

Foreword, Part II- The Glorious High Priest Amidst the Lampstands

Call to Worship: Daniel 7:9-10

Hymn #129- *Fairest Lord Jesus*

1st Scripture: Daniel 10:1-9

Hymn #131- *When Morning Gilds the Skies*

2nd Scripture: Revelation 1:9-20

Hymn #226- *Rejoice, the Lord is King!*

Introduction:

Having worked through a significant portion of chapter one of Revelation; the introductory chapter of the Book, I would hope that by now, we have gotten a strong and sobering sense of the great emphasis God has placed on calling us to read the Book, to read it carefully, to read it humbly, and to read it obediently, all with the constant reminder of what lengths God has gone to ensure that we recognize the urgency of its message. He has placed His seal of authenticity on this Book in several, unique and emphatic ways.

We have been told of the blessing that comes upon those who hear and obey the content of the Revelation. We have been given the sobering reminder of Christ's upcoming return, when every eye will see Him, and when all who are found sleeping, and all who know Him not, will weep bitterly and mourn because of their irrevocable judgment. We have heard glorious descriptions of both God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, self-declaring their Almighty, sovereign, eternal power, as a reminder of the absolute certainty of both God's ability and decreed will to bring about all that He sets forth in this Book. "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End; the First and the Last; the One who is and who was and who is to come...the Almighty!"

Everything in the introduction of this Book, shouts aloud, "Listen, like you have never listened before. Pay close attention; give heed to all I say and do exactly what I tell you...for I am the everlasting and eternal God!" It reminds us of God's dealings with the Israelites in the wilderness when He had given them His laws; when on numerous occasions, He would surround His commands with, "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt!" He would repeat this phrase over and over so that they would continually bring to mind all that God

had powerfully done in the destruction of the Egyptians and in the deliverance of the Israelites from out of the Egyptian bondage, leading them to carefully give heed to His commands.

Well here, He prefaces the content of this Revelation with the reminder that He is the only All sovereign, eternal power, who has started and will finish everything that He has predetermined to accomplish in this world and its history. And brethren, this type of language is meant to lead us; even us naturally deaf and hardened, stiff necked sinners, to say, “God has put such a great emphasis on His greatness at the beginning of this letter, not because it is too difficult to realize this even by natural deduction (it ought to be very obvious), but namely, because we are easily deceived and taken away by so many far less important things.” Because of our sin nature, we easily lose sight of the reality of God and His greatness. We need to be reminded of the infinite characteristics of God, because small things often draw our attention away from *His* relevance. We are too easily satisfied and too easily swept away by things that are of very little or no importance at all (distractions and tools of the enemy used to drive us away from Christ’s purposes, which are even revealed right here in this very Book).

Rest assured, God does not have to make these kinds of statements in the presence of His holy angels. It is all too clear to them. There is no sin to cloud their judgment. *We* need these reminders (constantly). And they must, and ought to drive us to see the need to consciously, continuously, daily ponder these realities. We have to take great pains to fight and lay hold of them, so that we will progress in our faith and do all that God calls us to do for His glory. In other words, brethren, if we simply sit back and assume that we will give ear and obedience to God’s voice; if we think that any progress in our faith and any application of all that we go over in this Book (or any other Book of Scripture for that matter) will simply come to us because we have had some emotional experience or because we have simply *heard* the truth; if we think we can truly benefit from God’s Word in any sense, without engaging in the difficult battle of putting to death the deeds of our flesh and walking in the Spirit, then we are grossly deceived and may as well spend Sundays floating around at Michael Jackson’s *Never Land* ranch. Brethren, we must behold God and His glory if we are going to grow and change and apply biblical truth! And we must behold God’s glory, especially in the face of Jesus Christ, if we are going to soar to the end and not coast to destruction. And this “beholding” takes effort; it takes work and labor; it is a battle to behold Christ, and only those who are willing to put on the

Gospel armor; and only those who are willing to draw up the sword and to run out onto the battle field, will find themselves victoriously overcoming, no matter what we must and will face in the times ahead. But I fear that some or maybe even several of you (and I am speaking to members of this church as well, when I say this)...I fear that some or maybe even several of you are not ready. There is little or no oil in your lamp, and when the Bride Groom returns, you just might be caught off guard and found wanting. You cannot casually coast into heaven.

Last week, we saw how John was commissioned unto the task of writing down the visions he was about to receive, so that they might be given to the seven churches in Asia, and ultimately handed off to the churches of all ages. He was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day, when He was overcome by the voice of God (the "Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last"); as of the sound of a loud trumpet, and when he turned, He saw *not* the Father, but the Lord Jesus Christ, revealed in such a way, that His true and divine characteristics burst forth with great power and glory. And this visual display of the glory of Christ and His divine attributes, is a final seal; a *visual* seal, meant to be added to the already powerful *Audible seals*, that have been given as a means of calling His audience unto the careful attention of all that is to be said concerning the visions that follow. The churches are about to be addressed in very specific ways about their strong points and their compromises, in the very next chapter (a chapter that is emphatically relevant to understanding the whole of this Book), and the calls to repent or endure come with great weight because they come from the very Christ who is described in the glorious and powerful ways revealed in our text. In fact, in the upcoming weeks, when we work through the letters to the individual churches in Asia (letters very relevant for the churches of all times, and for our church here in Merrick), you will see that various portions of this Christological vision are given at the beginning of each letter as a reminder of *Who* it is that is assessing their spiritual condition and calling them unto repentance and/or endurance.

And so, brethren, this morning then, we will spend the remainder of our time considering this glorious vision of Christ, which John beheld, and which ultimately led him to fall (as if dead) at the feet of the One, upon whose breast he once comfortably laid his head, while celebrating the Passover just prior to our Lord's crucifixion.

[Read verses 12-20 again].

I. The Glorious High Priest Amidst the Lampstands

It is significant to note that the first thing John sees when he turns to locate the source of the voice that has just spoken to him, are these seven lampstands. And then, we are told that in the midst of these lampstands stood this glorious vision of Christ, the One who “lives and was dead” and is alive forevermore (vs. 18).

In this particular vision, two of the key elements are actually defined for us, eliminating any debate as to the reality behind the symbols. In verse 20, we are told, “The mystery of the seven stars which you saw in My right hand, and the seven golden lampstands: The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands which you saw are the seven churches.” And so, the first thing John sees, are these seven lampstands, which are meant to represent the seven churches in Asia, ultimately pointing to all the churches of all times, indicated both by the number “seven” and by all that we will come to understand this morning, as we work through this visual display of the glory of Christ.

Why are “lampstands” in particular meant to symbolize the churches? To answer this question, which happens to be very relevant to the overall message of this vision, a few other facts must be brought into the equation. First, you will notice in verse 13, something significant about the description given regarding the clothing that Christ is here wearing. “And in the midst of the seven lampstands [stood] One like the Son of Man, clothed with a garment down to the feet and girded about the chest with a golden band.” As we consider the fact that Christ is wearing this lengthy garment with a golden sash running across it (probably from shoulder to waist), and the fact that He is standing in the midst of these seven lampstands, clearly, you are meant to reflect upon the Old Covenant priesthood and the tabernacle/temple.

Christ is meant to symbolize a priest here; an exalted High Priest to be sure, but indeed a priest. This would of course work very well with the clear teachings of Scripture, which tell us that, as our High Priest in God’s heavenly tabernacle, He ever lives to make intercession for us (Heb. 7:25). But consider the importance of this with respect to the churches. Christ’s churches are representative of the lampstand, which stood in the Old Covenant tabernacle. Why is this significant? Well, simply put, without the lampstand, one could not see anything inside of the tabernacle. The lampstand was what lit up the temple, shedding light on the Holy Place and the

Most Holy Place (or the “Holy of Holies.”). It was for this reason that the lampstand was to remain continually lit at all times. And the priest’s job was to ensure that the lamps were continually supplied with oil, and that the wicks were continually trimmed when necessary, so that the light would remain burning and unhindered.

And brethren, herein lays the significance of the church, which will begin to unlock the key to this first vision for us, preparing us to move into the Revelation. The true churches; the local true churches are called to reveal and expose the glorious presence of God to the world. Now this is not to make us important in and of ourselves, but rather, God has determined, according to His own good pleasure, to use His churches as the means of upholding and revealing His divine truth in the context of a dark, fallen and lost world, that knows not its Creator. This is why the Apostle Paul commits no act of blasphemy when he labels the church (much to the chagrin of Harold Camping), the “church of the Living God, the pillar and ground/support of the truth” (1 Timothy 3:15). As a body, we are a lampstand, as it were, within the very heavenly tabernacle of God, called (by our love, by our actions, by our obedience, by our deeds) to reveal the One who dwells above the mercy seat in the Most Holy Place.

And furthermore, Christ is the High Priest who stands among His churches, caring for them, supplying them the oil of His Spirit and grace, without which, no fuel exists for the light to burn. And He trims the wicks when the flame begins to flicker. He exhorts, convicts, rebukes, encourages and guides His churches through His Word. But the significance of this whole vision begins to take shape when we understand the reality that is conveyed here, namely, that Christ is ever among us, ever watching us, ever caring for us, ever trimming and oiling us, even though we don’t see Him. He is present, brethren. And I think we lose sight of this far too often...all of us. How we gather together to worship; our attitudes, our mindset, our timeliness...the quality and quantity of our worship...all of these things are barometers that help indicate the reality of our faith in the ever present Christ, who stands right here among us, every time we gather together. We are designed in such a way that we would cast forth the light that would reveal the glory of our infinite, eternal, gracious, righteous, holy and wrathful God.

And what happens, when we fail to bring forth that light? What happens when we lose sight of the very purpose for our existence, as a redeemed body of believers belonging to Christ? What happens when our light is smothered by the cares, worries and material things of this

world? Well, we are warned. God is indeed patient, as the upcoming letters indicate. But if we persist in the direction of worldliness or compromise or idolatry; if we fail to repent when we are called to repent, and to endure when we are called to endure, our lampstand itself is threatened, which is why Christ states to the Church at Ephesus, “Remember your first love, repent, and do the things you did at first or I will take away your lampstand.” That is to say, He would remove them from His heavenly sanctuary. He would cast them out as useless, worthless, tasteless salt that will never again serve the most privileged purpose of revealing the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ to the world. They would be a church only in name, a building full of deceived people, lacking the power of the Spirit to do anything beneficial for the Kingdom of God.

It is within this critical framework, that the remainder of this vision, containing the glorious descriptions of Christ’s divine character, emerges with great power and impact. For the One who stands among us, is indeed a merciful High Priest, but He is also One to be revered for the following reasons:

1) He is here depicted as having hair that is “white like wool, as white as snow” (vs. 14a). In Daniel chapter 7, God is referred to as the “Ancient of Days,” wearing a garment that was “white as snow,” and having hair “like pure wool” (Dan. 7:9).

When the Lord Jesus is given this description, sharing the same divine essence as the Father, we are meant to take note of His eternal wisdom. We are to consider that this One who stands among His churches, is all-wise. He is “omniscient,” having a perfect understanding of all things at all times. With age, generally comes wisdom. Well, our Lord is eternal, and His wisdom is eternally pure without any fault or error. His wisdom is boundless and without limit. He understands and He knows everything. With respect to His divine nature, He doesn’t learn; He is the source of all learning. Such a characteristic is both a blessing to the faithful, and a stern warning to the unfaithful and the compromising.

2) He is further depicted as having “eyes like a flaming fire” (vs. 14b).

And when the Lord Jesus is given this description, we are to recognize Him as the “searcher of hearts.” He is the all-seeing one. Nothing gets by Him. He sees, knows and understands all that is happening within and without the church. His eyes penetrate the hearts of all people, so that all that is hidden to the world is clearly known to Him. Again, this is a

blessing to the faithful, knowing that all things; no matter what appears at the surface in all of history, all things are made bear before our Lord. He sees it all, and He will deal with every silent deed in its proper time. And for the unfaithful, it presents them with the stern warning of recognizing that though they might coast under the radar of everyone else's vision in this world, their hearts and motives and intentions are clearly exposed before the One whose eyes are as a penetrating fire.

3) And then, our Lord is depicted as having feet "like fine brass, as if refined in a furnace" (vs. 15a).

Both this and the previous description are found in Daniel 10, there describing the unique angelic being who approached Daniel, while bearing the divine glory. And when our Lord is given this description, we are meant to consider His absolute power and universal sovereignty. He is all wise (omniscient), all seeing and all present (omnipresent) and all powerful (omnipotent). All of His enemies will be crushed under His feet, and in His wrath, He will tread them down in the winepress of His judgment. His feet are described as *fine* brass, as if refined in a furnace. His justice is pure and righteous and holy. When He tramples His enemies underfoot, He will do so as a means of satisfying the righteous justice of God. In other words, the description here given is meant to remind us not of a tyrannical power, but of a just and righteous power. He is glorified in the judgment of the wicked, not because He takes pleasure in the death of the wicked, but simply because He is glorified in vindicating His own righteous justice. Again, this is an encouragement for the faithful, to know that Christ Himself will bring vengeance upon their persecutors. And it is a warning to the unfaithful to know that if they remain on that course, they will be subject to such divine wrath and justice.

4) Fourthly, our Lord is depicted as having a voice that is, "as the sound of many waters" (vs. 15b).

Again, when John had first heard the voice that had compelled him to turn his head to see where it had come from, he described it "as of a trumpet," and here it is described "as the sound of many waters." Clearly, the loud and powerful, earth shaking voice of our Lord is again a testimony to His divine authority. It is the comforting voice of a reigning champion to His people; of a mighty ruler who is jealous for the welfare of His own, but it is a terrible,

frightening voice to His enemies; the voice of a mighty conqueror, whom they have ignored or ridiculed the whole of their lives but now must hear, to their own destruction.

5) We are told that “He had in His right hand seven stars...” (vs. 16a).

In Scripture, the right hand is that hand which represents power, sovereignty and absolute control. You can recall those texts that speak of the “right hand of God” as a description of His power. Here, our Lord is depicted as the One who has absolute power over these seven stars. They serve in the very palm of His hand.

And in verse 20, we have already seen that these seven stars are the “angels/messengers of the seven churches.” Now, there is debate as to whether these “messengers” might be seven literal representative angels or the leadership/elders of each church or some other representatives of these churches. Whatever the case might be, clearly they are meant to represent those who represent these seven churches in some significant way. To be sure, each of the seven letters is written to one of these messengers, and yet, clearly the content of the letters is meant to address each of the churches as a whole. So, however we define these messengers, the message here conveyed doesn’t change. It is Christ who stands among His churches as the High Priest, and it is Christ who holds them in His hand, and has all power and ability to do with them as He pleases, according to how He ought to respond as He looks upon them with His fiery eyes, discerning the very heart and root of the life, motivation, usefulness and worship of each church.

And it is here brethren that we begin to see more and more that this vision of Christ is meant to lead His churches to examine themselves first and foremost, knowing that all that we do; recognizing that the quality of our labor is all lived out in the very hand of Christ. Remember, Revelation is about exposing what is unseen but true, in the light of what is seen (and “seems to be”). We might feel a certain way; we may not feel threatened, we may feel comfortable, life may seem so right and good, but we have to bring all of this into the context of God’s Word (and into the context of this Revelation) as a means of seeing what God sees, so that we can have a pretty good idea of where we stand in the sight of this sovereign High Priest and Ruler. Again, encouraging words for the faithful and the persevering, but words of warning to the compromiser, to the backslider and to the idolater.

6) We are then told that “out of His mouth went a sharp two-edged sword...” (vs. 16b).

Here we are meant to consider the power of Christ's Word, not so much in its converting power (in this context), but in its power to judge and condemn His enemies. God's power is not in His physical physique...for He is a Spirit and not a man. God's power is revealed in and by His Words. He speaks and worlds are created. He speaks and dry bones are given life. He speaks and a sword comes forth and brings down judgment upon His enemies. What He speaks is sure and absolute; it will and must take place because His voice is an expression of His divine power. All throughout Scripture we see this, as God speaks through His prophets. He speaks of blessings to come, and blessings come down upon His people, like manna from heaven. He speaks of judgment to come, and judgment comes in the form of opposing nations or earthquakes or roaring waters...etc. The enemies of our Lord felt a quick jolt of this reality when Judas had betrayed Him on the Mount of Olives. They came with their swords and their weapons and their shields, searching for Jesus, so that they might arrest Him. And He steps forward and says, "I am He." And when He spoke those words, the whole lot of them "drew back and fell to the ground" (John 18:6). The same divine voice that raised Lazarus up from the dead by His words, leveled the entire military detachment with His words.

7) And then lastly, we are told that "His countenance was like the sun shining in its strength" (vs. 16c).

You attempt to look directly at the sun at high noon, on a clear and cloudless day and you quickly close your eyes because the light is so bright that it burns and your eyes cannot handle it. Here, the countenance of our Lord is described in this way. And clearly, we are meant to behold His infinite holiness and His righteousness, as One who, though He died in the place of sinners, bears the very holiness of God Himself. He radiates forth the utmost purity because He radiates what He is at the very core of His being...pure, undefiled, holiness. He stands out as unique; far above and beyond even the holy angels (who resemble His holiness in their own being). This Christ is "one hundred percent," authentic, God. And in His holiness, He radiates and emits a clear message, stating that while we are made righteous by His shed blood, we must never take His blood for granted. His humanity and His sacrifice do nothing whatsoever to change His purity and His being. And so, the churches ought to take careful notice of His holiness, all the while that they benefit from His mercy.

Bringing it all together

Lord willing, we will pick up at verse 17 next week, but brethren, let's bring this all together for a few moments; let's lay hold of this vision of the glorious Christ and deposit it into two purposeful categories of meaning. When we contemplate this awesome revelation, two things ought to come to mind with respect to its purpose:

1) Again, as already stated in the introduction of this sermon, this vision is now the last opening seal of authenticity that is meant to compel the readers to hear and obey the Revelation. Here, we are given a visual display of the glory of Christ, which is meant to accompany all that was just said audibly. In fact, you can put it this way. This is a visual display of the vocal statements, which describe God as, "The Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End, the First and the Last, the One Who is and Who was and Who is to Come...the Almighty." You hear those words, and you might say, "I am better at receiving information when it is in the form of pictures." Well, here our God gives both so that we are without excuse. We have the audible display of the glory of God and of Christ, and we have the visible display of that audible declaration. What does it mean to be the "Almighty God?" Here's a picture. He knows all; He sees all; He is ever present; He is all-sovereign...etc. Everything has moved and always will move in the direction of fulfilling all His holy purposes and will.

2) We must understand that this glorious display of Christ is given as a warning first and foremost to the churches. He is addressing the churches of Asia here; and by them, all of His churches. They are the ones who are warned, and who must understand, that as they live life in the church, He is watching; He is all knowing; He is all-powerful and He is all-holy! And so, in keeping with the upcoming letters, the message of "Beware of complacency and compromise and idolatry in the church" is the message that comes forth in this vision. This is the Christ who will return, not with respect to His physical appearance, but with respect to His inward reality!

And John falls down at the feet of Christ when He views Him in this way...but the good news is that those who are faithful; those who are striving; those who remain steadfast and those who persevere and endure, have no need to be terrified of this vision...because this same Christ presents Himself in another way to His beloved people. And we will ponder this as we pick up in verse 17ff next week, Lord willing. AMEN!!! Benediction: Jude 1:24&25