

Revelation 1:12-20

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Preacher: Joe Barnard

[0 : 00] I'd like to open your Bibles, open them to Revelation chapter 1. Jen had just been promoted in work, mother of two.

One of these moments in life where things kind of feel like they're finally on track, like the sun is shining when all of a sudden she went in and found out that she had cancer.

Listen, Harry. Harry was a young man, really excited, had just found out about the church, had just been through Christianity Explored, had just become a Christian, was really excited to let all of this family know what the Lord had done in his life, and result that actually his wife wasn't interested at all, that actually she wanted some separation, that actually his faith was really disturbing to her, and that she was thinking about maybe this relationship needing to end.

Now, Gordon. Gordon, at work, tries to live out a life of integrity, finds it difficult to not fall into some of the practices of his co-workers, finds that his professional life is not advancing as quickly as others because of his moral scruples.

But he's not willing to do. Sally. Sally, a young university student, grew up in the church, has always kind of played the role of a good girl, never had anything big to confess or felt like she did.

[1 : 37] All of a sudden, beginning to experiment with drinking Saturday nights, is having a lot of fun, actually. And slowly beginning to sort of drift from her anchorage and her faith.

Now, these are very different people, very different situations, and I think they probably represent the fact that in this room this morning, we're very different. It's a hard thing to come and preach in a new church, because I don't really know what you're wrestling with.

I don't know what it's like to live in Aberdeen. But the one thing I do know, is that as different as we are, as diverse as our needs are, what this passage tells us is that ultimately our need is the same thing.

It doesn't matter what you're going through. I don't have to know. You don't have to know what I'm going through. Ultimately, we need the same thing. And what we need, what Revelation reveals to us in this reading, is what we all need is a vision of the resurrected Lord Jesus Christ.

That's what we need this morning. And I want us just to think, first of all, why it is that Revelation begins with a vision of Christ. Isn't that an amazing thing, that this is how this startling book, in some ways this disturbing book, it begins with an image of Jesus.

[3 : 00] And why is that? Let's just step back for a moment. Let's just survey the whole landscape of Revelation and ask that question, why does it begin with this image or this vision of Jesus?

And I think there's several reasons. I mean, one of the reasons is if you read Revelation, you find out that the church is really disappointing. Now, some of us have yet to really get our heads around this.

You know, sometimes we come into a church and we look around and think, this is it. You know, if you're here, maybe you're thinking, this is a reformed evangelical church. It's not caught up with all the emotionalism.

Or it's not caught up with all of the liturgy. You know, I found it. This is going to be the church that's going to fit my need. And yet what we find in Revelation is that actually the church is sorely disappointed.

Seven letters to seven different churches. Two out of seven are doing pretty well. Five out of seven are severely struggling.

[4 : 02] Those five caught up with a whole diversity of issues ranging from lapsed love and loyalty to just materialism, to false doctrine, to just conformity.

But what we find in Revelation is that if your hope is in the church, you're going to be disappointed. The second reason that Revelation begins with a vision of Christ is news is really confusing.

You know, Revelation, it begins with this incredible declaration. This declaration that the lion is the lamb, that Jesus is on the throne.

I mean, this is the stuff that you would think would just echo through all of creation, right? Yet what we discover is that actually, unless we're looking at earth through the lens of heaven, the headlines are really confusing.

Because we don't hear a whole lot about what Jesus is up to. Rather, we hear that, you know, that terrorism is growing. We hear that, you know, the economic systems of this world are always really fragile.

[5 : 16] Have you ever noticed that the more you read the headlines, the more disturbed you feel on the inside? And so if we focus our attention on what's happening in the world, we very easily become disturbed, and we become worried, and we become anxious.

So Revelation's pulling us away from that. You know, also, one of the things we see as we look at Revelation, we find that evil is really deceptive. It's fascinating.

Later in Revelation, there are two beasts. One of them looks like a lamb. Jesus is called a lamb in Revelation. And yet it speaks like a dragon.

It's this incredible image of evil, how evil so often looks good on the outside. It's corrupt. It's malicious. It's destructive. On the inside.

If we're not careful, we easily get seduced by the evil of the world. It looks awfully good. It looks like it doesn't threaten us. And what we need is something that will pull our eyes away from it.

[6 : 19] One last reason. I think Revelation begins with this image of Christ is, again, if you read through Revelation, you find that, honestly, life in this world can be terrifying.

I mean, we have to be reminded in Revelation that all of the natural disasters, the economic unrest, the famine, the disease, the death, all of these things are not outside God's hands.

Because if we lose sight of God, if we fixate just on the stuff of this world, what we see is stuff that terrifies us. And so what Revelation is doing at the start is it's pulling us back from the headlines, you know, from all of the lights and the glamour of the city, from the situations of our life, and it's giving us an image or a vision of Jesus.

That's where your eyes are meant to be this morning. And what I want us to think about is what exactly this vision is that we read about in Revelation chapter 1.

Two big things, I think. First of all, what we discover in the verses that we read, first of all, is that the vision of Jesus is always a vision of majesty.

[7 : 37] Now, I have a feeling that your mind is probably like my mind. We probably all carry around a fairly domesticated image of Jesus in our heads.

I would bet money that probably the image of Christ in your head is uninspiring. You know, it is that Anglo-Saxon white male wearing some funny tunic, walking around looking like he wouldn't pluck a flower because he doesn't want to disrupt it, right?

That's the level of image that we keep. And what John wants to do, he wants to shatter the preconceptions that we have of Christ, and he wants to return the splendor of the holiness of Christ so we can see it and behold it and fix our attention upon it.

And let's just look at what he sees. I mean, look with me. Let's start with verse 14. The first thing that he sees is he sees that the head and the hair of Jesus were white like wool, as white as snow. Now, think with me. Why is the hair of Jesus white like wool, white like snow? Well, we read Daniel 7.

[8 : 53] We know that the ancient of days, his hair is white like wool, like snow. What John wants us to see is that the hair of Jesus is white because it's perfectly pure.

It's the holiness of God, but it's the wisdom of God. This is the one whose wisdom is perfect, who knows history from the beginning to the end, and none of it is outside of his wisdom, his providence, his sovereignty.

You know, I also think of Isaiah 1 as I read this, you know, though your sins are like scarlet, what they will be white like what? Wool and snow. This holy God who somehow purifies us from our sin. We're looking at Christ. We see his hair. His hair is white like wool, white as snow. Now, look at his eyes. His eyes are like blazing fire.

Now, think about what fire does. Thinking about how fire, it tests whatever burns. This blazing eyes of Christ, as he looks on us, what he does is he tests your heart.

[10:19] He tests your life. Later in Revelation, Jesus himself says, I am the one who tests the mind and the heart. When you come into worship, you need to know nothing is hidden from Jesus.

You can hide your sin from your neighbor. You can try to keep it away from your own attention, in the back of your mind, but it is there before the eyes of Christ.

He sees everything. Look at his feet. His feet are like bronze glowing in the furnace.

Burnished bronze. Now, what is this about? Why are his feet mentioned here? I can't help as I read this, but to think of that image of all of the kingdoms of this world in Daniel.

You know, they go from the gold, the silver, the bronze, then you get to the feet, and the feet is clay and iron, and the feet can't support the weight, and the whole structure collapses.

[11:25] And friends, every institution, every society, every nation state, everything of this world ultimately is frail.

You can't put your weight on anything of this world and be supported. You can't invest your hope in your spouse, in your mom and dad, in a denomination, in a country.

You know, there is no structure that can support you and support your hope and support your trust. But then we read the feet of Christ, they're like glowing bronze, and guess what?

There's stability with Jesus. He will not fall. He will not falter. He cannot be pushed over. There's strength to Him.

Now listen to His voice. His voice is like the sound of rushing waters. What I love about rushing waters, this is months ago, but months ago I was taking my kids swimming in Inverness, and there's this kind of funnel, and water pours out of it.

[12:35] And I went, I just stood beneath the water, and what I became aware of is as the water just pours over you, every other noise is drowned out. All of a sudden you can't hear the music coming through the speakers.

You know, you can't hear your child really talking next to you. All you hear is the sound of the water. This vision of Christ as He speaks, it's like a torrent of water.

It drowns out all of the noise so that all you can be aware of is what He is speaking. Notice what's in His hand.

Look at verse 16. I love this. In His hand He held seven stars. Now, the Romans thought of seven planets. You know, everybody back then believed in astrology.

They thought that actually the stars or the planets influenced what happened on Earth. There was power in the stars. If you want to think about what the stars are for us, these are probably, you know, you think of modern financial markets.

[13:41] Think of, again, institutions like democracy. Think of the things that we think guide history. The big things. The things that no one's in control of.

No nation's in control of. That somehow overwhelm everything. Well, these stars are pictured as being in the hand of Christ. That's how small they are to Him.

The one with the wisdom. The one with the stability. The one with the eyes. The one with the voice. And then from His mouth comes this double-edged sword.

What's up with that? How do we get our way in this world? How do nations get their way?

Often it's through violence, right? It's through the art of war. You know what's amazing? You know where the sword comes from with Christ? It comes from His mouth. It's through Him speaking truth.

[14:40] It's through a total integrity of what He says He does. What makes Him worthy. What accomplishes His purposes.

His sword is the word He speaks. And then His face, it shines like the sun in its brilliance. How long can you look at the sun?

Remember the solar eclipse the other week? Wouldn't there such paranoia that some kid was going to go blind from looking at the sun? You can't look at the sun for very long, can you? It has an effect upon you.

And one of the things that's so incredible about this vision of majesty and revelation is there's a test of whether or not you see it. The test is whether it has an effect on you.

You want to test your vision? Test your posture. John sees Jesus, and he falls down at his feet as if he's dead.

[15:46] You want to test the image you have of Christ in your mind? Then test the posture of your heart, whether you fall at the feet of Jesus this morning.

The vision of Christ is a vision that always affects us. It elicits a response. The response we see in John again in verse 17, When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead.

Now that's the first thing. The vision of Christ is a vision of majesty. There's something else you need to see about this vision. That is that the vision of Christ is equally a vision of presence.

Now let's see this. Now notice where Jesus is. Look at verse 12. Where is he?

Verse 13. He's among the lampstands. And of course, what are the lampstands? These represent the churches. Where is Jesus this morning? Friends, Jesus is here.

[16:59] Would it not change your experience of worship right now if you actually believed that Jesus was here among you? Would that not change everything if you actually believe that it's not empty pews and it's not a few people to your left and your right and you're not staring at me, but actually the resurrected Lord Jesus is present among us this morning.

This is the startling truth trying to be revealed here that John is communicating to us. That this majestic Lord, he doesn't just want to be in heaven, he wants to be among his people and it's represented by him walking among the lampstands.

So just imagine Jesus walking down the aisle and walking down the aisle and turning to face you and his eyes blaze like fire and his voice thunders like waters and all of a sudden you sit up straight or maybe you fall down.

What is it we see? A presence of what is the question? Well, first of all, what Jesus has revealed here, it's the presence of a priest. Again, look at verse 13.

How is he dressed? He's dressed in a robe, a golden sash. Go read Exodus 28.

[18:19] Read about the priestly garments. What did the priest wear? He wore a robe. And where is Jesus? Yes, he's among the churches, but the lampstands were always in the temple where the priest was.

This isn't just an image of Jesus among us. This is an image of us among Jesus. Us in the temple of God. And here's our high priest here for us.

And this is why, as his eyes blaze, and with his x-ray vision he sees straight through you, you don't need to be overwhelmed with despair, or guilt, or shame, because he's here as your priest.

So if what he sees in you this morning is a sin that you've been hanging on to all week, unconfessed, well, he appears among us as our priest.

And you can be totally transparent with your priest because he can see totally through you already.

And so our awareness of Jesus as we fall down, it's got to be a falling down, confessing our sin.

[19:29] Jesus, cleanse me afresh from whatever has defiled your name from my life this week. Jesus, he appears among us as a priest, but equally he appears among us as a judge.

I mean, look at this phrase, verse 13, like a son of man. We read Daniel 7.

We read the incredible passage where God appoints a man not just to judge individuals, to judge nations, to judge beasts, to judge everything.

It's hard for us to conjure up some sort of image of what the awful majesty of the supreme judge would be like.

Remember the passage in the Narnia, a lion, a witch, and a wardrobe? The first time they see the lion, Aslan? They don't quite know what to do, what to make of it. They go all trembly, right? This is why John falls at the feet of Jesus, is because he sees, one like the Son of Man, this is the one given all glory, honor, might, power.

[21:00] And you catch a vision, and you fall. The incredible thing is the story doesn't end there in Revelation 1.

Now look at verse 17. What happens? He places his arm, his right hand on John, and says, do not be afraid.

Do not be afraid. Jesus doesn't want us caught up with the fear, the terror of his presence. He wants us to feel the touch of his right hand of blessing.

And for us to hear the words, do not fear, which aren't just spoken because of the fear we have of him, but the fear that we may have of everything else that consumes us from this world through the week.

Look at what he says, I am the first and the last. Look, everything in your life is within the parentheses of me. I am the first, I am the last, you are within my wisdom, wherever you are.

[22:18] I am the living one, he says, verse 18. I was dead, I am alive, forever and ever, and I hold the keys to death and to Hades.

So guess what? Let hell do its worst. Let it threaten you by taking your life. And guess what? It takes from you nothing. Because I've got the keys to death and to Hades is what he says. Now here's the problem.

I'll say it quick. Time's about out. Go back to verse 12. What we see, and you can go back to verse 10 to see this, is that actually when John hears the word of Christ, he actually has to turn around and face Jesus.

Isn't it interesting that Jesus appears behind him? John's back is to Christ. And guess what? I think that's a great picture. Because for a lot of us this morning, this word is behind us.

[23 : 29] All week we've turned away. All week we've been consumed with all of the things, the distractions, the worries, the concerns, the suffering, the pain, the emotional anguish.

We've turned, we've focused on all of these things. Now we're turned. Jesus is behind us. This passage is an invitation to hear his voice and to face him.

You know, in Hebrew, that is what repentance means, just to turn around. This passage is an invitation to repent. To turn and to face Jesus.

And the wonder is, and this is where we begin and this is where I want to end. I don't know your problem. I don't know what you're struggling with this morning. But I do know what you need more than anything else is a fresh vision of Jesus.

That you know, if you actually are diagnosed with cancer or with some other disease, that actually you need to know that Jesus really does have the keys to death and to Hades.

[24 : 36] That you know, if you know, your partner does leave you because you've become a Christian and friends, this happens. You know, we don't live in an age where people like others becoming Christians.

I see this again and again. that some of us need to know that you can turn to Jesus and He'll be the friend, He'll be the faithful one that will never leave you. Be faithful to you to the end no matter who forsakes you.

You know, if some of us are actually persecuted in the workplace, again, this happens. Christians don't get promoted sometimes. We're too honest.

We're too truthful. Too many scruples. Believing that, well, all of the circumstances of my life, they really are in God's control. Of course, the world really is seductive.

Sometimes we do begin to taste and see and think that actually the world is good. At that moment, we need a vision of Christ. We need to know, look, He sees through the heart. His word is a double-edged sword.

[25 : 38] The only real good comes from seeing, beholding, and following Him. What every person here needs more than anything else today is a vision on the Lord's day of the resurrected glory, the majesty, the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ.

So let's pray that the Lord would give us that vision of Jesus now. Father, we're a lot weaker than we confess.

We're a lot more sinful than we'd ever admit. We're a lot more fearful than the gospel would have us be. But we thank You for this vision that empowers and thank You just for the majesty of our Lord Jesus Christ.

And we just pray that we would have eyes of faith to behold it. We believe that we're transformed by seeing. As we see something utterly worthy of our heart, as our heart begins to love what is true, what is good, what is beautiful, what is glorious, what is holy, that our thinking, our affections, and ultimately our lives are transformed.

And we just pray this morning that this word would come off of the page, that it would enter into the realm of our heart, that we'd find ourselves meditating and contemplating on this image, this vision, and that these truths would come back, that we'd remember through the week that the eyes of Christ and the hair of Christ and the voice of Christ and the shining face of Christ, and ultimately that we would feel that right hand on our shoulder and our weakness, telling us not to fear, to get up.

[27 : 25] Lord, we just pray that we would be ministered, not through a man, or at least any other man than Jesus himself.

Jesus, be now our high priest for us, for those confessing sin. Give them the assurance that you are faithful and just, that you forgive us our sins.

Those that need to believe in your wisdom, those that need to believe in your providence, give them eyes to see that you are the son of man. You will judge the whole world according to your righteousness and ultimately, all things will reflect the glory of God. We just commit our hearts to you and pray that they'd be strengthened through your word this morning. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.