history... from it's beginning at Pentecost... to the end of the Church Age... when the

church will be raptured.) The complete universal Church of Jesus Christ... spreads itself out before the omniscient gaze of Jesus... as He tells John to record it's character... of its seven distinct periods of history. John writes to specific (and contemporary) situations... that were going on at the time in these seven churches that are named here. ... But just like prophecies in the Old Testament... there would be an immediate fulfilment to the present generation... with a secondary fulfilment extended out into the future. ... That is how prophecy – in large part - works. We see dual fulfillments... one is within the current generation... and a fulfillment to future generations. (We will see more of both the immediate and incredible future fulfillments... when we study the letters to those churches in chapters two and three... starting next week.)

### **Revelation 1:12-16 - and 20**

After naming the seven churches, John saw seven golden lampstands... which symbolized the seven churches (or Christ's church throughout its entire history.) ... The responsibility of every church and Christian is to be a light bearer. ... We display light to a dark and sin-filled world.

In the very midst of His churches... was one like the Son of Man. The picture language used here... draws upon the book of Daniel... particularly chapters 7 and 10. ... For example...

#### **Daniel 7:13-14 (ESV)**

*"I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages*

*should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed.*

This "Son of Man" is Jesus Himself. ...The title *Son of Man* occurs many times in the New Testament in reference to Jesus as the Messiah. ... It is the title that Jesus used most often in referring to Himself.

John recognized Jesus because he lived with Him for three years and had seen him both as the Galilean preacher and as the glorified Son of God at the Transfiguration (Matthew 17:1-8).

Christ abides with the church. ... No matter what the churches face... Jesus protects them with his all-encompassing love and reassuring power. Jesus Christ is still among the churches today. ... When a church faces persecution... it should remember Christ's deep love and compassion. When a church is troubled by internal strife and conflict... it should remember Christ's concern for purity and his intolerance of sin.

(You see...) the imagery here is not only that He is protecting His churches. This also has allusions that go back to the Book of Exodus... We also see in this... Jesus' ministry of inspection. On this... I am going to quote J. Vernon McGee.

*In the tabernacle the high priest had the sole oversight of the lampstand. The other priests had other duties to perform, but the high priest took care of the lampstand. He was the one who lighted the (seven branches of candles). He poured in the oil and trimmed the wicks. If one of the lamps (candles) began to smoke and did not give a good clear light, he was the one who snuffed it out. The Lord Jesus is walking in the midst of the lampstands today. He is in the midst of His church, made up of individual believers. He is doing several things: He trims the wicks.*

*In John 15 we are told that He prunes the branches of believers so that they might bring forth fruit. One of the reasons He lets us go through certain trials on earth is so that He might get some fruit off our branches or that He might make our light burn more brightly. He is the One who pours in the oil, which represents the Holy Spirit.*

*... The Lord wants light, and He is the One who pours in the Holy Spirit to get that light. If there is any light coming from my ministry, it comes from the Holy Spirit. He is the source.*

*...Christ does something else, and it makes me shiver. He sometimes uses a snuffer. If a lamp won't give good light and it keeps smoking up the place, the Lord Jesus snuffs it out. ... You and I can be set aside. Oh, the number of people whom I have known to be set aside - - preachers and elders and deacons and Sunday school teachers! Christ put them aside. He is walking in the midst of the lampstands, and He wants them to produce light.*

The reason John was told to write letters to THE seven churches is that Jesus has been inspecting. These seven letters (that we will start to look at next week) are the result of His inspection.

Jesus is coming to judge the whole earth – but judgment begins in the House of God.

**1 Peter 4:17 (ESV)**

*For it is time for judgment to begin at the household of God; and if it begins with us, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God?*

Now... before we move on and examine the description of Jesus in this vision... let me first show you the importance of it. Drop down for a moment to verse 19...

**Revelation 1:19**



This is the complete outline of the Book of Revelation. Jesus gives John three categories of things he is to write down. These three things are to be the emphasis of the book... and they are.

This verse is the key to the book. It tells us that there is a *past*, a *present*, and a *future* in this book. This is its threefold division, and the divisions are clear.

*"The things that you have seen"* - These words doubtless refer to the vision of the glorified Christ which was being shown to John. It constitutes our verses of study today Revelation 1:9-20.

Next he is to write about "The things that are."

These words refer to the letters to the seven churches, or the history of the Church from Pentecost to the Rapture. The "things which are" compose chapters two and three - Our church age that we are living in now... Once the rapture occurs... the church will cease to exist – we will be with Christ... and then those things that are to take place will start to happen.

These "things" in the future comprise the majority of the book of Revelation - chapters four to twenty-two. Chapter four commences with our Lord's words to John...

**Revelation 4:1 (ESV)**

*After this I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven! And the first voice, which I had heard speaking to me like a trumpet, said, "Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this."*

AFTER WHAT...? There can be NO other answer but – "After what he just described in chapters 2 and 3... (in other words) the church age. *"What*

*must take place*” are the events of Revelation chapters 4-22. Revelation 4:1 says they will occur AFTER the church age. –We will not be around.

The outline that Jesus gives John for the book that he is writing... is pretty strong evidence... for why I believe we will not have to go through the awful period known as the tribulation. There is much more evidence... just as strong... that I will be showing you.

But the point in Revelation 1:19... is that Jesus gave John three clear divisions. The appearance of Christ... (which he was told to write about)... and the character of the church through its entire history... and Christ’s terrible judgment of the world. They do not overlap. Each division is complete in itself and distinct from the other two. Each is important for its own emphasis.

So now we turn to the first important emphasis - what Jesus looked like when John saw Him here. Now we return to verse 14...

*“The hairs of His head were white, like white wool, like snow...”* ... John is describing Jesus in the same terms used to describe the Ancient of days in Daniel 7:9...

**Daniel 7:9 (ESV)**

*“As I looked, thrones were placed, and the Ancient of Days took his seat; his clothing was white as snow, and the hair of his head like pure wool; his throne was fiery flames; its wheels were burning fire.*

The white hair we see in Revelation 1... symbolizes Christ’s eternity, just as it did for "the Ancient of Days" (God the Father) in the book of Daniel.

Second, His eyes (like a flame of fire) show His ability to see through you and I... to penetrate well beneath the surface. As he stands among the lampstands, Jesus' eyes (like a flame of fire) see through every façade that you or I would ever try to put up. He can say to each church and to every church member... "I know." He infallibly diagnoses our condition.

Have you ever been around someone who made you feel uncomfortable because they seemed to read you like a book? Jesus knows all about you. He knows all about me. He knows our private thought-life... everything we think that NO one notices! He knows the things we do when no one is around to see us.

His eyes search in judgment. They pierce... they penetrate... they commend and they condemn. ... This has at least three implications: 1) no sin that we commit will escape His notice, however... 2) He will see every *faithful* thing His people do, *and* 3) He will note every *injustice* that is done to His people by their enemies.

### **Revelation 1:15(a)**

His feet of burnished bronze suggest judgment... since the burnished bronze altar in the Temple of Israel was the place where the fire consumed the sin offering. His feet will crush evil. The Lord will come to judge the evil world system... but first... He begins with the House of God. Right now... the Lord is judging those who are His Own – we who comprise the present church age... the "things that are." He prunes us (through trials) so we will be more productive for His kingdom... some are laid aside from

ministry... some are taken home to glory by pre-mature death... and all of us will be rewarded according to Christ's judgment during this church age.

If this is not your image of Jesus – you need to change it! If you cling to a “Gentle Jesus – Meek and Mild” Who every now and then... only suggests optional changes... that you need for your life... and will never hold you accountable – please update your image!

### **Revelation 1:15(b)**

I have never been to Niagra Falls... but I have no problem imaging that it is a deafening roar... because I've heard the falls around here... and I've been up close to the water falls of Yosemite. The sound is impressive. Rushing water is beautiful... and dangerous at the same time. The voice of the Lord will be a roar of a beautiful and dangerous judgment. Men (inside and outside of the church) will not listen to His voice today... but one day they will hear Him whether they like it or not.

### **Revelation 1:16**

A few minutes ago we looked ahead to verse 20... so we know that the symbolism of the stars in Jesus' hand is defined for us. Jesus tells us what they represent. He says the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches. ... But even though we are told what they are – there is much ambiguity... and disagreement among those who study Revelation.

(You see) the word for “angels”... (angelos) most literally means “messengers.” Angels were messengers. Most translations automatically render this Greek word (angelos) that is used in Revelation 1:20 as

“angels.” But I do not think that it should be so automatic. I think that it should be the most literal translation of angelos – which is our English word... “messengers.” Here is why.

In chapters 2 and 3... every letter to the seven churches starts off using this same word: “To the angelos of the church in... Ephesus...” and next is “to the angelos of the church in Smyrna...” and each of the subsequent five letters begin the same way... “to the angelos of the church in...”

First... we have to assume that every church has it’s own angel. It is not hard for me to think that this may be true... but there is nothing else in Scripture to suggest that this is true. ... However... second... and this is why I cannot see that the correct translation is “angel.” ... Several of these letters are admonitions for allowing sin in the church. ... I don’t think that God would admonish angels. God’s angels obey Him.

I think that it is better to understand that these are “messengers” of each church. They are the lead teachers in the church. The first century church did not yet have a formal system of pastor’s... but each one did have it’s own primary teacher who was responsible for leading that congregation the right way through the teaching of God’s Word. They are accountable to God for the churches they represent. ...And the image of stars... is very fitting. Stars have always guided people. Stars illuminate... they shine in the darkness.

Most... but not all... of the scholars that I have read on this subject... think that the lead pastors of churches... are what is depicted as being in Christ’s right hand. Pastors have a more severe judgment – if they mislead Christ’s

people... but they also have Christ's greater protection... when they are faithful.

I don't mean to be self-serving... by what I am about to say... in fact my temptation was not to mention it at all. But I think that I would not be giving you the full picture of this verse in its context... if I didn't.

The history of the church... through the ages... unfortunately includes the church attacking it's pastors. ... Church members can be rather cruel... and think nothing at all of gossiping about him... destroying his character... and his ability to minister to others in the church. Pastors are often forced out of ministry by those who do not know that Christ has them in His right hand. YES! - Jesus judges pastors more severely... but He also protects those who are faithful more strenuously.

The picture of Christ holding the "angelos" of the churches in His right hand... comes right in middle of His image of judging the church and the world. I think that He will be judging a lot of churches for flippantly acting as though they are free to destroy a pastor... without any repercussion from Christ. The faithful messenger will be securely held in the hand of his all-glorious Lord. (Now... moving on...)

Out of His mouth came a two-edged sword. This is... of course the Word of God. The sword in Jesus' mouth symbolizes the power and force of His message. People today can be very trifling and careless about the Word of God. But one day... they will have this powerful Word-sword judge them.

*"and His face was like the sun shining in full strength..."* The Lord's shining countenance reminds us of His transfiguration (Matt. 17:2) and also the prophecy of Malachi 4:2 ("the Sun of righteousness [shall] arise"). The

sun is a familiar image of God in the Old Testament (for example Ps. 84:11)... reminding us not only of blessing, but of judgment. The sun can burn as well as bless!

This vision of Christ was totally different in appearance from the Savior that John knew "in the flesh" when He was ministering on earth. He was not the "gentle Jewish carpenter" that sentimentalists like to sing about. He is the risen, glorified, exalted Son of God, Who has the authority to judge all men... beginning with His own people.

### **Revelation 1:17-18**

John's falling down as though dead is not an act of worship but rather a fainting with fear. It is the sort of dread that we see elsewhere in Scripture when people are confronted by the glory of the living God (even in a visionary experience). ... But the one who spoke 'grace and peace' to His people... (which we saw back in v. 4)... placed His right hand on John in a gesture of comfort. He then spoke words of comfort, and gave reasons why John should not be afraid... He began with a reminder of His divinity... and also gave encouragement to any follower who faces possible death.

Today... each of us so desperately needs to have the right perception of Jesus. For some... the need is to see Him in His majestic splendor... poised to judge the world. The world seems so far out of control without any repercussion for the evil and debauchery that seems to be getting worse. But it has not slipped out of Christ's control. He is coming to judge the world.

Make no mistake about it... your best life is not now. ...Your best life will begin when the skies are split by the shout of the archangel. Your encouragement from this passage is to patiently endure whatever afflictions you face in your life...

Others... and maybe some here... have a great need to adjust their vision of Christ in a different way. Their necessity is to know that He sees what (they think) they are doing in private... without His being concerned at all. They don't know... or don't care that His eyes are like a flame of fire... and His feet are like burnished bronze. He stands in the midst of the candles... are you a simple wiff of smoke...?

Having the right image of Christ is the first of three important emphasis that we come to in the book of Revelation. I hope that you see why it is so important. See Jesus as He really is!