

Seeing Jesus

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- [0 : 00] Lord God, our Heavenly Father, as we turn to your word, as we look at this passage from Revelation, we ask that you would show us things that you want us to see, some things that you want to reveal about yourself and about your son so that we might be built up in our faith and be better able to follow you and serve you and love you.
- And we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, what did Jesus look like?
- We sometimes wonder that, don't we? What did he physically look like? And there have been all sorts of guesses and people have made little images that some movie, in movies you might have seen him depicted in such a way.
- Usually, and as you can see, many of them show him as tall, white and good looking. But actually, he was a Palestinian Jew.
- And so, neither, not white, nor, as is depicted in one of those, even black. Isaiah 53 tells us that he wasn't very handsome.
- [1 : 46] He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him. Nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. And we don't even know how tall he was.
- We don't have a physical description, except in this passage.
- Today's reading, we have an amazing, unexpected, and even startling description of what Jesus looked like.
- It's a stylised description. It's a part of a vision. And the elements of that vision aren't there so that we can do a sketch of Jesus.
- It's impossible to sketch what is described, actually. But it is depicted in this way so that we learn truths about him, not to give us a photo ID.
- [3 : 01] We saw last week that this letter is written to a church under pressure, suffering, even being killed for their faith.
- And it's a letter of encouragement and comfort because it is about Jesus. these verses that Ricky read to us earlier are a continuation of that message.
- It's the second half of the same chapter as we read last week. In these verses we hear the answer to questions about the letter.
- Who it's from. Who was its first audience. What authority does its writer have? And what difference will it make?
- Well, the year was around 96 AD. The brutal anti-Christian tyrant Domitian is the Roman emperor.
- [4 : 33] As we saw last week, one of his hobbies was persecuting Christians. And John was one of the last, if not the last, remaining apostle who had been with Jesus.
- And he'd been banished to the island penal colony of Patmos. A small island in the Aegean Sea off the coast of what is now Turkey.

What was then the Roman province of Asia. Now, we have every reason to believe that the John who introduces himself in verse nine of our reading is that venerable apostle who wrote the gospel of John and the three letters of John.

But a bit like Beyonce or Adele, he was well known enough and regarded highly enough that he didn't have to identify himself except with a single word, John.

But unlike Beyonce or Adele, John identifies himself closely with his audience. He's their brother.

[6 : 02] He's their companion in the faith. And he describes that faith. Suffering and kingdom and patient endurance in Jesus.

That is, it involves suffering, but also royal privilege in a kingdom that not only stands in contrast to the Roman Empire, but as we will see, far surpasses it.

And it's worth the patient endurance that we have to go through now. That integral part of being a Jesus follower, of hanging in there.

And John says in verse nine, that he's on the island of Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.

Jesus. The word of God and the testimony of Jesus. It's sort of like a double meaning because it's talking about the word from God but also the word about God.

[7 : 25] And similarly, it's the testimony about Jesus and the testimony that Jesus himself had and made.

In other words, what John is saying is he's on Patmos because of his faith in the word which came from God and the testimony which is from Jesus.

That's the content of his faith. but it's also about because he declared the word about God and gave testimony about Jesus that he died, he came, he died and rose to bring us to God.

And that's the same word and testimony that John received and that he has declared and that has got him into such trouble that he has been sent to the island of Patmos.

So John is saying that he has the credibility to speak about to these suffering churches. He shares with them the faith in Jesus that entails suffering now but a glorious kingdom to come and in the meantime patient endurance.

[9 : 06] this where he is exiled across the water from the people that he loves is because he's heard this faith, he's proclaimed this faith, he's held on to this faith and so he's punished.

He's one of them and he knows what they're going through. He's going through what they are going through. So there he was, one day, one Sunday, one Lord's Day, in the Spirit.

in the Spirit. That's a phrase that occurs four times throughout the book of Revelation and each time it signifies a new phase of revelation that was given to the writer.

It signifies an openness to receiving a vision from God's Spirit. It signifies a communion with God not just talking to God, but ready to hear from him.

He was in the Spirit, ready to hear from God. And hear from him he does. Write down what you see and send it to the seven churches.

[10 : 42] It says a loud trumpet-like voice from behind him. We'll hear a lot more about these churches over the coming weeks.

The letters of chapters two and three are addressed to them and we'll start exploring that next week. But suffice to say that they are towns in that Roman province of Asia, what is now the country of Turkey.

And they're listed in the order that a messenger from Patmos would travel to take the message to each of them. I've got a map here that shows those churches.

So, here we are. Patmos is out here in the middle of the sea. Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, Laodicea.

You'll see that some of these are places that we heard about when we were studying Acts, aren't they? Paul spent two to three years in Ephesus and when he met for the final time with the Ephesian elders, he met them on the beach at Miletus here on his way sailing towards Jerusalem.

[12 : 21] So, this is familiar territory in a way to us and it will become more familiar in the coming weeks as we look at the letters to those churches.

And so, John is commanded to write to these churches. And the commission to write is repeated in verse 19 as we see on the slide.

Write therefore what you have seen, what is now, what will take place and what will take place later. This is not a private vision.

This is not something just given to John to encourage him along the way. this is a message from Jesus to his people given through his servant.

This is a message to us, not just given to John way back then. So, John hears this loud voice telling him to write it down and so, of course, he spins around to see who's talking.

[13 : 46] I turned around to see the voice that was speaking to me and when I turned, I saw seven golden lampstands. What a sight he saw.

I mean, we see seven golden lampstands, sure, and we're told that they represent the seven churches.

Golden lampstands were, of course, part of temple furniture associated with the temple and temple worship.

the implication being that the churches are objects of worship for our God.

But that isn't the main emphasis here. And what grabs John's attention and what grabs our attention as his readers is not the lampstands but the one who stands among the lampstands because he is breathtaking.

[15 : 05] He is someone like a son of man who we heard about in the Old Testament reading that Michelle read to us earlier, didn't we?

He's son of man is a title that Jesus used of himself during his earthly ministry.

And he used it to emphasize his authority over all things. And that's what's referred to in Daniel 7.

Notice how the son of man, what is emphasized in these verses is his authority. He was given authority, glory and sovereign power.

And he is worshipped. All nations and peoples of every language worshipped him. His dominion, his authority is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away.

[16 : 12] And his kingdom, that which he reigns over, will never be destroyed. can you see this majestic, authoritative, worshipful figure, or worship worthy figure.

It's not just ordinary authority. This is the authority of God. All people will worship him. And his kingdom is an eternal one.

He is an eternal king. king. The son of man is an impressive figure. Even just with that title.

But the description that follows gives more weight to it. But notice where he is. This majestic, authoritative, divine, eternal king.

is amongst the churches. In the middle of the churches. Among the lampstands.

[17 : 25] Right there, with his churches. Jesus is in the middle of his churches. Which is where he ought to be, because of course the church is Christ's body.

Any church church, even a persecuted and otherwise unimpressive one, has in his midst Jesus.

What a thing. That's an image of great comfort and encouragement. We might look around and get discouraged by the church.

It may be down on numbers. we may be told that it's no longer relevant or up to date. It's definitely not cool. And sometimes it's under attack.

And that can be discouraging. And that discouragement would no doubt have been there for John's first readers, a small gathering of nondescript believers in a little town on the edges of the Roman Empire under siege and harassed could easily get discouraged.

[18 : 44] What an encouragement then to know that Jesus, the ascended, risen, ascended, triumphant, glorified Lord Jesus with all authority and the almighty ruler of a kingdom that will never pass away is there in your midst.

right there with you. And indeed he's right here with us. That's what he promised.

Where two or more are gathered in my name, I am there in your midst. And that's what this vision tells us. And what a figure he is.

John gives us a kaleidoscope of images all at once. Not so that we can be bogged down in the detail of each part of it, but so that we can get a cumulative picture of the son of man.

So we'll go quickly through these images, drawing out the connotations of each aspect, using the Old Testament and the book of Daniel in particular, to grasp the illusions that John is making.

[20 : 11] His clothes. He was wearing a long robe with a golden sash, symbols of dignity, majesty, and greatness.

and his hair, his hair, the hair on his head was white like wool.

This echoes Daniel 7. Just a few verses before the ones that we read were Daniel 7 verse 9.

I'm sorry I didn't get a slide of that, but if we flip back to Daniel 7 verse 9. As I looked, thrones were set in place, and the Ancient of Days took his seat, his clothing was as white as snow, the hair of his head was white like wool.

Exactly the same words as John uses here. Not only is John saying that Jesus is the Son of Man with his authority and dignity and sovereignty, but he's also the Ancient of Days himself.

[21 : 37] And the white hair in that passage symbolizes wisdom and eternity and deity, John wants to emphasize the whiteness.

It's as white as wool, as white as snow. And throughout Revelation, the color white is associated with the Son of Man.

Eleven further times we'll hear that, and it designates goodness. goodness. He's good.

And in fact, God isn't just good. That sort of sounds a little bit ordinary for God to say, oh, he's good. But he's the one who we know what goodness is.

He defines good. He is good. good. We know what is good and what is not good from God himself.

[22 : 48] So that's just his hair. And his eyes, whoops, I went too fast. The eyes of the Son of Man blazed like a flame of fire.

fire. In chapter 2 and in chapter 19, this image is used of judgment. The Son of Man brings.

Nothing, it seems, escapes his fiery gaze and he will judge rightly. Are you starting to get the impression of a very impressive figure?

But there's more. his feet. The gaze of the apostle travels downward and we notice the feet of the Son of Man.

Now, this description is a little bit more difficult to understand because we have no direct parallels elsewhere. But the idea seems to be of strength and stability.

[23 : 56] feet like bronze glowing in a furnace in his voice. Sorry, feet like bronze glowing in a furnace.

They are fire furnace refined bronze still hot from the furnace. There's notions there of purity and absolute perfectness in his feet, stable and able to trample down his enemies maybe.

And his voice sounds like many waters, majestic and awesome and powerful and thunderous and we get this image as it recurs again in chapters 14 and 19.

in his right hand he holds the seven stars which we are told in verse 20 are the angels of the churches.

The angels are both the guardians of the churches but they're also the heavenly counterparts of the earthly expressions and they're held.

[25 : 24] Those churches, those angels of the churches are held in the right hand, the hand of strength by the son of man.

He holds them. There's no doubt who is in control here. It's not the angels. the son of man holds them.

And his mouth. This image is seen several times in scripture. In Isaiah 49 verse 2 we have this description of the word of God being a sword that comes out of the mouth of God.

It's used throughout the New Testament to designate the word of God especially in the book of Hebrews in chapter 4. The word of God is alive and active sharper than any double edged sword.

It penetrates even into dividing soul and spirit joints and marrow. It judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. This image will come up again in Revelation but here it shows the word of God wielded by the Son of Man and it has penetrative powers of judgment and his face like the sun shining in all its brilliance glory.

[27 : 08] The radiant face of the Son of Man shows his dazzling blinding glory similar to the glory of God himself which even when reflected in the face of Moses if you remember was too much to look at.

So I hope you're getting the picture of this dignified majestic great one who is God himself.

He's good perfect even he's the judge he's steadfast he's all seeing and righteous he's the one who's in control sovereign and authoritative and powerful ruling by his incisive word and mighty voice.

It's a bit overwhelming really and so it was for John when I saw him I fell at his feet as though dead.

John takes all of this in about the son of man and he is undone he falls at the feet of this one as though dead like so many before him and since he is terrified he recognizes that he is in the presence of pure holiness and he can do nothing but fall down like a dead man but then the son of man touches him and speaks to him surely he's about to be torn apart explode implode or cease to be but no what Jesus says changes changes that whole scenario from one of terror to one of comfort don't be afraid

[29 : 28] I am and the first and the last he has touched him not to destroy him as well he might but to comfort him in touches him in solidarity and protection one of the most repeated commands of the Bible is don't be afraid and actually it's one of the things that we need to hear most because there are lots of things that scare us aren't there and Jesus gives John some reasons why John should not be afraid he says

I am Jesus makes statements of who he is and like in John's gospel which many of us are studying each of these is put in a really emphatic way the phrasing of the Greek emphasizes this I am and of course that's a deliberate echo of Exodus chapter 3 verse 14 where God's Moses asks God who are you who can I tell the people your name is when I say God sent me which what God how do I and so God answers Moses and again Exodus chapter 3 verse 14 helps if I get to chapter 3 yes

God says to Moses I am who I am this is what you are to say to the Israelites I am has sent me to you and then he went on to explain that he was the God of their ancestors as well he is and we get this we even use this phrase sometimes you know somebody who thinks that they're full of themselves that they think that they're written a bit you say oh he's the great I am but no there is only one I am and that is God himself he is the great I am who was and is and is to come he is the eternal one there is no ambiguity of what

Jesus is claiming here though he's saying he is Yahweh the one true God I am and he's the first and the last that statement emphasizes the claim of who of being God himself doesn't it the eternal nature of Jesus is given here he is the first and the last he's before all things and after all things John has no need to fear because the one who is sovereign over all history from first things to last things and all points in between has laid his hand on him in protection and comfort and he's the living one he was dead but now he's alive the living one was dead the one who is the living

God was dead and now is alive forever he can't be dead again he's been there he's done that he's fixed it there is no more way there's no other way that death can hold him Jesus is saying I am the living God what's more I'm the living God who died and did away with death and now I live forever death couldn't hold him he's far more powerful than death and as such he holds the keys to death and Hades the place of the dead Hades is a way of saying the place of death now that's more than just theoretical interest to

[35 : 06] John's readers of course believers were facing death daily and to know that their Lord holds all of that in hand death he's got it he's in charge of it what what a comfort and encouragement it's not just John encouraging him here and for a church facing the real prospect of being killed at any time Jesus holding the keys of death and Hades is a great thing death doesn't triumph they have the prospect of life beyond death through the living one and there's comfort that goes beyond John's time of course we all are facing the prospect of death one day maybe not as immediate as those churches way back then but just as real and we all get frightened in the face of death but

Jesus says to those who are his own don't be afraid I have the keys to death and Hades I have it in hand don't worry don't be afraid nothing not death even the place of the dead none of that can touch you Jesus has its keys as the song that we sang goes no power of hell no scheme of man can ever pluck me from his hand what a comfort to us to a church under pressure to us all but actually what John was most terrified of is not the

Roman oppressors the people who can kill him those thugs or flunkies of the emperor that wanted to do away with him what really terrifies John and what made him fall on his face was the son of man himself remember who it is and what it is that John has seen the son of man is great and mighty immensely powerful and authoritative he is the almighty God himself and he's the one who sees everything even through all his pretensions he will judge it all his sword is sharp and penetrating and his voice thunders he's a searing powerful holy presence and

John just like us is an ordinary weak sinful person small wonder he falls down like a dead man but here's the good news remember back in verse five that we read last week the terrifying presence is actually Jesus the one who we read in verse five is the one who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood that's the one who comforts John you see John Jesus comforts John because he holds the keys of death and Hades not only for the

Romans and the ones who oppose God but he holds those keys for John to free him for us to free us and so the comfort is for all who put their trust in him and turn to him in repentance and faith turning away from sin and towards him don't be deceived he is the one who judges all sin but even for us today when we turn to him we need not be terrified because he holds the keys of death and Hades for you if you are a

[40 : 43] Christian person you need not be scared or terrified of this mighty Lord Jesus you will want to worship him but if you are not a Christian or if you are not sure where you stand being scared of something that is a danger to you is a good thing as long as it leads to appropriate action if you find yourself standing in the middle of the tracks with a tram bearing down on you it's good to be scared enough to move out of the way it's good to be scared as long as it makes you get out of danger the appropriate action here in the face of the one who will come to judge is to turn to him in repentance of your sin turning away from those things that keep you from

God your rejection of God rejecting your rejection if you like and turning to him in faith faith that he really does free you from your sins by his blood and don't just leave it because he will come to judge just as surely as the tram will come down the tracks Jesus loves you deeply and died to give you life but you need to accept that so to the one who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood and made us to be a kingdom and priest to serve his God forever to him be glory and power forever and ever that's where it leads us to it leads us to worship as we know what it is to experience that love you