

Revelation Class 5

1:9-16

Reviewing last week, we spoke of the chiastic structure of the book of Daniel, which drove us to the conclusion, that its message is The Kingdom or reign of God triumphs over the pagan nations through the faithful witness in suffering. John reminds his readers, that while this is true of Jesus it is also true of His people.

It is important to remember that the Apostles did not think of themselves as bringing new information as much as applying, the authoritative interpretation of Jesus of the Hebrew Bible, what we call the OT to new situations and circumstances, so that God's people would know how to live, believe, and behave. They would reason theologically and then in light of theology prescribe a way or path to follow. John, does that in the book of Revelation.

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1:9 “I John, your brother, who share with you in Jesus the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance, was on the island called Patmos on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.” First, John identifies himself. While there is some dispute, the witness of the early Church is unanimous that John Zebedee, Jesus’ cousin, the youngest of the disciples, is the writer. He writes to the churches on the Asian mainland of Asia Minor, of their common experience...a seemingly mysterious dual reality, that on the surface seems contradictory, and confusing...namely that they are in and experiencing the dual reality of the tribulation AND the Kingdom or Reign of God simultaneously. Much debate centers on whether Revelation is to be understood as primarily speaking of things far removed from the first century or something current in the first century. Clearly, here John asserts that the tribulation and the Kingdom are present realities, and both he and the churches to whom he writes are experiencing both realities as he writes. Further, he writes to commend, and encourage their ‘faithful endurance’ in the face of tribulation, opposition, and persecution, both current and coming. There is some dispute as to why John is on Patmos. Some say, he went there to get the revelation...but, most believe, that he was there by action of Roman officials to silence him and limit his influence as a punishment for his overt stand for and advocacy for Jesus as Lord. John writes, to encourage his readers...that he is not alone on the island...nor are they alone in the midst of these cities and towns in which they live as witnesses for Jesus...in fact Jesus Himself is with them! His hope, even on Patmos, in the hands of and under the control of the Romans, is that he is not under their control but they are under the control of the Lord of history, the eternal God of Holy Scripture, incarnate in Jesus of Nazareth, crucified and risen and reigning as the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. He is not simply before time, and shall be after time but is with him in the midst

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of time...so that neither John nor the believers on the mainland are alone in tribulation but that Jesus shares with them in their suffering and that their suffering and faithful witness is worth whatever it costs. What is needed now, in the face of terror and opposition is perseverance. See Mk 13:13; Mt 10:22; 24:13. What John preaches and prays for others is what he himself was taught by Jesus Himself.

Often Protestants can make the Gospel offer sound as if, One believes right stuff about Jesus, and prays a certain prayer, that one is saved no matter what follows. Texts like these are a good antidote to this incorrect doctrine.

See also 2 Cor 5:9,10.

Is there evidence that there is widespread persecution of Christians going on at this time? Not exactly...we know of sporadic outbreaks of violence and discrimination, usually through mob action but there was also widespread suspicion of the loyalty of Christians...not unlike many feel today toward Muslims in our society. Within 2 decades of the writing of the book of Revelation, we do have a letter from the then Governor Pliny of that part of the Empire referring to his treatment of Christians under his authority and jurisdiction. He spoke of killing a few of them...to make examples of them and to create fear among the rest of the group. We know from 2:13 that at least one man was killed for following Christ. There was strong pressure to conform on Christians, economic, political and social.

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Vv.10, 11 “I was in the Spirit on the Lord’s day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet saying, ‘Write what you see in a book and send it to the seven churches...’ John here identifies with the prophets of the OT and identifies his message with theirs, see Eze 2:2; ; 3:12, 14, 24; 11:1; 43:5...as well as Jer 23:18, 21,22. Further, John identifies his message as a message from Yahweh by alluding to Ex 19:16; 19-20. This experience sometimes referred to a ‘prophetic rapture’ the Apostle Paul also alludes to in 2 Cor 12:2ff. In these passages relating the common experiences of the prophets of Yahweh is the experience of ‘being in the realm of the Spirit. See also Ps 89 and Ps 115:3.

Again by way of reminder, notice on the map the circuit formed by the churches starting with Ephesus and following the list.

Vv.1:12 ff “The I turned to see the voice that was speaking to me, and on turning I saw seven golden lampstands, and in the midst of the lampstands one like a son of man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden girdle round his breast; his head and his hair were white like white wool, white as snow; his eyes were like a flame of fire, and his feet like burnished bronze, refined a in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of many waters; and in his hand he held seven stars, from his mouth issued a sharp two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining in full strength.” This vision, I have no doubt is what John saw...but he saw what others had seen and described in similar ways. See Eze 1 and Dan 7, Dan 10:6 and 8:18. What we ‘see’ is that John is taking us into the Trinity by showing us that Jesus is who God is. Jesus is clothed with divine glory, he bears divine attributes.

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Eze 1 we see the glory of God and a manlike figure on the throne. We see 7 stars- a symbol of divine sovereignty, cosmic sovereignty. There were understood to be seven major 'stars' or planets...now these stars are said to signify the seven churches...this is yet another place where reality in Heaven is mirrored on Earth. Not unlike the camping arrangement of Israel's tribes in their journey to the Promised Land in Num 2.

For general background of this Heavenly scene we have Ex 25 and 37 and Num 8, but more directly Zech 4:2,10 for the lampstands. Zech 4:6 for the seven Spirits. The lampstand in Zech vision stood as a symbol for the whole tabernacle or temple. So here the lampstands stand for the seven churches and like the lampstand represents God's presence. Zech uses the presence of God as motivation to finish the reconstruction of the Temple after the exile, so now John uses the presence of God to encourage faithfulness against the pressure of the world, accomplished by the power of God's Spirit.

"See the voice" recalls Ex 20:18 where all the people 'saw' the voice, and the voice of the trumpet recalls Eze 3:12-13; 43:5-6; Dan 7:11.

The appearance and attributes of the 'son of man' come from Dan 7:10ff. The clothing may be either royal or priestly but here they are both not either but he stands in the sanctuary of the Heavenly Temple. The appearance of the Son Man's face and hair are drawn directly from Dan 7 and depict Him as the Judge at the Last Day, bearing full divine authority and power. Daniel 10 was intended to put Israel's enemies on notice that judgment was coming to them one day and Israel was to be encouraged that God knew their suffering and would bring justice to bear one day. His face appearing as the sun at full strength is drawn from Jud 5:31 and the Son of Man in Dan 10. All of these references are looking at Judgment/Deliverance or Rescue events.