

The Glorious Appearance of Christ in Revelation

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INTRODUCTION

Jesus Christ is revealed in glory in Revelation chapter one. This revelation has tremendous meaning for Christians in history, today, and tomorrow. The risen Savior appears in bright, dazzling, awesome and unspeakable power and glory! Saint John immediately falls before Him, his body like a corpse. Jesus reaches out and touches John with compassion, speaking the gentle yet powerful words He has often spoken before: "Do not fear". The apostle is commissioned to write down The Revelation. Christ the Lord wants it to be known. God is once again not silent. In power He reaches down with a gentle touch to communicate.

These are the verses that record His glorious appearance to John, Revelation 1:10-20,

(10) I was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day and heard behind me a great sound like a trumpet, (11) saying: "What you see, write in a book and send it to the seven churches, in Ephesus and in Smyrna and in Pergamum and in Thyatira and in Sardis and in Philadelphia and in Laodicea." (12) And I turned around to see the voice which had spoke with me, and turning around I saw seven golden lampstands (13) and in the middle of the lampstands One like a Son of Man, dressed in a long robe and having wrapped around the breasts a belt of gold. (14) But His head and hair were white as wool, like snow; and His eyes were as a flame of fire; (15) His feet were like bronze, as bronze having been burned in a furnace; and His voice was as many waters; (16) and He had in His right hand seven stars; and from His mouth a sharp, double edged sword came out; and His countenance was as the sun shining in its strength. (17) And when I saw Him, I fell before His feet like a corpse; and He placed His right hand on me, saying: "Do not fear! I am the First and the Last (18) and the Living One, and I became dead and behold I am living forever and ever; and I have the keys of death and hades. (19) Therefore, write what you see and what is and what is about to happen after these things. (20) The mystery of the seven stars you saw in My right hand and the seven golden lampstands is this: the seven stars are angels of the seven churches and the seven lampstands are the seven churches."

Following verse 20, in chapters two and three Christ continues to talk to John, giving him the content of the message to the seven churches.

Various aspects of Christ's appearance from the above verses are repeated throughout chapters two and three. This study will focus on the above verses, Revelation 1:10-20.

This was not a dream: "God has given revelations by means of dreams, but neither Peter in Acts 10:10 nor John on this Sunday slept and dreamed. Their spirit was wide awake, its powers were exercised

with exalted clarity. This state is never self-induced and is not dependent on some preparation to bring it on."¹ John actually saw Jesus Christ, the One who is the very center of **Christianity**. Jesus physically touches John and talks directly to him. Following this initial appearance of Christ, angels talk directly to John and interact with him on a personal level. John sees Jesus as the Lamb (chapters 5-8,14, and 21-22), the woman's Son (chapter 12), and the Rider on a white horse (chapter 19). That makes this appearance of Christ very important. Nowhere else do we see Christ interacting with a human while appearing with such detailed description of His risen brilliance, glory and power. What does it mean?

Jesus appears to John in this way to commission him to write down The Revelation which is being shown to him. The things John wrote down are now the book of Revelation in the Bible. So Christ's appearance is the inauguration of Revelation. Secondly, Jesus appears to John in glory to give John, the churches of Asia, and all Christians power in the midst of the suffering involved in our mission. This second purpose of His appearance is also a major theme of the whole book of Revelation. A revelation giving power in the midst of suffering is an aim of Christ's appearance, and is, in turn, an aim of the whole of Revelation.

¹R. C. H. Lenski, The Interpretation of St. John's Revelation (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1963), 58.

John was the one who saw Christ, but "The vision was for the whole Church. John was given it in order to transmit it to others."²

It was not only for the churches of John's day, but "intended for the churches of all the ages."³ It is just as personally, particularly and powerfully for the Church of every age and every location, for every individual church as well as for every individual Christian.

By the power of the Holy Spirit, each one is to hear, read or remember this with a dynamic vitality and reality akin to John's original vision.

As one studies, meditates, bows in prayer, worships or simply suffers, the Holy Spirit is able to bring this vision of Christ's appearance to one's spirit in such a way as to powerfully bestow life, vitality, glory and endurance to the suffering soul. Christ Jesus is the powerful One who has gone before us through suffering to glory ("despising the shame"), and He is there for us!

Therefore, the glorious appearance of Christ to John will be explored in this paper as the "Inauguration of The Revelation" and as "Empowerment for the Mission". The witnessing mission of the Church, of all Christians, is the place of delivery and application for this empowering experience of Christ. Thus, "The Witness Mission" will be explained first.

²John R. W. Stott, What Christ Thinks of The Church (London: Lutterworth Press, 1958), 17.

³Lenski, 62.

I. THE WITNESS MISSION

The Great Commission says, "Go and make disciples of all nations . . ." ⁴ In the same vein Jesus also said, "You will be my witnesses . . . to the ends of the earth." ⁵ The Greek word, *martyres* ('witnesses'), came to be especially associated with dying for Christ as a witness to Him. One recalls that Jesus said, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me." ⁶ and, "Then they will hand you over to those who will make you suffer, and they will kill you, and all nations will hate you on account of My Name." ⁷ He said, "Remember the word which I spoke to you: 'A slave is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you." ⁸ Therefore, in warm and fervent response to the Gospel, Christians go forward as witnesses to Christ with the awareness that suffering will follow. The mission is to be a witness to Jesus, and suffering is part of that witness mission. Without the supernatural power of Christ, not one would be able to bear the suffering.

John and the seven churches were in the midst of this suffering: "I, John, your fellow Christian and one who shares with you in suffering and ruling and patiently enduring in Jesus, was exiled on the island called Patmos for speaking God's word and the testimony of Jesus . . ." ⁹ John understood and shared firsthand in this suffering:

The Christian society in the Roman province of Asia at that time was hard pressed. It is probable that the Revelation reflects the situation during the reign of the Emperor Domitian, who carried to its second stage the persecution of Christians begun twenty-five years previously by Nero. Nero's persecutions had been sporadic; Domitian's seem to have been more systematic. The effects of Nero's antagonism were felt in Rome only. While under Domitian, who was hungry for divine honours, the persecution spread to Asia. Christians who worshipped the Lord Christ were being invited to worship the Lord Caesar. The battle was joined. The hearts of Christians were filled with alarm. Already some of their number were receiving personal insults. Others were being boycotted in business. One or two had even lost their lives. Could the Church survive the storm which seemed to be on the point of breaking? ¹⁰

⁴Matt. 28:19 NET.

⁵Acts 1:8 NIV.

⁶Matt. 16:24 NIV.

⁷Matt. 24:9 NET.

⁸John 15:20 NET.

⁹Rev. 1:9 NET.

¹⁰Stott, 13.

Their suffering included "a variety of pressures ranging from ridicule, slander, social ostracism, and harassment, to poverty, violence, imprisonment, and possible martyrdom."¹¹ They needed a glorious appearance of Christ to empower them with endurance in their witness mission: "A church with its back to the wall, fighting for survival, needs more than moral exhortation and pious entreaty; it must see Christ. A history of the world in cipher (which some Christians believe the Revelation to be) is cold comfort in comparison with a vision of the exalted Christ."¹² Along with persecution, false doctrine and the love of wealth were challenging the Church.

It must have been very difficult for some of the Christians since they shared in the earthly wealth of the Roman province of Asia to some degree, "But John sees that the nature of Roman power is such that, if Christians are faithful witnesses to God, then they must suffer the inevitable clash between Rome's divine pretensions and their witness to the true God."¹³ Bauckham writes:

Revelation itself allows no neutral perception: either one shares Rome's own ideology, the view of the Empire promoted by Roman propaganda, or one sees it from the perspective of heaven, which unmasks the pretensions of Rome. Revelation portrays the Roman Empire as a system of violent oppression, founded on conquest, maintained by violence and oppression. It is a system both of political tyranny and of economic exploitation.¹⁴

Rome had absolutized her own power and prosperity, and "Those who bear witness to the one true God, the only absolute, to whom all political power is subject, expose Rome's idolatrous self-deification for what it is. . . . it was the Christian vision of the incomparable God, exalted above all worldly power, which relativized Roman power and exposed Rome's pretensions to divinity as a dangerous delusion."¹⁵

One of the ways in which Rome had absolutized its power and prosperity was by "claiming the religious loyalty due only to the ultimate power of God."¹⁶ Whenever something besides God is absolutized, a faithful Christian witness will expose the idolatry and suffering will follow.

Rome was the immediate source of persecution for John and the seven churches, but throughout history many other sources have persecuted Christians in the spirit of Rome's idolatry. Rome, like ancient Babylon, was an entity in itself that stood contrary to God

¹¹Gerhard A. Krodel, Augsburg Commentary on the New Testament: Revelation (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1989), 92.

¹²Stott, 15.

¹³Richard Bauckham, New Testament Theology (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 38.

¹⁴Ibid., 35.

¹⁵Ibid., 39.

¹⁶Ibid., 37.

and His people in its idolatry; like Babylon, Rome is also a representation and designation for all other entities that stand against God and His people in idolatry. "Thou shalt have no other gods before Me."¹⁷

To the degree that any person or entity breaks this first and most important commandment, they stand as an enemy against God and His people. They become an instrument of Satan in his attempt to inflict suffering upon God's people. When anyone or anything is thought or declared to be an absolute equal to or above God, the sin is in place and persecution of God's people is inevitable. This was Satan's original sin:

How you are fallen from heaven,
 O Lucifer, son of the morning!
 How you are cut down to the ground,
 You who weakened the nations!
 For you have said in your heart:
 "I will ascend into heaven,
 I will exalt my throne above the stars of God;
 I will also sit on the mount of the congregation
 On the farthest sides of the north;
 I will ascend above the heights of the clouds,
 I will be like the Most High."
 Yet you shall be brought down to Sheol,
 To the lowest depths of the Pit.
 Those who see you will gaze at you,
 And consider you, saying:
 "Is this the man who made the earth tremble,
 Who shook kingdoms,
 Who made the world as a wilderness
 And destroyed its cities,
 Who did not open the house of his prisoners?"¹⁸

One thinks of the many martyrs throughout history. Hebrews chapter eleven speaks of the Old Testament martyrs, some who were tortured, mocked, scourged, chained, imprisoned, stoned, sawn in two, tempted, killed with the sword, afflicted, tormented, destitute, wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, roamed in deserts and mountains, and lived in dens and caves of the earth. These were the ones "of whom the world was not worthy."¹⁹ John the Baptist suffered like these and was beheaded for his witness. Then, Jesus' suffering stands at the apex. In Rev. 1:5 calls Jesus "the faithful witness". So, "He is the faithful witness. Is the Church called to bear witness in the world? Let it follow the example of its Lord."²⁰ Stephen then begins the trail of the great cloud of witnesses that have suffered in the midst of and because of the witness mission following Christ.

¹⁷Ex. 20:3 KJV.

¹⁸Is. 14:12-17 NKJV.

¹⁹Heb. 11:38 NKJV.

²⁰Stott, 15.

As recorded in Acts chapter seven, Stephen was stoned because of his witness. Throughout the book of Acts suffering is inflicted upon the faithful in many ways. Fox's Book of Martyrs records that all of the disciples, except John, were persecuted to death for their witness:

Philip was scourged and crucified.
 Matthew was slain with a halberd.
 James was stoned and clubbed at the age of ninety-four.
 Matthias was stoned and beheaded.
 Andrew was crucified on a cross with its two ends fixed transversely in the ground.
 Mark was dragged to pieces.
 Peter was crucified upside down.
 Jude was crucified.
 Bartholomew was cruelly beaten and crucified.
 Thomas was speared.
 Simon Zelotes was crucified.²¹

Paul is said to have been killed in Nero's first persecution for his witness. Many others followed, including Christians in the seven churches.

From the time of these first Christian martyrs, Christians have been suffering in various ways in every generation. In the twentieth century one thinks of rulers like Hitler, Stalin and Mao who have absolutized their power and inflicted suffering and death upon millions.

Many others besides Christians have suffered throughout human history, but Bauckham makes the point that Christians stand in solidarity with all the victims of history in a special way.²² Through the generations Christians have suffered, born the cross, in many ways. They have even suffered for Christ in times when good government prevailed and outward persecution was not evident. Sometimes people and things can be absolutized in the most subtle ways. Individual judgement and relativity is absolutized. The movements against injustice can be absolutized.²³ The ways in which Christians have suffered in big and small ways are countless. The appearance of Christ in Revelation chapter one is to empower every Christian in their witness mission.

It is to empower every church, in every place, in every time. It is to empower now, just as particularly as it empowered John and the seven churches.

In the witness mission "Christ's churches are meant to be light-bearers in the darkness of the world."²⁴ This light is the Gospel of Jesus Christ which reveals that He is Lord of all and the only Savior. It is gloriously good news and means unimaginable good to

²¹John Fox, Fox's Book of Martyrs, ed. William B. Forbush (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1967), 2-5.

²²Bauckham, 161.

²³Ibid., 160.

²⁴Stott, 18.

all who believe. As that light is born, that witness given, suffering follows. Every person or entity who claims equality or superiority over God is like Rome, an instrument of Satan to inflict suffering upon God's people, the Church. But through the empowerment of the appearance of the brilliant and powerful Christ, power to witness and endure with joy is given to Christians of all generations. They are assured "that the church's ultimate destiny is tied to Christ rather than to Rome, whose triumph is temporary."²⁵

Empowerment for the witness mission is a major purpose of Christ's appearance to John in Revelation. Another important purpose is the inauguration of The Revelation from God, revealed to John. Given this initial authority by Christ Himself in His glorious brilliance, John recorded the things he saw and heard in what is now the final book of the Bible.

²⁵Robert W. Wall, New International Biblical Commentary: Revelation (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 1991), 62.

II. INAUGURATION OF THE REVELATION

The King, Emperor, President, Commander, Mayor, or other supreme leader will often be the one to start an important undertaking, then the details are delegated to responsible subordinates. An important person or project is commissioned or inaugurated by a personal appearance of the supreme leader, then the following supervision is most often delegated to a trusted representative. This is what happened with Jesus, John and The Revelation: "The original command, we see, comes from the lips of Jesus Himself.", then God worked by "the employment of angel after angel in the visions in which an angel could serve the Lord's purpose in revealing this and that to John."²⁶

Bauckham notes that Revelation "1:9-10 begins John's inaugural vision of the risen Christ who gives the seven messages to the churches (2-3)."²⁷ Talbert writes, "John witnesses an awesome christophany.

From it comes his commission."²⁸ Another author relates to the value of humbleness at the time of commissioning as he refers to the fact that John fell down like a corpse when he experienced the brilliance of Christ: "He felt like he was dead. Only then was he ready for ordination, only then ready to receive the Word which he in turn was to preach."²⁹

This inauguration and commissioning was important for John and also for the seven churches who were to receive the message. Paul had written very sternly that "even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed."³⁰ Therefore, the appearance of Christ showed that this new revelation was from God Himself, and is not a different gospel. Some would certainly have the tendency to reject the book of Revelation since it has such amazing imagery and symbolism. In fact, from the beginning, various people including Luther and others have felt like the book of Revelation is alien to their spirit. Luther came to be reconciled to Revelation, but many Lutherans refer more to his doubts about the book. Consequently, many people are hesitant about embracing Revelation. This hesitant feeling is similar to the feeling toward accepting Paul as an apostle after he had been persecuting the people who believed in Christ. Christ personally appeared to Paul on the road to Damascus to confer authority upon him to be an apostle. God knows how people think, so Christ appears to John to

²⁶Lenski, 60.

²⁷Richard Bauckham, The Climax of Prophecy: Studies on the Book of Revelation (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1993), 3.

²⁸Charles H. Talbert, The Apocalypse (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994), 16.

²⁹Richard L. Jeske, Revelation for Today (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), 38.

³⁰Gal. 1:9 NKJV.

"confer divine authority upon the prophet for the task at hand. . . . John shares his own visionary experience [like Paul] with the Risen Christ, not only to state the circumstances that occasioned the writing of this book of visions, but also to evoke the recognition of his authority for doing so. Like Paul's, John's authority derives in part from his commission by divine revelation (cf. Acts 22:3-21)."³¹
In similar manner, Isaiah and Ezekiel saw the glory of God when they were being commissioned (Is. 6; Ez. 1).

³¹Wall, 60.

After the initial appearance of Christ, angels are the ones who relate directly to John. Sometimes they reflect the glory of God, like the angel in Revelation 10 who had a rainbow on his head, a face like the sun, feet like pillars of fire and a voice like the roar of a lion. Some have thought this angel to be Christ. Indeed, "The description of him (10:1-3) is far more elaborate than that of any other angels in Revelation (cf. 15:6; 18:1), though far less elaborate than, and quite distinct from, the description of Christ (1:13-16)."³²

On a few occasions John even bows down to worship one of the angels (Rev. 19:10; 22:8), but the angel stops him.

John was commissioned, given authority and the revelations of the book of Revelation were inaugurated by Christ's appearance. However, there is another major reason for the appearance of Christ in His brilliant glory: empowerment for the witness mission.

³²Bauckham, The Climax of Prophecy, 253.

III. EMPOWERMENT FOR THE MISSION

Christ's appearance is empowerment for the witness mission. It is a Law and Gospel call to repentance and faith. Hengstenberg writes: "The appearance here stands in the closest relation to the matter in hand. It presents before our view those aspects of Christ's nature, which were adapted to the seven churches, and to all who are placed with them in similar states and circumstances, on the one hand to bring them to repentance, and on the other to fill them with consolation and encouragement."³³ In the presence of God's power and righteousness, a sinful man cannot stand. John fell down like a corpse. This is the work of the Law. Yet He reaches out His hand and touches John, telling him not to fear. He recalls His death and the fact that He is risen. This is Gospel. Christians in the seven churches, throughout history, and in our day are daily moved to repentance and faith by God's Law and Gospel work. This appearance of Christ has the same effect. In the midst of the witness mission, whether the suffering is severe or not, Christ moves His children here to repentance and faith. That God given faith receives His cleansing forgiveness and tremendous empowerment. That empowerment comes from His Glory and Power, His Relationship, His Empathy, and the Foretaste of future glory.

A. Glory and Power

This glorious appearance of Christ is the most descriptive picture of the risen and glorious Christ recorded in the Bible. In glory and power it is many times advanced over the other glorious descriptions of Christ. But God's infinite glory and power are far beyond mere human comprehension. Charles Ryrie observes that, "This is a picture of the risen, glorified Lord depicted under a number of similes--the only way He could be described to finite creatures (note the occurrences of 'like' and 'as')." ³⁴ John really did see Christ, and the impact of the experience had to have been far more glorious than human words can completely contain. John's continued use of 'like' and 'as' show that He was describing the experience with language as close as possible to what he saw. God the Son is certainly far more powerful and glorious than our words and mind can describe or imagine. Yet part of His glory and power is revealed by the fact that He reaches down to humans

³³E. W. Hengstenberg, The Revelation of St John, trans. Patrick Fairbairn (New York: Robert Carter & Brothers, 1852), 123.

³⁴Charles Caldwell Ryrie, Revelation (Chicago: Moody Press, 1968), 18.

and makes Himself known in an understandable form. If He showed Himself in the fullness of His glory and power, the words to describe Him would be unspeakable by humans, far surpassing all human understanding.

In a way it would be no revelation since it would be so incomprehensible that there would be no understanding, no revelation. It would blow a person away in its vastly unfathomable mystery. It would be akin to trying to explain an atomic bomb to Robin Hood's squire. But the squire would have far more understanding.

God shows His compassion for His children in that He comes to us in ways that we can understand. He is actually present as He comes to a newborn or anyone in the water of baptism. He is really physically present in the bread and wine of communion. He comes to people in His Word, the Bible. The words of the Bible are such that they are understandable in any language. They are also like an ocean in that children can wade and play in much of it, yet some realms are so deep that they are still unexplored. Such is Christ's glorious appearance.

He revealed Himself in images that John and the Christians of the seven churches knew well. The images in which He revealed Himself still bear an understandable and very strong impact. A little knowledge of John's world helps to unfold them even more. The dynamic power of this revelation of Christ is such that it continues to unfold itself with more and more power and glory in a Christian's life as God's Spirit ministers to believers with it, building greater and greater faith with spiritual power and glory through many different situations in a person's life. Indeed, "This is his stupendous greatness, absolute supremacy, infinite glory."³⁵

Christ was **dressed in a long robe and having wrapped around the breasts a belt of gold.** The long robe is seen by some to signify priesthood, and "The Jewish high priest's girdle was partly gold (Ex 28:8; 39:5), with all his holy garments designed 'for glory and for beauty' (Ex 28:2, 40). The similarity between this and the prophecy of the Messiah in Is. 4:2 is scarcely a coincidence, especially in view of the fact that the Old Testament priesthood was in many ways a type of Christ."³⁶ The prophecy in Is. 4:2 says, "In that day the Branch of the Lord shall be beautiful and glorious . . ." (NKJV).

But His head and hair were white as wool, like snow. This is like the vision of God that was revealed to Daniel, recorded in Daniel chapter seven. Daniel calls Him "The Ancient of Days". The white head and hair often represent purity and wisdom.

And His eyes were as a flame of fire. Beckwith writes that "flaming eyes generally express fierceness against adversaries (e.g. Dan. 10:6; common in classic writers also)".³⁷ Hengstenberg proclaims, "The eye

³⁵Lenski, 73.

³⁶Luther Poellot, Revelation (Saint Louis, Missouri: Concordia Publishing House, 1962), 19.

³⁷Isbon T. Beckwith, The Apocalypse of John (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1919), 438.

as a flame of fire is the eye sparkling with indignation . . . fiery zeal".³⁸ Ryrie notes, "They were piercing in their fiery holiness. The true character of each church is transparent to His eyes. There may also be a connection between this verse and I Corinthians 3:13; that is, the fire which shall try men's works at the judgment seat of Christ will be the gaze of Christ which will of itself consume works of wood, hay and stubble."³⁹ Poellot states, "Fiery eyes are commonly associated with zeal, penetration, power and authority, and the intent to overcome or destroy. God's omniscience is implied indirectly through the penetrating quality of the eyes."⁴⁰ Finally, Mounce asserts, "It expresses the penetrating insight of the one who is sovereign, not only over the seven churches, but over the course of history itself."⁴¹ One can see that the fiery eyes are a vivid image. Christians are both humbled and empowered by Christ's amazingly powerful eyes. Even the evils perpetrated in secret upon His children are wide open to Him. He stands present, as the just judge, watching all: "No creature can hide from Him. Everything is uncovered and exposed to the eyes of Him to whom we must give an account."⁴² As believers are aware of His penetrating, zealous, powerful eyes upon them and their persecutors, they are empowered to endure and continue their witness mission to the end.

His feet were like bronze, as bronze having been burnt in a furnace.

One is reminded of God's wrath to be poured out upon all that is wicked, sometimes pictured as treading upon grapes to make wine. Hengstenberg quotes Bengel who says, "This has respect to his great power, with which he brings all under him, as with a bar of metal, which at the same time is burning hot, one can give a very powerful thrust. Oh, how will he tread down all his enemies!"⁴³ Lenski writes, "The sense is that the feet of Jesus resembled 'gold-bronze,' not as this is when it is cold, but as it appears when it is glowing in the intense fire of a furnace. Where such feet tread they utterly blast and instantly turn to ashes everything they touch or even approach. . . . Here they symbolize the consuming wrath that will come and consume all the enemies of Jesus and of his church."⁴⁴ Whether it be a government, sin, person, demon or anything else that is Satan's instrument inflicting suffering upon Christians, it will be thoroughly trampled by the powerful feet of Jesus. This is good news to suffering Christians. This is empowerment!

His voice was as many waters. One may recall that Elijah heard

³⁸Hengstenberg, 127.

³⁹Ryrie, 18.

⁴⁰Poellot, 20.

⁴¹Robert H. Mounce, The Book of Revelation (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1977), 79.

⁴²Heb. 4:13 NET.

⁴³Hengstenberg, 128.

⁴⁴Lenski, 66-67.

the still small voice of God: "The He said, 'Go out, and stand on the mountain before the Lord.' And behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind tore into the mountains and broke the rocks in pieces before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire a still small voice."⁴⁵ Now, in a mighty and overcoming image, Christ's voice is more powerful, with great diversity, than any other. It is reminiscent of the voice of God that Ezekiel heard: "His voice was like the sound of many waters".⁴⁶ Imagine the sounds of waterfalls in their immense power and rumble that drowns out all other sound. Imagine the sound of all the waves crashing upon the shore, and rain, and streams, and rivers, and floods. These are the sounds of many waters. The thought of the British Parliament brings to mind voices speaking with vigor in order to overcome the surrounding voices. One remembers that people like Lenin and Hitler have given birth to evil governments through their loud speeches. But, "None will ever be able to challenge and to stand against the elemental force of Jesus' voice and his will."⁴⁷

And He had in His right hand seven stars. In verse twenty these are called the messengers or angels of the seven churches. Opinion is divided about whether these are guardian angels, pastors of the churches or even the churches themselves. Luther Poellot produces a convincing argument. He writes, "We hold that it does not refer to the world of spirits but that it means 'messenger' and refers to the pastors of the churches. . . . Elsewhere in the Bible we read of God sending angels as messengers to men, but never of God using men to send a message to angels."⁴⁸ Regarding the image of power in the stars, the Romans pictured planets on coins and other things to depict their universal reign. Consequently, John Sweet draws the conclusion that this "be read both as a contemptuous dismissal of imperial pretensions, and as a bold assertion of the cosmic significance of the congregations of humble and persecuted people whom the seven stars represent (v.20)."⁴⁹

And from His mouth a sharp double edged sword came out. There were two different kinds of swords: 1) the short sword that the Romans carried on their belt, called 'makaira' in Greek, and 2) a very large sword, called 'romphaia' in Greek. The romphaia is the sword that Goliath carried, which David used to behead Goliath. It is a large, heavy sword, the length of a man. It had to be carried with a sling on the soldier's back. This is the sword used to describe the sword

⁴⁵1 Kings 19:11-12 NKJV.

⁴⁶Ez. 43:2 NKJV.

⁴⁷Lenski, 67.

⁴⁸Poellot, 24.

⁴⁹John Sweet, Revelation (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1990), 71.

that proceeded from Jesus' mouth. It is very sharp, double edged, and powerful. It "symbolizes the irresistible power of divine judgment.

The authoritative word of Christ is to be understood over against the fraudulent demands of the imperial cult. It is the word of Christ which will ultimately prevail."⁵⁰ In Hosea chapter six God speaks of slaying by the words of His mouth. Ephesians chapter six records that the Word of God is the sword of the Spirit, the offensive weapon of Christians in their battle against Satan and all his spiritual forces. Second Thessalonians chapter two says that the Lord will slay the lawless one with the breath of His mouth. Hebrews chapter four states, "The word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart."⁵¹ God's Word created, redeemed and recreated. It also destroys all enemies of His people.

And His countenance was as the sun shining in its strength. His brilliant countenance is amazing! It fills the believer with light and power. His light is powerful and substantial. It chases away all the darkness of sin. It gives mighty strength and lifts one up. It moves a Christian to bow down and give glory and praise and honor to Jesus. This is the high point, just as His countenance is also compared to the sun at its high point. Second Thessalonians speaks about the lawless one whom it says the Lord will "destroy with the brightness of His coming."⁵²

When John saw Him he fell down like a corpse. But Jesus reached out in compassion, put His hand on him and said, "Do not fear". Throughout the Bible there are records of people falling down like this when the glory of God appears to them. Sinful humans are overwhelmed in the presence of the glory of God, but "Because of the grace that is contained in these revelations the recipients of them are bidden not to fear."⁵³ The merciful grace, the undeserved love, of Jesus Christ is present. Sinful humans separate themselves from God with their sins, but Jesus reconciles. The sinner is justified by grace, through faith, apart from works, for the sake of Jesus Christ. His death upon the cross paid the penalty we deserve. He suffered the punishment we deserve upon the cross. Now, through the gift of faith, given by the Holy Spirit, people have a relationship with Him. Christ's appearance to John empowers His people through the glory and power revealed, and it also empowers His people through the relationship with them which is revealed in it.

⁵⁰Mounce, 79-80.

⁵¹Heb. 4:12 NKJV.

⁵²2 Thess. 2:8 NKJV.

⁵³Lenski, 72.

B. Relationship

Christ, now risen and dwelling in glory, does not stand aloof from His people: "In verse 13 we learned that Christ stands in the midst of his churches. Facing persecution in a hostile environment, they are to recognize his abiding presence."⁵⁴ He is not looking at them from afar, but standing right in their midst. He is physically present in the Lord's Supper which they take in remembrance of Him.

The King of Glory dwells with His people, carrying on a personal relationship with them, both corporately and individually. Christians are empowered when they understand that the glorious and powerful King is reaching down and standing in their midst.

His presence and relationship empower as He makes His face to shine upon us and lifts up His brilliant countenance upon us. People are continually desiring to be in the presence of the leader, the beautiful person, the popular person, the charming person. And uplifting strength and pleasant fulfillment often comes from such an association. Here we have a personal association with the King of all, the most beautiful and pleasant One, the Desire of Nations.

A Christian is content in His presence, even though that Christian may be suffering the most humiliating and downgrading circumstances on this earth. Even if the whole world rose up against a Christian, the power present in that person's life through the presence of Christ more than overcomes. All the power and evil in this world is nothing compared to Christ. He can flick it away with His little finger.

Our passage reveals His personal presence and relationship not only by verse thirteen which says He is standing in the midst of the churches, but also by verse seventeen. Verse seventeen says that He laid His hand on John and told him not to fear. Jesus often communicated His relationship with people in a physical way, showing that He relates with our whole being. Mark chapter ten records that they brought their children to Jesus that He might touch them. It says that "He took them up in His arms, put His hands on them, and blessed them."⁵⁵

Luke chapter eighteen records the same, but says they brought infants. In Matthew chapter eight "a leper came and worshiped Him, saying, 'Lord, if You are willing, You can make me clean.' Then Jesus put out His hand and touched him, saying, 'I am willing; be cleansed.'

And immediately his leprosy was cleansed."⁵⁶ A significant aspect of this touch is that people used to keep quite a distance between themselves and lepers because of their fear of catching leprosy. By all means they would never touch a person unclean with leprosy.

Yet Jesus touches the man even before he is cleansed of his leprosy. This is like the way in which Jesus reaches down and touches John

⁵⁴Mounce, 82.

⁵⁵Mark 10:16 NKJV.

⁵⁶Matt. 8:2-3 NKJV.

and us, who are unclean with the sickness of sin. He touches us, cleanses us of our sins, beginning a personal relationship which continues eternally. He continues the personal, physical touch through His physical body and blood in the bread and wine of communion, attaching to them the forgiveness of our sins.

John Stott writes about this appearance of Christ: "The Christian Church is the new theocracy. Christ reigns over us. We are His Kingdom. . . . 'priests', enjoying intimate access to Him" ⁵⁷

Christ in all of His power and glory lives among His people, in personal relationship with them, empowering them in the midst of the struggle involved in the witness mission on this earth. Sometimes that struggle is the outward persecution inflicted by a government or another entity.

Sometimes that struggle is more of an inward affliction of the devil and our own sinful nature. Christ reaches down to touch us in our sinful sickness, unattractiveness, stench, filth, squalor, handicapped soul, dullness, ignorance, slowness, irresponsibility, repulsiveness, other-cultured, and the great multitude of many things that make us odious in our sinfulness next to God's purity, beauty, intelligence and goodness. This in turn moves the believer to reach out to others who appear that way to him or her on this earth and touch them with Christ's love. Yes, that is a major part of the witness mission. We reach out with His warm and personal compassion and touch the elderly in their sickness of body and mind, people of other cultures among whom we may feel very alien, people who are slow, unintelligent, handicapped, unattractive, filthy, irresponsible, uncharming, marked by sin, and criminal. We reach out to the helpless, children, babies, outcasts, the weak, downtrodden women and downtrodden men, awkward adolescents, people with bad breath, and the list goes on and on. This can be a difficult part of the witness mission, especially when it has to do with long term contact: taking care of an elderly parent, living with a difficult person, dealing in love with bothersome members of a congregation, continually forgiving a repeat sinner, patiently loving and caring for a handicapped person, working with a person with barbs in their personality, and on and on. Christ also sees, understands, and empowers us for this type of suffering which is beautiful in His eyes, bears much fruit in His Kingdom, and will produce a great reward. But one cannot have the genuine warmth of God's love from the core of the soul in these situations until one knows Christ's love. We are all those unattractive and bothersome things in our sin, next to His purity and goodness. We are handicapped, uncharming, outcasts, awkward, irresponsible, criminal, smelly, alien, etc. next to Him. Our response in the presence of His glorious power and beauty is to fall flat on our faces like a corpse as John did. And He reaches out His hand to touch us compassionately, He dwells in our midst day in and day out despite our squalor, He continues to invite us to the intimacy of His Supper (without reproach) where we receive the most sacred and honored substance on earth, His body and blood. His Spirit

⁵⁷Stott, 16.

continues to dwell in our spirits, ministering His Word, His power, and His presence in our lives. We are unworthy, yet He reaches down to have a long term relationship with us. This motivates us most powerfully in our same witness mission to others who appear to us the way we have appeared to Him.

Christ empowers His people in their witness mission by standing in their midst and giving them a personal touch. He brings His power and glory into their lives by His personal relationship with them.

In His appearance to John, Christ also empowers Christians through His empathy.

C. Empathy

Jesus went through it all and has overcome. He now stands glorious and victorious, but compassionate and empathetic. He has been through the worst, having suffered the punishment of hell, forsaken by God the Father in punishment for all the sins of the world. He did this because of God's great love for people so that "whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life."⁵⁸ Christ alludes to this when He says to John, **I became dead and behold I am living forever and ever**. Because He went through the deepest suffering possible to mankind, He can empathize with every bit of our suffering, big and small. Hebrews chapter four encourages Christians with His empathy.

It says, "Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession.

For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need."⁵⁹ Since He has been through it all and has overcome, He is especially qualified (more than any other) to strengthen His people with empathy.

He suffered in many ways, so He empowers by empathizing with our suffering. Not only does He empathize since He has been through the suffering His children experience, but He has also paved our way to glory. His overcoming glory directly responds to each bit of suffering inflicted, so He also empowers by giving a foretaste of the glory which will come to all who endure to the end.

D. Foretaste

⁵⁸John 3:16 NKJV.

⁵⁹Heb. 4:14-16 NKJV.

In His appearance Christ empowers His people for their witness mission by giving them a foretaste of the glorious overcoming of each bit of suffering, power over death through resurrection and the resurrected body. Romans chapter eight proclaims, "For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God. . . . because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God."⁶⁰

It also says, "God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose."⁶¹

God works the great reversal. He turns every pain and everything bad into multiplied good.

Jesus hung in contorted shape on a wooden cross. Now He stands gloriously in the midst of golden lampstands. He was stripped of His clothes, and His tunic was gambled away so that He died in earthly poverty. Now He has a robe down to His feet, like the beautiful robe of the priests. He also has glorious riches with a belt of gold around His chest. His head was bloodied with a crown of thorns, and bruised black and blue with the mocking blows of the soldiers. Now His head and His hair are a clean, glorious, beautiful sight of pure white, like wool and snow. His eyes were filled with the grief and pain of suffering for our sins. They were also filled with compassion as He asked His Father to forgive the ones inflicting the suffering, as He gave words of consolation to the thief on the cross, and as He saw that His mother was going to be in good hands. Now they are filled with fiery zeal, penetrating omniscience, piercing judgement, and overwhelming power. His feet were pierced with a spike. Now they are solid, beautiful, whole and powerful, ready to tread the grapes of God's wrath. Previously, the voices of sinners were allowed to have predominance in the process of inflicting suffering and judgment upon Him. The betrayer, false witnesses, Caiaphas, Herod, and the crowd that yelled to free a criminal and crucify Him were allowed to cause His suffering and death according to God's plan. Even the denying voice of Peter caused Him pain. Now Jesus speaks with the thunderous voice of many waters, like great waterfalls, powerfully rumbling rivers, the storm of a deafening rain, the waves crashing upon millions of miles of shoreline, He drowns out all other sound.

The voices of sinners are like a wisp of smoke that quickly vanishes in the presence of His voice. His hands were bloodied as His wrists were pierced through with the nails. Now He holds stars in His hand.

He was slapped and hit on His mouth which spoke words of grief and also compassion. Now the powerful, large and very sharp double edged sword proceeds from His mouth for piercing judgment. His countenance was humbled, marred, bloodied, ripped with the whip, made black and

⁶⁰Rom. 8:18-21 NKJV.

⁶¹Rom. 8:28 NASV.

blue with the blows, bent over with the weight of the cross. Now His countenance is brilliant, like the sun shining at its height. Formerly, people were allowed to look down on Him. Now, even the greatest of saints falls down like a corpse in the presence of His glory.

Jesus accomplished the goal. He suffered as a faithful witness. He completed His mission on this earth. He died as The Sacrifice for the forgiveness of our sins. His glory gives believers a foretaste of what awaits them. Therefore, the powerful exhortation in Hebrews chapter twelve fills the Christian with strength and courage to suffer according to the will of God:

Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls.⁶²

He despised the shame, keeping His eyes on the glory ahead. We must consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners, especially in light of the revelation of His glory in His appearance to John and us through His Word which John recorded. This is a foretaste of glory similar to what all believers who endure will receive. He says:

Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life. . . . To him who overcomes I will give some of the hidden manna to eat. And I will give him a white stone, and on the stone a new name written which no one knows except him who receives it. . . . he who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations--'He shall rule them with a rod of iron; As the potter's vessels shall be broken to pieces'--as I also have received from My Father; and I will give him the morning star. . . . He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life; but I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels. . . . He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go out no more. And I will write on him the name of My God and the name of the city of My God, the New Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God. And I will write on him My new name. . . . To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father

⁶²Heb. 12:1-3 NKJV.

on His throne.⁶³

Finally, He empowers believers in the witness mission through a foretaste of the resurrection in His appearance to John.

Christ "was the first to enter a new and indestructible life. Others had returned to life, only to die again. He rose and is alive for evermore."⁶⁴ The fear of death is a fierce power. Fear in itself is a powerful influence in this world. The root of all fear is the fear of eternal death, eternal torment in hell. Every little disappointment, which may only bring the smallest wisp of a sad feeling, is a reference to physical death and finally eternal death. Everyone suffers many such little deaths each day. The larger disappointments in life can be more poignant experiences of the painful grief of death.

Loss of a loved one, financial disaster, strife in relationships, sinful corruption, major illness, serious accident, vocational disappointment, big failures, excessive weariness, etc. are all examples.

Every loss and disappoint is akin to death, to eternal death. By revealing power over physical and eternal death in His appearance, Jesus is conquering the fear at the root of all fear. Eternal death is separation from God and eternal torment. This is ultimately the greatest fear of mankind. Jesus has conquered that fear through His death upon the cross for the forgiveness of our sins, and His resurrection to life eternal. His appearance is a foretaste of life eternal for the believer. It is also a foretaste of the resurrected body.

His resurrection generates our resurrection. His resurrection is so very important that "if Christ is not risen, then our preaching is vain and your faith is also vain. . . . your faith is futile; you are still in your sins! Then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable."⁶⁵ But by Christ's appearance and much more we know that "now Christ is risen from the dead"⁶⁶

His resurrection has the greatest consequences for Christians: "As we have borne the image of the man of dust [Adam], we shall also bear the image of the heavenly Man [Christ]."⁶⁷ Paul writes, "We shall all be changed--in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed."⁶⁸

Believers will receive a glorious body, like Jesus' resurrected body:

The risen bodies of the faithful, however, will then be spiritual (somata pneumatika). 1 Cor. 15:44: "It is sown a

⁶³Rev. 2:10, 17, 26-28; 3:5, 12, 21 NKJV.

⁶⁴Stott, 15.

⁶⁵1 Cor. 15:14, 17-19 NKJV.

⁶⁶1 Cor. 15:20 NKJV.

⁶⁷1 Cor. 15:49 NKJV.

⁶⁸1 Cor. 15:51-52 NKJV.

natural body; it is raised a spiritual body." What is meant by a spiritual body we may, of course, not determine by speculation, but can learn only from Scripture, which describes the resurrection bodies, in contrast to their character in this life, as incorruptible, glorious, vigorous. 1 Cor. 15:42-43: "Raised in incorruption - in glory - in power." The term "glorious" is further explained Phil. 3:21: "Fashioned like [summorphon] unto His glorious body," and Matt. 13:43: "The righteous shall shine forth as the sun."⁶⁹

Whatever deterioration or destruction our bodies suffer here, the empowering truth is that they shall be like Jesus' body when they are raised. Therefore, there is great encouragement while enduring the suffering in the midst of the witnessing mission: "But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord."⁷⁰

⁶⁹Francis Pieper, Christian Dogmatics (Saint Louis, Missouri: Concordia Publishing House, 1953), 538.

⁷⁰1 Cor. 15:57-58 NKJV.

CONCLUSION

The glorious appearance of Christ in Revelation chapter one is the most descriptive appearance of Christ in His glory, risen from the dead. He appears to inaugurate The Revelation and commission John to write it down for the Christians of the seven churches and all Christians. John's authority to write Revelation, given by Christ here, is important for John and all Christians because of the symbolic nature of Revelation combined with Paul's exhortation in Galatians not to accept another Gospel, even if it should come from an angel.

He also appears and reveals Himself in the details of His glory and the warmth of His compassion to empower Christians in their mission, the mission given in the Great Commission. That witnessing mission involves suffering. The suffering experienced by John and the Christians of the seven churches was coming primarily from Rome. The suffering experienced by Christians throughout history and today comes from any person or entity which, like Rome, is an instrument in the hands of Satan in his attempt to harm God's people.

God's people are not defeated by their suffering. They are empowered by Christ. They are specifically empowered through this appearance of Christ by His glory and power, His relationship with them, His empathy for them, and the foretaste of the glory and goodness ahead. God comforts and encourages His people to the end:

For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. . . . If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things? Who shall bring a charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written: "For Your sake we are killed all day long; We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter." Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.⁷¹

⁷¹Rom. 8:18, 31-39 NKJV.

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