

Foreword, Part III- Christ, Triumphant on Behalf of His People

Call to Worship: Hebrews 1:1-4

Hymn #24 (supp)- *Victory in Jesus*

1st Scripture: John 16:16-33

Hymn Insert- *In Christ Alone*

2nd Scripture: Revelation 1:9-20

Hymn #223- *Arise, My Soul, Arise*

Introduction:

Revelation is a Book that contains an urgent message. God has gone to great lengths to persuade us of this, all throughout chapter one. And Revelation is a Book (with an urgent message) that is written first and foremost to the churches. While it carries clear and very relevant teaching for those outside of the church, its primary purpose is to address the churches, beginning with the seven churches of Asia, and making its way to all churches of all ages.

Having almost completed one chapter of the Book (the introductory chapter), we can already begin to see a pattern that has begun to develop, which leads us to identify at least two categories of professing believers meant to be addressed by the entire Revelation. There are those who have either compromised their faith in some way (or perhaps are on the verge of compromising) and there are those who are remaining faithful and persevering in spite of very difficult trials, persecutions, temptations and afflictions. And the amazing thing about the Revelation is that both types of people are not only addressed individually throughout the Book, but often times, they are addressed at the same time and by means of the same visions. In other words, the same visions which are meant to warn one group are also meant to greatly encourage the other group. We have already begun to see this in the audible and visible descriptions given concerning God and the glorified Christ. Those who are backsliding, wavering and compromising are meant to behold Christ as the glorified High Priest and returning judge, who will trample all of His enemies under foot, leading them to fear caving into the threats and/or temptations of the enemies of Christ. And those who are persevering, enduring and remaining faithful are meant to behold the same Christ as the glorified High Priest and returning judge, who will trample His enemies under foot, leading them to find comfort in their afflictions, always

remembering that their victory is indeed sealed in Christ, who will soon vindicate them to the fullest.

You see, there are always both types of people in the church, and sometimes the overall atmosphere of the church is representative of one type or the other, as we will especially see in the letters to the seven churches, given in chapters two and three. To be sure, there are churches where the general atmosphere is an atmosphere of faithful perseverance and commitment to Christ. And sadly, probably more often than not, there are churches where the general atmosphere is an atmosphere of compromise, callousness and lethargy.

Last week, we considered the vision of the glorious Christ, which John had seen, when he turned to locate the origin of the voice that spoke to him, sounding like a loud trumpet. And we saw how that vision presented us with a reigning, conquering and exalted Christ, who is mighty on behalf of His people and yet, greatly to be feared by all who oppose Him, especially in their lack of faithfulness within the church. So terrifying was the vision that the beloved Apostle John himself, fell at the feet of this Christ, as if dead.

But this morning, as we consider the conclusion of this chapter, we find also those tender, merciful and gracious aspects of the heart of this same Christ, who aims not to terrify, but rather to comfort His faithful and yet frail followers, represented by the weak and anxious Apostle John. And this tender, loving, gentle side of Christ is what raises John back to his feet, enabling him to find the strength to continue on with his task of writing down the Revelation. And this tender, loving, gentle side of Christ, which is inextricably married to His exalted, kingly priesthood (forming the Holy Perfect King and Tender Savior) is meant to motivate the faithful of all ages to remain steadfast in their Christian service and in their pursuit of holiness, forever realizing that Christ is both mighty on their behalf and eternally gracious toward them. Brethren, both the glorified, reigning, holy, conquering Christ, and the tender, beloved, merciful, gracious Shepherd, together, make up the united complete and perfect comfort for all who are truly His. An impotent, frail, weak Shepherd, full of love, can do very little to help us. And an omnipotent, all-mighty, reigning King, without love and tenderness, could do very little to bring us comfort. Both; all of Christ alone, is the redeemed, striving sinners eternal comfort.

And so, as we close out this first chapter of the glorious Revelation, let us then consider the following three things for this morning:

- 1) We will consider our Lord's comforting words to the faithful John
- 2) We will consider the two-fold backing to these comforting words
- 3) We will consider our Lord's final charge, calling John to the task at hand

I. Our Lord's comforting words to the faithful John

The glorious vision of the exalted Christ, saps John of his strength and energy, and sends him down flat on his face in a state of great terror and panic. It was as if he were dead. The power and glory of this vision overwhelmed him, and he didn't quite know what to make of it. All he could do is fall down and hope that what seemed to be a tremendous threat, would somehow either go away or alleviate his fear. The next few moments are critical for John. What will this frightening, glorious Being do?

Perhaps John was reminded of the time when the Lord Jesus was transfigured on the mountain, and God the Father came down in a glorious, bright cloud, commanding Peter, James and John to "Hear" His beloved Son. At that time, they fell on their faces as well. The glory of God and His powerful voice shook them to the core and brought them to the ground in a state of terror. The glory of God has a way of doing that to men, doesn't it?

Well, here in Revelation, the divine glory *now of Christ* does this to John. And interestingly enough, something happens that is identical to that which happened when John was on his face at the Mount of Transfiguration, which serves to alleviate the fears of John. Notice the wording of both Matthew 17:6&7 and our text here in Revelation 1:17:

Matthew 17:6-7- "And when the disciples heard [the voice of God], they fell on their faces and were greatly afraid. But Jesus came and touched them and said, 'Arise, and do not be afraid.'"

Revelation 1:17- “And when I [John] saw Him, I fell at His feet as dead. But He laid His right hand on me, saying to me, ‘Do not be afraid...’”

What happens in both cases? John feels the touch of Jesus, accompanied by the comforting words of Jesus. Jesus lays His right hand on him and says, “Do not be afraid.”

Isn't it a wonderful thing, when overcome with immense terror by someone or something, to come to the realization that whatever it is that has frightened you is actually working for you? Imagine seeing this glorious Christ; this Christ who is fierce, almighty and coming in judgment, and not being one of His own beloved followers? You would desire to run and hide, but you could never escape His fiery eyes. You would wish that the mountains and hills could somehow collapse upon you, burying you alive. You would plead for some form of annihilation or state of non-existence, wishing you were never even born. What a terrible reality to face such a Christ as this, and to not be one of His own. And yet, sadly, concerning many here even in this room; should Christ return at this very moment, that would be your experience. No, you might not see Him as He is physically described here. But how He is described here is His true reality. This is a real representation of His true power and glory. This is the real deal from the inside! Suddenly, the words of Psalm two ring loudly, “Kiss the Son, lest He be angry, and you perish in the way, when His wrath is kindled but a little” (Psalm 2:12).

But the end of that text; the sentence that follows, is that which meets John here face to face, and that which meets all of the true children of God in the end. “Blessed are all those who put their trust in Him.” And so, John feels the tender touch of this almighty, glorious, exalted Christ, accompanied by the precious words, “Do not be afraid.” “John, you have remained faithful; you are in fact in exile because of your faithfulness to Me. You have no reason to fear Me. This vision of my glory serves another purpose in the instructing of the churches, to whom you will be writing this Revelation.” And brethren, you who are faithful; not perfect, but faithful and persevering, standing out from the world and determined to follow Christ; this same Christ is mighty on your behalf, and He comes to you tenderly and in peace. We look within ourselves and see our imperfections and we are quickly distraught and terrified, but our hope is truly in this Christ, and we are indeed living out of that hope, and so, we have no reason to fear, and in fact, we have every reason to continue on, serving this Christ with great boldness and joy...why? For the following two reasons:

II. The two-fold backing to these comforting words

John has no reason to be afraid because the One whom he has just seen is for him, and because this One who is for him is identified in two very significant and comforting ways:

- 1) “Do not be afraid; I am the First and the Last...” (vs. 17)

Once again, our Lord takes that divine title, which belongs to God alone, and He applies it to Himself. To be sure, no one else would dare refer to himself as, “The Alpha and the Omega or the First and the Last.” This is a title of divine sovereignty. It is a claim to the ownership of eternity, which no one else but God Himself can claim.

And why ought John to be comforted by this reality? Namely, because this was the God whom John has been serving all along, even unto his own exile. The whole time, John has been and always will be in the hands of his sovereign God and Creator, who is also the Lord Jesus Christ. If Christ is for John, who could be against him? John had nothing then to fear, regarding the reality of the vision he had just seen, and regarding the reality of all that he would behold concerning the future. To be sure, the world will be full of tribulation, and Christians must go through that tribulation, but they never go through it alone and they never go through it unto a useless purpose. All of their ways; all of their sacrifices are governed by God unto the prosperity of their own spiritual growth and unto the success of His Kingdom.

And so, our Lord’s response here serves a two-fold purpose of both relieving John from any fear he had over the glorious vision of the exalted Christ, and of relieving him (and Christ’s faithful followers in the church) of any fear that he might have concerning the trials and tribulations that are to come upon the church and the world.

Jesus is the First and the Last, brethren! Therefore, we have nothing to fear concerning floods and tornadoes and hurricanes and tsunamis and so-called natural disasters. Jesus is the first and the last, and therefore, we have nothing to fear concerning possible upcoming persecutions and afflictions and trials and tribulations. In the world, we will most assuredly have these kinds of trials and tribulations, but we can be of good cheer, the blessed right hand of Christ’s power is upon us, and He has overcome the world.

But Christ does not only identify Himself as a glorious, divine, omnipotent King who is mighty on behalf of His people. Secondly, we see that He also identifies Himself as a tender Shepherd, who has overcome death on their behalf.

2) “Do not be afraid...I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore. Amen. And I have the keys of Hades and of Death” (vs. 18).

As a second source of comfort, the Lord encourages John by telling him that He is the One who has overcome death on behalf of His people. In other words, He points John back to the cross and to the resurrection, and says, “That same Jesus is Me!” “I am alive and well. Yes, I was dead, but now look again and see that I am alive forevermore. Truly!” I am the One upon whose breast you once laid your head. I am the tender and gracious Shepherd who has died on behalf of My people, and so there is nothing to fear. And furthermore, I now have the keys of Hades and Death. That dreaded place, to which all of mankind must travel because of the curse of sin, is no longer impenetrable. I hold the very keys to that dark abyss, and I am able to release and free whomever I please! John, behold Me in My omnipotent and exalted state; not to cause you to be afraid, but to all the more cause you to rejoice, because I am victorious and powerful and reigning on your behalf even right now.”

And so, brethren, with John, we constantly remind ourselves of Christ, especially in these two reassuring and comforting ways, so that we will endure, and persevere, and withstand, and press forward in our service of Him at any and all physical expense in this life. Rest assured, you will face hard times...perhaps more difficult than you have ever imagined you would experience in this life. At some point, the walls of this very nation will come crashing down, because of our immorality and godlessness, and we may just be alive when that happens. At some point, there may be severe religious persecution even in this presently “free country.” But that can change in but a heartbeat, in your own lifetime. Life may never be the same as early as today or tomorrow or next week. And certainly, you will face (and are facing) constant daily temptations to compromise and to entrench yourself in the lusts and material things of this world. That is here already, and some of you are, even now, all but swept away in that direction.

And if we are going to push through all of this; temptations, trials, persecutions, afflictions...etc, we must carry this vision of Christ with us. We must remember that no matter

what happens, Christ is mighty on our behalf. He reigns! He reigns! He reigns! He is the First and the Last! Why then is this all happening? For your good; always for your good, and always for His glory. Go with it! Serve all the more! Take more risks! Invest in building His church! Pursue holiness and Christ-likeness with every fiber of your being. Maintain regular, sweet fellowship and communion with Christ daily! Let no idol; let nothing whatsoever come between you and this Christ. Let nothing else sit on the throne of your heart or on the seat of your affections. Let Christ be your All and All! Constantly remind yourself that this is all in His hands, going right according to His plan!

And what is most to be feared in this daily battle of life that we face? Is it not death itself? Is that not what the world fears? Well, what if I am injured and what if I cannot be repaired? What if I die? Oh, never that...anything to preserve life! Well, brethren, our blessed Christ holds the very keys to Hades and Death. The grave is nothing to be feared by us. We can take great risks of faith, and have confidence that when this body drops, our souls will immediately find their way to Christ. Death has no power to bind us in any way, shape or form. Behold, He is the One who lives, and who was dead, but is now alive forevermore! Amen! And as He is, so shall we be.

And so, we have an encouraging call to remain faithful; to press on; to maintain our witness and our relationship to Christ as our First Love. Christ as our Glorious, Almighty King, and Christ as Our Tender, Gracious, Loving Savior, gives us all of the motivation to trek through the Revelation, and to trek through the life that is represented in the Revelation, with boldness and confidence! And so, our Lord then gives John the command to stand and to fulfill his commission fearlessly.

III. Our Lord's final charge, calling John to the task at hand

“I am the First and the Last...I have the keys of Hades and Death,” so come now John: “Write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after this” (Rev. 1:19).

And so, John is commissioned to write all that he has seen; which includes illustrative descriptions of the things which are, and the things which will take place in the course of the future.

In chapters two and three, and in some other portions of this Book, we will indeed behold some of the things, which were already taking place at the time John had written. And as history continues to unfold, the churches must make any necessary changes in the present and they must prepare for the future (even the immediate future), in light of all that the Revelation reveals concerning that which is to come.

Concluding words

Brethren, let us carefully examine our own hearts as we move into the critical letters to the seven churches in the weeks ahead. *All of this* most definitely applies to us, right here in the year 2011. We don't want to have our heads buried in the sand (with the rest of the world), living life as if everything begins and ends at the surface. No, we want to be ready for anything and everything. Our sovereign God is moving things along right according to plan. We want to live and act in accordance with all that God reveals beneath the surface. We want to endure and persevere, so that Christ will be glorified in and by us.

You know, aside from dragging Christianity, the church, the Name of Christ, and the Scriptures through the mud, one other thing Mr. Harold Camping managed to do with all of his pride-filled, prophecy making foolishness, which is now being mocked worldwide; one other thing he managed to do was to further harden the unsaved against any notion of the return of Christ and the coming judgment. And so, when it does indeed happen, all the more, jaws will drop to the ground in amazement and hopelessness. There is presently a worldwide mocking of the idea of a final judgment, but oh when it comes, heads will indeed roll. Let us live like we know it's coming; never foolish enough to proclaim a year or a day or an hour, but living as if it could happen right now, even this day. This world will reach its terminus. But will *we* be ready? Will there be oil in our lamps? Not if we take our gaze off of the reigning, exalted, glorious, sovereign, Christ, who has, by means of His glorious atonement, conquered sin and death on our behalf. Benediction: Jude 1:24&25

AMEN!!!