

A picture of the Risen Christ
Revelation 1:5-20

Introduction

In the seven letters to the churches which we are about to look at, the Head of the Church addresses them, assesses them and passes His opinion on them. So who is this Head of the Church? What are His claims and what is His authority? We see Him in Revelation in all His majesty, glory, authority and power.

Right from the start of this book, it was important for the persecuted readers to realize that the one they were suffering for and were called to give their lives for was truly worthy of sacrifice and suffering.

*“Turn you eyes upon Jesus,
Look full in His wonderful face,
And the things of earth will grow strangely dim
In the light of His glory and grace.”*

What Jesus Christ has done for us

John tells us He was a faithful witness. He was the first one raised from the dead, never to die again, and He is the ruler of the kings of the earth. He loves us and freed us from our sins by His blood, and made us a kingdom of priests to serve God. This would have warmed the hearts of John's readers. They lived in a loveless world, but how good it was to know that there was someone in heaven who loved them. They mattered so much to Christ that He shed His blood, gave His life, poured it out for them, so that they might be free from sin, guilt, punishment and bondage of sin.

They were freed to belong to God, and made into a kingdom of priests, as God's people in the Old Testament were (Exodus 19:6). Christians are all priests. No such thing as a special class of priests. We can all enter right into God's presence to pray for men and go to men to speak on behalf of God.

How the book of Revelation, like the rest of the New Testament, loves to focus our attention on Christ's atoning death which is at the heart of the Gospel. Revelation uses the name "Lamb" 28 times. No wonder the hosts of heaven cry **Worthy is the Lamb who was slain** (Revelation 5:12).

One day He will return and every eye will see Him. He is coming back for those sinners whom He has taken, released from their bondage to sin, and made into a kingdom of priests. To Him be the glory forever. As one old lady once said to Spurgeon, "If Christ will save me, He will never hear the last of it". In Charles Wesley's words, we will one day be "*Lost in wonder, love and praise.*"

What Christ is like now

The Gospel claims that Christ who died is very much alive, exalted in glory to God's right hand. In this chapter we get a full-length portrait of our risen Lord. His qualities

and attributes are set forth in all their splendour. We have in our minds a caricature of the person of Jesus Christ. We have reduced Him to arm chair level, not much different from the rest of us. We must not be influenced by pictures and illustrations we have seen. Here is a wonderful picture of Him, derived from Old Testament symbols.

I turned I saw seven golden lampstands, and among the lampstands was someone "like a son of man" (Revelation 1:12,13). Here is the Messiah, God's anointed One who rules His Kingdom, moving among the churches, inspecting, assessing, examining, rebuking, encouraging and rewarding. He sees their decline, compromise, endurance and indifference.

He is **dressed in a robe reaching down to His feet, with a golden sash around His chest** (Revelation 1:13). On earth He was a Galilean, homespun like any peasant in Palestine. That has all gone. Now He has a splendid gorgeous robe and sash, befitting His dignity.

His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and his eyes were like blazing fire (Revelation 1:14). Eternal purity and holiness is embodied here, and those burning eyes see all. Pretences, shams, white lies, He sees through them all. He sees our deepest needs.

His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of rushing waters (Revelation 1:15). His feet had the swiftness and severity of his judgements. He could crush to nothing the forces and power of darkness and evil. Like the sound of the waters of Niagara Falls, His voice is so loud it can be heard over everything else, clear, authoritative, final, dominant, and majestic.

Out of his mouth came a sharp double-edged sword (Revelation 1:16). This sword cuts both ways. His coming brings salvation for those who receive Him, but brings judgement for those who reject Him. Just as when the Gospel message is preached, the Word of God brings salvation to some, and drives others away.

His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance. The sun has an enduring and marvellous glory, surpassing all else. The ultimate source of life and light.

The mystery of the seven stars that you saw in my right hand..... are the angels of the seven churches (Revelation 1:20). This may refer to guardian angels, but more likely the leaders and pastors of the seven churches. They were in His protection and under His control.

Most of these descriptions are used again in the ensuing letters, especially the letter to Laodicea. They are images drawn from the Old Testament concerning God, but now applied to the risen Christ. It is such a glorious picture of a risen and triumphant Lord, which would have inspired the early readers who were about to lay down their lives for Him.

This description ought to affect us too. It should put us in the mind to revere Him, give us the heart to trust Him, and the spirit to worship Him. Many Christians need a new vision of Christ, because there is a staleness and drabness about their Christian

lives. We may have known the Lord for years, but we can always get closer. We have no reason to be proud or self-satisfied. **Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him** (John 14:21).

What our response should be

John saw this glorious picture and was dazzled and amazed. His breath was taken away and he fell at His feet as dead. This overwhelming vision of the Lord totally humbled him. His strength, pride and self-confidence were absolutely taken away.

It is so easy to speak lightly of divine things, and act irreverently in church. We speak casually of sin and disobedience because we have no vision of God's majesty. Anyone who has truly seen the Lord reacts in the same way. Isaiah said, **Woe is me** (Isaiah 6:5). Peter said, **Depart from me** (Luke 5:8).

The vision subdued John and put him in his place. It also was a source of comfort to him. He heard the words Jesus often spoke when on earth, **Do not be afraid** (Revelation 1:17). Christ's words are not empty platitudes. He gives solid reasons not to fear. **I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever!** (Revelation 1:18). He has control over death. He alone admits His people into death and opens the way out onto the other side. Our destiny and death are in those nail-pierced hands. He will be there to welcome the believer home and to reunite him with a new body at the Second Coming.

John's readers were in daily danger of losing their lives at the hand of the tyrannical Roman Emperor. They needed to hear these assurances. It would have strengthened and helped them. Many since have faced the cruellest deaths for Christ's sake. We also need to hear these assurances, when we consider the brevity and uncertainty of our own lives.

Everything changes when the risen Lord, His glory, promises and authority fill our picture and viewpoint. Far too often it is self that fills the picture, and Jesus is only on the sidelines. But when we pray **Now show me your glory** (Exodus 33:18), our life with its worries, burdens, fears go out of view, and Christ is all in all.

We need to pray for a new brokenness, new surrender, and for everything to be changed. This is how the church is revived. Do not rest on past experience, but see Him afresh.