

Introduction

An expedition to Antarctica left port December 5, 1914. The leader was Ernest Shackleton and the ship's name was Endurance. A month and a half later, the ship was entrapped in ice, and after 10 more months the ice gobbled up the ship, abandoning a crew of 28 with the supplies and life boats they removed before the ship sank. Five additional months later, the ice broke up and the crew made it to a desolate island in their lifeboats. Four hundred and ninety-seven days had now elapsed since they left port.

After nine days of recuperation, twenty-two men remained while a group of 6 including Shackleton boarded one of the life boats. They departed to seek help from a whaling station more than 800 miles away. Their voyage faced constant confrontation from mountainous swells and hostile winds. The crew spent their time baling water out of the boat and beating ice off the sails. After 16 such days they landed but on the wrong side of the island. An arduous 36 hour hike over mountains and down glaciers finally brought them to the whaling station. But this was just another beginning. It took three subsequent attempts of three different ships to finally reach the stranded sailors in August of 1916. Miraculously, not one crew member lost his life. This is a story of endurance. While the ship named Endurance was crushed, the endurance of Shackleton and every one of the crew members outlasted the hostility waged against them by the ocean, the ice, and the wind.

Patient endurance is one of the aspects of what it means to be a follower of Jesus Christ. Such endurance requires the power of the Holy Spirit at work in us. But we also need to keep a constant view of Jesus Christ before us. And we find just the kind of view of him we need in our text this morning.

[Read Text and Pray]

In these 12 verses, John relates the setting in which he received the glorious visions of the Revelation. He was on Patmos, an isolated and desolate island of steep cliffs and jagged rocks. Such was his sentence for his faithfulness to Christ. In complete contrast to the harsh and gloomy landscape, however, John experienced what would have to be one of the most compelling events of his life—a glorious visit of the ascended Lord Jesus Christ. His voice was like a trumpet, a figure from the Old Testament of summons. He calls out to John to summon him to write what he is going to see. Christ's appearance radiates holiness and judgment, causing John to fall down with the life streaming out of him. But Christ Jesus emboldens him and repeats his call to write. The text emphasizes the holiness of Jesus as he commissions John to write to the churches. The main idea is that the church's focus must remain fixed on Jesus. And there are three aspects of who he is that stand out—his glory, his care, and his call.

I. Christ's Glory

A. The Old Testament vividly presents the glory and holiness of God on a number of occasions. Moses saw a bush that burned yet without being consumed. As he turned aside to see, the Lord called out to him to take his sandals off his feet because he was on holy ground. Moses hid his face. Isaiah saw a vision of the Lord in which the beauty of his holiness was proclaimed by the flying seraphim hovering above him. The prophet said, "Woe is me! For I am undone." Ezekiel also saw the appearance of the glory of the Lord. And he fell on his face. The New Testament counterpart to those experiences is placed before us here in Revelation 1.

It is amazing how many artists through the centuries have attempted portraits of Jesus when the fact is that the gospels say almost nothing about how Jesus looked. What we have here in Revelation 1 is not to be interpreted literalistically as though we are to imagine that Jesus actually had snow-white hair and eyes of fire. However, what John saw and now relates to us tells us more about Jesus than any painting ever could.

B. In a word, he is holy. The details communicate the holiness of God and the judgment that flows from his holiness, starting with the phrase, "one like a son of man." This phrase originates in the book of Daniel. In the seventh chapter Daniel sees the clouds of heaven, and with them came "one like a son of man." He came up to the throne of the Ancient of Days and "was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom shall not be destroyed." Daniel indicates that the one like a son of man is bringing God's judgment on the world.

Now back to John's vision. The one like a son of man was clothed in a striking way. He wore a long robe with a golden sash around his chest. It is the clothing of a priest, and Jesus, our great High Priest is seen as though in the temple. One of the tasks of the priest in the temple was to tend the lamp. So Jesus is tending the lamp stands that represent the church.

His hairs were white like wool, like snow. It is not a very welcome thought, but for a moment imagine one of those blustery winter days in Wisconsin when the snow has freshly fallen. For a moment everything is white and the skies are clear. The bright sunshine threatens to blind you and you have to squint your eyes in the face of its rays.

Jesus' eyes here shine bright and with fire, the image of holy judgment. Remember how John the Baptist said of Jesus, "His winnowing fork is in his hand . . . he will gather his wheat into the barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire" (Matthew 3:12).

His feet like burnished bronze give testimony to the purity and weight of judgment with which Christ will tread the winepress of the fierce wrath of God the Almighty.

Then, there is his voice. It is like the sound of many waters. Ezekiel describes the sound of the coming of the glory of the God of Israel as "like the sound of many waters." If you have ever hiked to a waterfall, you begin to notice a crashing sound as you get nearer and nearer. At first you wonder what it is and then you go oh, yeah; it is the waterfall. The nearer you get the louder it becomes. Even relatively small waterfalls create a lot of noise. Multiply that many times. The voice of Christ is not merely attention-getting, it overrides the competition and thunders with fierceness.

In the right hand of this glorious Jesus are seven stars. We learn that they are the "angels" of the seven churches. The word means messengers, and it appears that these stars represent pastors and teachers in the churches through whom Christ's message would be conveyed. They are accountable to him to be faithful with his word.

We are also told of a sword. It comes from the mouth of Jesus. Clearly, the sword represents the powerful word of Christ, penetrating and discerning even the motives of the heart. But it is also a weapon of judgment. My mind goes to the scene where Saul disobeyed the commandment of the Lord to wipe away everyone and everything when he defeated the Amalekites. Saul had even left alive the king of the Amalekites. After Samuel confronted Saul for his disobedience, he said, "Bring here to me the king of the Amalekites," and Samuel took a sword and hacked Agag to pieces before

the Lord. So Jesus tells the church at Pergamum that if certain ones teaching false doctrine do not repent, he will come and war with them with the sword of his mouth.

And finally, there is the face of Christ. It shines like the sun at full strength. Here is incomparable brightness. Bring together the white purity of snow and the sun shining in its strength. All these features together function to compel the onlooker to shield himself. In fact, John falls down as though dead.

C. The appearance of Jesus coupled with the sound of his voice is alarming. It is undoing. It threatens to scare the life out of John, so we know this was an experience akin to that of Moses and Isaiah and Ezekiel. And this is Jesus. The soft portraits so many paint of Jesus reflect the deficient views many people have of him. Sure, and gloriously, he is gentle and meek and humble. But he is not weak or powerless or tolerant of sin. How that was manifested in his life when he rebuked the scribes and pharisees, when he said I came not to bring peace but a sword, when he drove the money changers out of the temple, and when he spoke of the terrors of hell more than anyone else in the Bible.

This vision of Jesus communicates that he is holy. Humanity has nothing to compare with divine holiness. The awareness of the transcendence and absolute sinless purity of God exposes the shamefulness of human pride and sin. We maximize our own importance. And we minimize the evil of our sin. But as our understanding of God's holiness deepens, we realize our utter bankruptcy, the futility of our works, and the joke that we imagine is our strength and significance. We need to highly regard the holiness of God in general and of Jesus in particular. If we lose sight of his holiness, we have lost sight of who he is. We will take him lightly; we will take our own sin lightly; and we will maximize our own importance. But no, Christ Jesus is holy God. His transcendence in being and in purity surpasses our understanding and calls for songs of loudest praise and reverence of the deepest measure. His transcendence beckons us to fall before his throne with John as though dead. His holiness summons us to respond resolutely to his call to serve, to say "here I am, send me" just the way Isaiah did.

But not only does the vision communicate that Jesus is holy. It also communicates that he is judge. He comes with a sword to confront even the churches in the midst of which he stands. Christ stands with his churches, but with such a high privilege comes a great deal of accountability. To whom much is given, much is required. We must take God's holiness seriously or we will be subject to it. Think for example of Nadab and Abihu. These were the two older sons of Aaron and the first priests to minister in the tabernacle. And they disregarded the command of the Lord not to offer unauthorized fire on the altar of incense. And fire came out from before the Lord and consumed them. Moses explained to Aaron, among those who are near me I will be treated as holy.

The church of Jesus Christ is a privileged bride and those who serve her as teachers are privileged as well to handle holy things. But you can be sure that the privilege must not be taken lightly. He has blessed her greatly and looks intently for her fidelity even to death.

II. Christ's Care

The vision of the holiness of Jesus seems even more gripping than when John witnessed Jesus's glory in great strength on the mount of transfiguration. For he fell down at his feet as though dead. Perhaps John was struck with a fresh awareness of his sin. Perhaps he realized afresh how the strains of pride and arrogance ran through his flesh. But certainly he saw a vision that worked in

him an overwhelming awe, reminiscent of what he wrote in 1 John 1: God is light and in him is no darkness at all.

But Jesus responded to him with tenderness and assurance, exhibiting a care as transcendent as his purity.

A. First, he touched him. John recounts, "He laid his right hand on me." The same hand which held the stars now ministered comfort and affection. Jesus often chose to touch the ones he healed. He did not have to do so in order to heal, but personal touch is a strong communicator. And Jesus used it here to assure his faithful disciple and friend that his holiness met by John's unholiness would not prevent his love. As undoing as is the holiness of God for even for the godliest saint, his determination to care for and comfort them is just as great. Listen, when you are undone by your sin and come before the Lord with a broken heart, he is ready to remove your burden and apply a balm to your heavy heart.

Think how Jesus illustrated this truth with the story he told of the wayward son. He took all of his inheritance and went and wasted it in riotous living, but when he came to his father, while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion and ran and embraced him and kissed him. That is the demeanor of the Lord to you, as well, if you have come home with a repentant heart. He loves you. He welcomes you. He cares for you. Welcome that comfort that love that care.

B. But not only did Jesus touch John, he also spoke to him. He said those words we see multiple times in the scriptures, "fear not." Sin is a reason to fear. When Adam and Eve had sinned and the Lord came walking in the garden, they hid themselves for they were ashamed. It is a fearful thing to encounter holy God with the recognition of your sin. To know and sense conviction of the judgment you deserve is a fearful thing. And the Lord will not leave the guilty unpunished. But He worked in such a way that the guilty who will trust in him will be counted righteous before holy God. Jesus gives John the gospel here.

"Fear not, I am the first and the last, and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forever more, and I have the keys of Death and Hades." Sinners deserve judgment from holy God, but here is the good news. No one need fear who trusts in Jesus Christ because he died but he is alive. He is alive forever. He went to death and took death's keys away. Death is not an ultimate enemy to those who belong to Jesus Christ.

Here is why you should abandon every humanistic philosophy, every hope in your own ability, and every religion promoted in this world. Religion cannot save you. You cannot save you. Philosophy can't save you. Only Jesus has died for sinners but is raised never ever to die again. He died to purchase people for God with his blood. And he is worthy to receive honor and glory and blessing. And he alone is worthy of your trust. He is holy and you are not good enough for him. But he is good enough to make you acceptable to God if you will trust in him.

III. Christ's Call

In these verses we observe a clear and straightforward call to John and an implicit call to all believers.

A. Christ's call to John in this text is issued two times—once at the outset of the vision and again at its conclusion. That call is a command to write. In verse 11, "Write what you see in a book and

send it to the seven churches." And again in verse 20, "Write the things you have seen." John was to use words to communicate the testimony of Jesus through the visions he had already seen and those that he would see.

The vision of Christ in his holiness and readiness to judge places before John both the privilege and awesome responsibility that it is to communicate to people on behalf of the Lord. It is an honor to speak for God, but at the same time, a high, high level of accountability rests on those who are called and equipped to do so. James soberly warns, "Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness" (James 3:1). If the Lord places us in the role of teaching, we should teach. We should not retreat from his calling, but we must not approach the opportunity lightly. We are accountable for what we say and communicate. Woe will be unto us if we lead Christ's people astray. Paul expressed it to Timothy this way: "I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching . . . always be sober-minded, endure suffering" etc.

Jesus's charge to John to write also underscores to us his intent to communicate with his people by his written word. The Revelation is written for his servants. It is written for his church. It is a message which comes forth as a sword to address unfaithfulness and as a balm to comfort the afflicted in Christ. The whole of the scripture likewise is the treasury of God. It is his word. This is the word teachers are to teach. His word is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path. All scripture is profitable to inform what we believe, to correct our thinking and behavior and to incite our faith and obedience. It is through the word that people are converted. It is through the word that believers are instructed. It is through the word of God's promises that God's people are provided a surer and unshakable hope. Blessed are those whose delight is in the word of the Lord and whose thoughts are filled with it day and night.

B. So there is a straightforward call to John, but there is also an implicit call from Christ to all believers. It is a call to be faithful to the word of God and the testimony of Jesus no matter what the cost. For John, it was faithfulness to the word of God and the testimony of Jesus that had landed him on the cruel and harsh island called Patmos. He was suffering tribulation for being steadfast in teaching and affirming the gospel of Christ. But such is not only the lot of John. If you belong to Jesus, there are three things John identifies as being your lot. One is tribulation. Another is the kingdom, our great privilege to reign with Christ. And yet a third is patient endurance. It is true that belonging to Christ carries with it the reality of reigning with him. However, two of the three aspects here do not appeal to the flesh of man—tribulation and endurance.

These two aspects of following Christ do not make for an enticing gospel tract. How about a tract whose headline is "God loves you and has a difficult plan for your life" or how about this: "Embrace Christ, Embrace Tribulation"? Or "The Demand for Endurance." Not very alluring is it? But it is true. The fact is that following Jesus is not easy but promises you hard knocks from every direction and the need for perseverance. We are called to exhibit the perseverance of Ernest Shackleton who would not give up in his intent to rescue his crew. It mirrors the endurance of Jesus who endured death itself to rescue his crew. Jesus himself said in the Sermon on the Mount that the path of kingdom living is challenging. The gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life. But this is Christ's call for all believers. Jesus paid for your sin debt, but he calls every one who would come after him to take up his cross and follow. Following Christ is not for sluggards. It is not for gliders and drifters. It is for mountain climbers and long distance runners. Following Christ is not for those

who love the world and the comforts and pleasures of the world. It is for those who value the kingdom of heaven and its righteousness so much they are willing to suffer at the hands of the world in order to be faithful to the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. You do not glide into heaven. You fight the good fight to get there. You do battle with the world, the flesh, and the devil. You fight in the power of the Holy Spirit. You fight against threats and against the devil. You fight against sin and the desires of the flesh. You hold on in the midst of tribulation and persecution.

Conclusion

In Christ are all the hopes of heaven. In Christ is the reality of forgiveness of sin and reconciliation with Holy God. In Christ we are joint-heirs and co-regents with the king of kings in an eternity where all tears will be wiped out of our eyes. In Christ, ours is the hope of future and eternal glory and peace with God. In Christ we have the most loving and caring and compassionate Savior there ever could be. But in Christ in this world there will be tribulation. You know there are some theologians and theological systems out there that teach the church will not undergo tribulation. It just is not so. Jesus said back in John 16, "In the world you will have tribulation." And here in Revelation 1, John testifies that in Christ there is tribulation and patient endurance. But these aspects of being in Christ should not daunt our courage or steal our joy. The reason for these challenges is that we live in a fallen and darkened world which despises its own creator. Living in such a place will therefore cost those who do his will. But, as Paul says, "the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us."

Prayer

Benediction

In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom, I charge you brothers and sisters to patiently endure in faithfulness to the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. Keep your eyes on the glory of him who calls you. He will not fail you or abandon you. Amen.

At this time we need to dismiss all who are not members of GCC. But we are asking our members to remain for a members only meeting. I hope all members will remain. We need 5-10 minutes of your time for a serious and very important matter.