

The Majesty of the Unveiled Christ
Rev 1:4b-18
November 25, 2012

Grace and peace to you from him who is, and who was, and who is to come, and from the seven spirits before his throne, and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father—to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen. Look, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him; and all the peoples of the earth will mourn because of him. So shall it be! Amen. “I am the Alpha and the Omega,” says the Lord God, “who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty.” 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 because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. On the Lord’s Day I was in the Spirit, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet, which said: “Write on a scroll what you see and send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea.” I turned around to see the voice that was speaking to me. And when I turned I saw seven golden lampstands, and among the lampstands was someone “like a son of man,” dressed in a robe reaching down to his feet and with a golden sash around his chest. His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and his eyes were like blazing fire. His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of rushing waters. 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. When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. Then he placed his right hand on me and said: “Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades.

Have you ever faced a problem that was so big or devastation so great that you began to question God? Maybe you started to doubt God’s wisdom. Maybe you questioned God’s fairness. You might have had negative suspicions about God’s care and love. You might even have gone so far as to wonder about God’s existence.

The reading you just heard was written by the apostle John somewhere around 90 to 95 A.D. By the time John wrote the book of Revelation, the Church had experienced an untold number of trials. Many Christians had been martyred. Tradition tells us that, at this point, all the original disciples, except John, had been executed. John, himself, was exiled on Patmos; an island the Romans used as a penal colony. Abusing God’s faithful people had become a very popular sport.

Taking all of that into consideration, it wouldn’t be out of reason to assume the young Church, and maybe even John, were being assaulted by Satan with questions about God. If that was happening, all of those questions and doubts were put to rest when, in his grace and wisdom, the ascended Christ appeared to John.

It had been over sixty years since John had seen Jesus, but he had no trouble recognizing the “Son of Man.” John saw the One who was, who is, and who is to come.

John saw his eternal, unchanging Lord. John saw the same one that Daniel had seen hundreds of years before. Daniel wrote: *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. 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* (Dan 7:13-14 NIV).

John and the young Church must have gotten great comfort from the fact that their ascended Lord was near at hand. The Book of Revelation is a message of comfort to God's people. It tells Christians that no matter how bad things look, no power of man or demon will diminish God's victory and the salvation of his faithful people.

Still, times are bad for the church today. It's not fashionable to be an outspoken Christian. Speaking out about the sins of the world is frowned upon, and in some places it's illegal. We live in a country where a child is denied the right to attend a school Halloween party dressed as Jesus, but the same party can be attended by other students dressed as witches and devils.

We live in a day and age where people accept evil as good. Many churches are being drawn into the sin of this world. Paul warns us about this: *The time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths* (2 Tim 4:3-4 NIV).

Like the early Christians, today's Christian can look at the Church and the world and start doubting and asking questions. That's what makes today's Epistle reading so important. If we can see the Christ that John saw on Patmos, then our confidence will be unshakable and our doubts and questions will disappear. To that end, let's look at eight attributes of the Alpha and Omega so we can see what John saw. While the language John uses is symbolic, the truth he declares is actual and eternal.

Verse 13 says: *Among the lampstands was someone 'like a son of man,' dressed in a robe reaching down to his feet and with a golden sash around his chest.* Here we find the Commanding Christ. His clothing says several things. In ancient times, this was the recognized dress of authority, dignity, and royalty. In Old Testament times, a long robe was the clothing of a spiritual leader of high rank; a high priest, a king, a prince, a judge.

Our ascended Lord is all of these. Jesus is most certainly our high priest, our king, our prince, and our judge. This is the Christ that John saw. Is this the Christ that you see? When things in your life seem out of control, remember that Jesus is the King of kings. Remember that Jesus is in complete control and *that in all things [our Lord] works for the good of those who love him* (Rom 8:28 NIV).

Moving on in verse 14 we learn: *His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow.* Here we have the Consecrated Christ. The reference to white wool and snow lead us to envision things that are pure. In order to be the perfect sin sacrifice, Christ had to be

perfectly pure.

Have you ever consider the fact that Christ was the only person who never suffered the ill effects of a guilty conscience? Jesus never told a lie. He never betrayed a friend. He never gossiped behind someone back. He never stole. He never manipulated the people around him in order to get what he wanted. He never put himself first. In other words, Jesus never had a sin to confess. We can trust someone that pure.

Verse 14 continues: *his eyes were like blazing fire*. Here we are presented with the Comprehending Christ. His fiery eyes refer to his wisdom and knowledge of all matters. The penetrating vision of the Lord sees all things.

Jesus not only sees all things, he knows the how and why of all things. He doesn't just see our actions, he knows our motives. Jesus is never fooled by alligator tears or the smile that hides contempt. He sees every minister, notes every member, observes every ministry, and views every motive with eyes that blaze like fire.

The Condemning Christ is brought out in verse 15: *His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace*. From his fiery eyes, John looks down to see Jesus' red-hot feet, glowing like burnished metal in a furnace. His glowing feet remind us of the fire of final judgment.

While our Lord is the very essence of love, we must never forget that his holy nature cannot tolerate the existence of sin. There will come a time when all sin will be abolished and unrepentant sinners will be judged. There will be no escape from the wrath of God when Christ's burning feet touch this earth.

As we continue with verse 15, John moves from sight to sound: *His voice was like the sound of rushing waters*. The voice that sounded like rushing water brings us to the Communicating Christ. The voice that John heard was the voice that called the universe into existence; the still, small whisper that Elijah heard; the voice that calmed the raging sea, the voice that taught the crowds and the disciples.

And that roaring voice is just as powerful today as it was at Creation. In a time when so many voices are being raised against Christ, you can rest assured that the day will come when they will all be silenced. When Christ returns, he won't be subjected to beatings, crucifixion, and the shouts of unbelievers. Jesus will come as the King of kings, the Lord of lords to judge, rule, and reign.

In verse 16 we hear about the Controlling Christ: *In his right hand he held seven stars*. In biblical terms, the number seven was used to refer to perfection or completeness. The fact that Christ held seven stars tells us his sovereignty is complete. There is an old song that says, "He has the whole world in his hand" and truer words were never spoken. At this very moment, Jesus holds his church, his people, and his servants. I said his church. This is not my church, it's not your church, it's not our church. This is his church.

The middle of verse 16 points out the Conquering Christ: *Out of his mouth came a sharp*

double-edged sword. Christ's double-edged sword speaks about the strength of our King. One day the Lord Jesus will come to do battle with Satan and the nations of the world. The double-edged weapon that will win that battle is the Word of God.

When problems arise in your life, what weapons do you use; money, medication, manipulation, denial, meanness? If the weapon that Christ will use to subdue the world is God's Word, what other weapon do you need in your battles?

His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance is the last part of verse 16 and it introduces us to the Compelling Christ. Twice John witnessed the face of Christ shining in all his glory; once on the Mount of Transfiguration and once on Patmos. The face that was once bruised, bleeding, and spat upon, now shines in resplendent glory: unveiled, unmasked, and unadulterated.

If John had been despondent over all that he and the Church had been through, the vision of Christ in all his glory certainly cured his depression. When you become preoccupied with yourself, your problems, and your circumstances, you cannot see Christ clearly. When you feel despondency and depression invading your life, when the bad is all you can see, turn around. Focus on Christ and remember his eternal promise to his people:

Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest (Matt 11:28 NIV) *[because]*
surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age (Matt 28:20 NIV).