"The Ineffable Glory of Christ"
Revelation 1:9-20
June 30, 2024

All of Scripture is sacred, weighty, authoritative, sufficient, and true. Yet there are certain passages, that when I come to them, I have a particular reverence for. I hold these passages more carefully as though holding a priceless treasure—passages I love to preach on, yet I am cautious to preach on. When I come to the pulpit the only way to pray is, "*who am I* to speak of such true and glorious realities." Why? Because these glorious realities are none less than a vision of the great and glorious, infinite, holy God Himself. I'm talking about passages like Exodus 33, Isaiah 6, Isaiah 40, Daniel 7, John 1, Colossians 1, Hebrews 1, Revelation 1 and Revelation 19. While we should regard these passages with the deepest reverence, they should also be the most worn in our Bibles.

Today we are going to mine a stunning vision of the *ineffable*[1] glory of Jesus in [**Rev 1:9-20].**

Setting the Stage (Rev 1:9-11)

Verses 9-11 give us some important background information leading up to John's encounter with Christ. We know that John is on the Island of Patmos, having been temporarily exiled there as some form of punishment on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. In other words, John's ministry of preaching and evangelism have been met with temporary banishment from the mainland to inhibit the growth of the early church.[2] Yet in God's providence, it will be here on Patmos, removed from the normal business of life, that John will have time and opportunity to write the 22 chapters of this essential book for the church.

John introduces himself to his readers in vs. 9 as "*your brother and partner in the tribulation, and the kingdom, and the patient endurance that are in Jesus.*" In essence John is saying, "I'm walking with you on this road of tribulation and patient endurance that are a part of living out the kingdom of Jesus." Notice that these three things (tribulation, the kingdom, and patient endurance) are all *in Jesus*. That is, life in Christ, following Jesus, means that we are citizens of His kingdom, yet as we live on this earth amidst the kingdom of this world, our identification with Jesus will result in tribulation that requires patient endurance.

The believers to whom John writes were despised religiously, politically, socially, and economically because the kingdom ways of Christ to whom they were loyal, were counter cultural and seemed to threaten the prosperity of the world order. *Religiously*, Christians were considered offensive because they rejected the Roman pantheon of gods. *Politically*, Christians gave higher loyalty to Jesus than to Caesar. *Socially*, Christians seemed to threaten the hierarchical system including slavery by teaching that all people are equal (Gal 3:28; Col 3:11). *Economically*, Christians were marginalized for detracting from the financial profit of idol worship.[3]

As a result, the early church experienced many tribulations that required patient endurance including the possibility of "exile, imprisonment, social ostracism, slander, poverty, economic exploitation, violence," and legal threats.[4] All of these things are part of *kingdom living* in Jesus in this present world. That doesn't sound much like kingdom living until we realize that the kingdom of God is not at all like the kingdom of this world. There is a future triumphant reign to the kingdom of God (that's where the book of Revelation ends), but in this world the way we reign with Christ, the way we triumph, is by patient endurance, obedience and faithfulness to God that refuses to compromise in the face of persecution, enduring suffering with faith, living sacrificially, doing good to those who do us harm, praying for our enemies, counting the cost of following Christ and hoping in the resurrection.

[1] *Ineffable* – Incapable of being expressed or described with words; not spoken of because its sacredness.
[2] Robert Mounce, *The Book of Revelation* (NICNT), pg. 55.
[3] John MacArthur, *The MacArthur NT Commentary: Revelation 1:1-11*, pg. 38-39.
[4] Grant Osborne, *Revelation* (Baker Exegetical Commentary on the NT), pg. 80.

Patient endurance (perseverance) is a key theme in the book of Revelation because it is how we reign with Christ now, before He comes. I'm not talking about patient endurance as mere survival, but living in the power of the Spirit in a way that reigns over sin, self, and the temptations that tribulation brings. Clinging to the mind of Christ, living by faith, extending forgiveness, relinquishing our hopes, dreams, disappointments, heartaches, and future to Christ. Surrendering to Jesus as Lord on the road of the cross. This is life in Jesus—experiencing the triumphant life of Christ in the midst of tribulation, patiently enduring without compromising our loyalty to Him.

It is on this stage that Christ reveals Himself to the churches to encourage them to persevere when it is costly and to warn them of the greater cost of compromise.

It was on the Lord's day, while John was worshiping and abiding in the Spirit on Patmos (in other words, living out the kingdom in exile) that he heard a loud voice, like a trumpet, commanding Him to write what he was about to see and send it to the seven churches.

It's noteworthy that John identifies this voice as one like a trumpet. In the OT the sound of the trumpet signified the awesome and terrifying presence of God, as on Mt. Sinai. The trumpet was also used to indicate God's nearness in worship (Ex 19:16; 2Sam 6:15; Neh 12:35-36). Furthermore, the trumpet signaled warfare or announced the king's presence (Judg 3:27; 1Kings 1:34). In the NT it's the trumpet that announces the day of the Lord, the great day of God's reckoning (Mt 24:31; 1Cor 15:52; 1Thess 4:16).[5] Thus this trumpet-like voice in vs. 10 is the voice of the glorified Jesus announcing His divine presence which John will encounter with fear and awe as Jesus reveals the events surrounding the great day of the Lord and the final conflict to end all wars.

The Ineffable Glory of Christ (Rev 1:12-16)

Now we come to John's vision in **[vs. 12-16]**.

We know from vs. 20 that the seven lampstands in vs. 12-13 represent the seven churches to whom John writes. The lampstand imagery points to Zechariah 4 in which a lampstand with 7 lamps represented the power of the Holy Spirit. It is also associated with the presence of God in the temple where a lampstand with 7 lamps was located in the Holy of Holies.[6] This presents a picture of the church as representing the light of God's presence and the power of the Holy Spirit in the midst of this hostile world.[7] We are the temple of God—the temple of the Holy Spirit. We are the light of the world (Mt 5:14).

Then John sees in vs. 13 "one like a son of man" in the midst of the lampstands. It's important for me to point out 2 things here. First, this is the same Son of Man that Daniel saw in Daniel 7. There are so many parallels between these visions that I'm going to take a moment to read from Daniel 7. **[Dan 7:9-10, 13-14]**

> "I kept looking Until thrones were set up, And the Ancient of Days took *His* seat; *His vesture was like white snow, And the hair of His head like pure wool*. His throne *was* ablaze with flames, Its wheels *were* a burning fire.
> "A river of fire was flowing And coming out from before Him; Thousands upon thousands were attending Him, And myriads upon myriads were standing before Him; The court sat, And the books were opened…
> "I kept looking in the night visions, And behold, *with the clouds of heaven One like a Son of Man was coming*, And He came up to the Ancient of Days And was presented before Him.
> 14 "And to Him was given dominion, Glory and a kingdom, that all the peoples, nations, and *men of every* language Might serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion which will not pass away; And His kingdom is one which will not be destroyed."

The Messianic figure to whom God gives the eternal kingdom is Jesus as we see Him in Revelation.

[5] Grant Osborne, *Revelation* (Baker Exegetical Commentary on the NT), pg. 84.
[6] G.K. Beale, Revelation: A Shorter Commentary, pg. 47.
[7] See Osborne, pg. 86-87 and Schreiner, pg. 100.

Second, notice in vs. 13 that Jesus is in the midst of His churches. In the OT it was the priests who tended the lamps in the temple. This points to Jesus as a heavenly priest tending the churches as we will see in chapters 2-3 by correcting, exhorting and encouraging them.[8]

Church, Jesus is constantly present among us. He knows intimately the situation and circumstances of each church—and each person.[9] He knows our strengths and He knows our sickness. He stands ready to extend blessing or discipline. He is able to support us and protect us in our trials and tribulations. Yet as Lord over the church He can remove our lampstand if we refuse to repent (Rev 2:5).

Now John gives us 8 specific descriptions of Jesus as He stands in the midst of the church. What's important here is not the visual descriptions themselves, but what they represent.

1. **Long robe and golden sash** (vs. 13)

Given the priestly imagery we have already seen of Jesus among the lampstands, this long robe and sash most likely represent the high priestly ministry of Jesus. Six out of seven times in the OT a long robe represents the priestly vestments.[10] But it also appears in Ezek 9:2 describing the executioners of divine judgment. Furthermore it describes the 7 angels with the 7 plagues in Rev 15:6 and the heavenly being in Daniel 10:5. Taken together, we see Jesus as a heavenly high priest who also executes the judgment of God. Such clothing represented one of high rank who was exalted, dignified, and endowed with greatness and majesty. *Church, behold Jesus, the heavenly high priest who executes divine Judgment.*

2. **Hair white like wool or snow** (vs. 14)

In ancient times, white hair represented dignity, wisdom and honor. More importantly, Jesus bears a likeness to the Ancient of Days in Daniel 7 whose vesture and hair were white like wool. This demonstrates a unity between the Father and the Son pointing to Jesus' deity.[11] Furthermore, such brilliant whiteness reminds us of the transfiguration in Mark 9:3 where Jesus' garments became radiant and exceedingly white. Jesus radiates the eternal wisdom and glory of God, most holy and abounding in pure goodness.[12] *Church, behold Jesus, the eternal wisdom and glory of God dressed in dignity, wisdom, and honor.*

3. **Eyes like a flame of fire** (vs. 14)

These eyes represent divine insight that penetrates to the very core of the human soul and sees all things. Tom Schreiner describes it as the ability "*to penetrate to the deepest level of reality, which means that nothing is hidden from His gaze, that He knows the truth about all people exhaustively. He knows who is righteous and who is wicked; the true state of [all] affairs…is evident to Him. [This] assures the church that all will be right in the end, that the Son of man will judge according to the truth*."[13]

This is none other than the divine warrior with flaming eyes who will wage war in Rev 19:12 to render the fierce judgment of God. *Church, behold Jesus, the omniscient One whose gaze penetrates to the most hidden recesses of the soul; whose eyes no one and no circumstance can escape notice.*

4. **Feet like burnished bronze, refined in a fire** (vs. 15)

In the ancient world, feet represented the direction of one's life. Bronze represents strength, and the refining fire points to purity. This depicts Christ's life and character in the glory and strength of moral purity—holiness.[14] The one who is perfectly good, pure, and powerful, is able crush His enemies under His feet (Rev 19:11-21).[15]

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[8] Beale, pg. 48.
[99] Schreiner, 100.
[10] Osborne, 89.
[11] Osborne, 90.
[12] Schreiner, pg. 104.
[13] Schreiner, pg. 104.
[14] Osborne, pg. 91.
[15] Schreiner, pg. 105.

Don't miss here the relationship between purity and strength. It's Christ eyes of flaming fire and feet of purified bronze that will come to the church of Thyatira and address their tolerance of sexual immorality. Sinful impurity of any kind will weaken you and make you vulnerable. *Church, behold Jesus, the one who is perfectly good, pure and powerful, able to crush His enemies under His feet.*

5. **Voice like the roar of many waters** (vs. 15).

Throughout Scripture the sound of God's voice is described as loud peals of thunder, a great multitude or tumult (like stadium shouting), or many waters (Rev 14:2; 19:6). All of these together represent the weightiness and majesty of the voice of God. Like standing at Niagara Falls. What John wants us to grasp here is that Jesus speaks with the very voice of God with all its weight, majesty, and authority. *Church, behold Jesus, whose voice thunders with weight, majesty, and authority.*

6. **In His right hand He held seven stars** (vs. 16)

We know from vs. 20 that the seven stars represent the angels of the seven churches. It's been debated whether the term here represents angelic beings or the pastors of the churches. I'm going to take this to mean heavenly, angelic beings because the term *angel* is used over 60 times in the book of Revelation and every other time refers to heavenly begins.

The angels associated with the 7 churches are held in Jesus' right hand, which is the hand of authority and power. Clearly, Jesus is being revealed here has having authority over both heaven and earth[16] (he walks among the churches and hold the stars/angels in His right hand). With the angels in His right hand, Jesus is possessing and protecting His church as well as ruling over angels.

It's also possible that this is meant to be seen as a contrast to the pretentious Roman emperors who inscribed coins with stars and planets to suggest they had divine rule.[17] What an encouragement to the churches, that Jesus is the true Lord and King heaven and earth, despite the pompous arrogance of the emperors. *Church, behold Jesus, the one who reigns over angels and earth, possessing and protecting His people, and holding them to account.*

7. **From his mouth came a sharp two-edged sword** (vs. 16)

Here we see Christ as the bearer of *universal, judicial authority*.[18]

- Isaiah 11:4 – "He will strike the earth with the rod of His mouth, And with the breath of His lips He will slay the wicked."
- Rev 19:15 – "And from His mouth comes a sharp sword, so that with it He may smite the nations; and He will rule them with a rod of iron; and He treads the wine press of the fierce wrath of God, the Almighty."
- 2Thess 2:8 - "And then that lawless one will be revealed whom the Lord will slay with the breath of His mouth and bring to an end by the appearance of His coming…"

The idea here in Rev 1 is that Christ will judge the disobedience of both the church and the world (Rev 2:16).[19] The combination of the mouth and the sword is noteworthy. With His mouth He proclaims judgment and with the sword He carries it out.

Hebrews 4:12 speaks of the word of God being sharper than any two-edged sword…able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. Just consider for a moment the power of God's word. In creation it brings into existence out of nothing; in judgment it destroys—immediate, effective, and irrevocable! When we resist or disobey God's word, we are making ourselves extremely vulnerable. The sword of His mouth is reserved for those who reject His word. *Church, behold Jesus, the sovereign Judge who executes justice by the sword of His very words.*

[16] G.K. Beale, pg. 48.
[17] Osborne, pg. 92 and Schreiner, pg. 106.
[18] Osborne, pg. 92.
[19] Beale, pg. 48.

8. **His face was like the sun shining in full strength** (vs. 16)

The angel from the heavenly presence of God in Daniel 10 had a face with the appearance of lightning. When Moses came down from Mt Sinai after being in the presence of God, his face shown with glory. But the glory that John sees in the face of Jesus is not a reflected glory like that of angels or Moses. It is the glory of God like the sun shining in full strength—John has nothing greater to compare it to. We see this same display of overwhelming glory at the transfiguration where Matthew tells us that Jesus' face shown like the sun (Mt 17:2). This a direct parallel to the glory of Yahweh Himself (Ps 84:11; Isa 60:19).

In the words of Tom Schreiner, "Just as one cannot stare down the sun when it shines at [full] strength, so too the glory of the Son of Man is more that human beings can withstand."[20] *Church, behold Jesus, the glory of God like the sun shining in full strength.*
This is why John responds the way he does in vs. 17…

The Impact of Encountering Christ (Rev 1:17-20)

[vs. 17-19] John falls prostrate at the feet of Jesus out of great fear as He encounters the overwhelming glory and holiness of Jesus. John joins Daniel, Isaiah, Ezekiel, Job, Saul of Tarsus, and others in the grave reality that the glory of God/Christ strikes terror in the hearts of sinful men.

Then, Jesus laid His right hand on John—the same right hand that holds the angels of the churches—He laid His right hand of power and authority on John not only as a means of comfort but also commissioning him, endowing Him with the authority to write this Revelation.

Then in response to the holy dread that had fallen on John, Jesus said to Him, "*Fear not.*" The reason Jesus gives to alleviate John's fear is nothing less than who Jesus is and what He has accomplished by His death and resurrection.

"I am the first and the last…" Notice that this is equivalent to what God said of Himself in vs. 8: "I am the Alpha and Omega." Together God and Christ reign as the Sovereign Lord of history. As Creator, they are before all things, they have the first word in creation, and they will have the last Word in final judgment.[21]

"*I am the First and the Last, and the Living One. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I hold the keys of Death and Hades.*" John need not fear because Christ has overcome death forever and He holds the keys of death and Hades. That is, Jesus alone has authority over death and judgment. He determines who is locked in the prison of death and He determines who is set free eternally.

What an incredible encouragement this is, not only for first-century believers but for us today. Caesar does not have the final word. Presidents and prosecutors do not have the final word. Christ alone has the final word—the One who has the keys of death and Hades and the One who has the authority and power to raise the dead.

Regardless of what suffering or trials we may face, if we patiently endure, we will indeed reign with Christ forever" because He holds the keys.[22] God's kingdom is secure because Christ is reigning as the Sovereign Lord and Judge who will have the final word. Therefore, we can patiently endure whatever tribulation is necessary to remain faithful to Christ without compromise.

[20] Schreiner, pg. 107.
[21] Osborne, pg. 95.
[22] G.K. Beale, pg. 50.