

**Revelation: The Triumph of the Lamb**  
*The Son of Man among His Churches*  
Revelation 1:9-20

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**Text:**

<sup>9</sup> I, John, your brother and partner in the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance that are in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. <sup>10</sup> I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet <sup>11</sup> saying, "Write what you see in a book and send it to the seven churches, to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamum and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea." <sup>12</sup> Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking to me, and on turning I saw seven golden lampstands, <sup>13</sup> and in the midst of the lampstands one like a son of man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash around his chest. <sup>14</sup> The hairs of his head were white like wool, as white as snow. His eyes were like a flame of fire, <sup>15</sup> his feet were like burnished bronze, refined in a furnace, and his voice was like the roar of many waters. <sup>16</sup> In his right hand he held seven stars, from his mouth came a sharp two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining in full strength. <sup>17</sup> When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. But he laid his right hand on me, saying, "Fear not, I am the first and the last, <sup>18</sup> and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades. <sup>19</sup> Write therefore the things that you have seen, those that are and those that are to take place after this. <sup>20</sup> As for the mystery of the seven stars that 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 are the seven churches.

**Introduction:**

In the opening vision of Revelation chapter one, we have met the hero of this story – the resurrected Christ. Last week we looked very simply at John's description of Jesus and found it to be not a description of what his resurrected body looks like literally; but a description of what Jesus Christ really is like. John is not giving us a literal description of Jesus' body as though he really does have a sword in the place of a tongue or eyes that really shoot forth flames of fire. Instead, John is describing what Jesus is like. He is the searcher of hearts full of consuming holiness and boundless wisdom; He is the perfect priest standing for his people in the presence of the Father; and He is our defender in the presence of our enemies.

You see, the book of Revelation is concerned with depicting a reality that is deeper than anyone of us could ever comprehend. This book describes reality at its highest and deepest levels – levels that transcend space and time.

- For example, when a lady gave birth to a son some 2,000 years ago and wrapped him in swaddling clothes placing him in a manger that was about far more than the simple beginning of a new young family. Those events were part of a cosmic reality that goes way beyond earth.

- When a grown man was sentenced to death on a Roman cross innocent though he was, his death was a part of a reality that transcends earth. His death dealt a blow to the forces of evil that human eyes cannot see.
- Similarly, when we see the reality of a church being harassed by the political party of its day that conflict is about far more than it may appear on earth. That suffering is only part of a cosmic conflict that is taking place in dimensions unseen to the human eye.

My point is this – reality as you and I see it – is not all there is to reality. Our drama as individuals, as a corporate church, and as a universal church existing in 2006, are all mini-dramas being worked out on a much larger cosmic scale. The best written novels of our day are the novels that tell the stories of four or five seemingly unrelated events or individuals only to completely sweep you off of your feet by weaving them together at the end. Can you imagine what the drama written before the foundations of the world by God Almighty will look like when we get to the end of the story?

So John is writing to a suffering and persecuted church so as to refresh their perspective of reality and he does so by masterfully demonstrating that their drama is only a part of the cosmic reality. Their conflict is only a sliver of the cosmic conflict. The ultimate reality is not this earthly realm but a spiritual realm to which this earth is headed – a new heaven and a new earth.

Now, what this means is that that for every aspect of the ultimate heavenly or spiritual reality there seems to be an earthly counterpart. For example, we have seen in John’s description that the resurrected Son of Man radiates heat and light: eyes like flames, feet like bronze heated to a glow, a face blazing like the sun shining at full strength. And this luminous appearance is then reflected and miniaturized in the seven stars he holds and the seven lampstands that surround him.

Or, the seven lampstands surrounding the Son of Man correspond on earth to the seven lamps (different word) that John will see in heaven in 4:5:

<sup>5</sup> From the throne came flashes of lightning, and rumblings and peals of thunder, and before the throne were burning seven torches of fire, which are the seven spirits of God,

Since these lamps in heaven picture the Spirit’s presence with Father, these lamps call the churches to reflect the Spirit’s presence on earth, in their communities. It seems then that the seven letters are being written to show each individual congregation just how they are to reflect the presence of the Spirit, and the holiness of Christ in their respective cities.

John was commissioned to write in v. 11: “Write what you see in a book and send it to the seven churches.” In v. 19: “Write therefore the things you have seen, those that are and those that are to take place after this.” (I think John is saying that he is to write down the vision he had just seen of the resurrected Jesus, the dialogue he is now hearing, and the visions, the things he will see after the dialogue is ended. He is to put the contents of all he has seen (v. 2) and send it to the churches.)

And “as for the mystery of the seven stars that you saw in my right hand,” who are they? What are they? In v. 12 you clearly have Jesus standing among the lampstands. That is, you have the resurrected Jesus walking among his churches. That alone corresponds to a dimension of reality that transcends the natural senses. We do not see, hear, feel, taste or smell his presence; nevertheless, it is a reality. Think of that! But then in v.16, we have the resurrected Jesus holding the seven stars in his right hand – his hand of power, his hand of control.

V. 20 says: “As for the mystery of the seven stars that 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 are the seven churches.”

Who are these angels? What are these angels? The key to their identity lies in the fact that each of the letters is addressed not to the church that is in each city but to the angel of the church in each city. And while the word *angelos* can mean something like messenger, he is addressing the churches and not simply the messenger.

Jesus is probably evoking in John's memory glimpses from the book of Daniel where angels seem to have been given charge over nations. Do you remember that the angel who was sent to deliver a message to Daniel announced that his delay was due to the fact that he had been held up by the prince of the kingdom of Persia for 21 days (cf. Dan. 10:12-13)? But here in John's vision there is a slight modification such that it is unlikely that Jesus is saying there is a ministering angel assigned to each congregation. Technically, the angel of each church does not appear to be a literal angel but rather the spiritual counterpart of the churches in heaven.

In other words, the angels are the seven churches viewed from the heavenly perspective while the lampstands are the seven churches viewed from an earthly perspective. The angels are the seven churches in Christ's right hand of power and control. Perhaps 1:20 should read: "As for the mystery of the seven stars that you saw in my right hand, and the seven golden lampstands, the seven stars are the angels which are the seven churches..." Then each of the letters should read: "To the angel which is the church in Ephesus write..." The angels are the seven churches from heaven's vantage. They are in Christ's right hand. He is in control. The seven lampstands are the seven churches from earth's vantage. They are to reflect the presence of the Spirit in their community.

There is one further piece of evidence. There is evidence that in the first century mindset, the phrase "seven stars" referred to the "seven planets." There were only seven known planets in ancient Roman world. Beasley-Murray, expands this in his commentary:

In the ancient world the seven (then known) planets were a common symbol for sovereignty (Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, the moon, and either Earth or the Sun). He says: "Even in John's day there were many who believed that the planets were gods, exercising a powerful and even fearful influence over the lives of men. From this it was an easy transition to make of them a symbol of the political power exercised by the Roman Caesars over the world, and in this sense the seven stars often occur on imperial coins. When John declares that the seven stars are in Christ's hand, he is claiming that the sovereignty over this world resides not in the Caesars of Rome but in the Lord of the Church. These seven stars he then defines as the angels of the churches. The purpose of John's prophecy, from its first page to its last, is to assure the saints of God that they are kings and priests to God through the redemptive grace of Christ. The purport of the symbolism of *the seven stars = the angels of the churches* is therefore plain: it declares that the sovereignty of this world belongs not to those who proudly claim to be the saviours and lords of men and who seek to crush the Church of Jesus. It belongs to the Christ of God and his people" (69-70).

Read v.20 again: "As for the mystery of the seven stars that you saw in my right hand, and the seven golden lampstands, the seven stars are the angels *which are* the seven churches [viewed from heaven's vantage], and the seven lampstands are the seven churches [viewed from earth's vantage].

And when we connect these facts again with vv.12 and 16 here is what we see:

According to v. 12 the risen Christ walks among his earthly church and

According to v. 16 the risen Christ holds the ultimate reality of the church in his sovereign right hand.

You put these two together and you get some fantastic truths:

*Christ Jesus watches over us and walks with us.*

*He is sovereign over us and he is present with us.*

- Can you even begin to fathom what encouragement this would be to a church suffering under the Roman oppression of the first century? Brothers and sisters in Christ were dropping like flies beneath the Roman sword.
- Can you even begin to fathom what this kind of perspective would do for you and me when we enter into trials and afflictions as individuals? We have a Christ who walks with his people and we have a Christ who watches over his people with his powerful right hand!

But let's bring it even more down to earth: The glorious Son of Man, who lives among his congregations and holds their lives in his sovereign hand, has something to say to each of them. He is not so detached or so far removed that he does not know and identify with our afflictions. He has something to say. He had something specific for seven individual congregations in John's day. What would he say to us if he were to write us a letter? What would he say? "And to the angel which is the church in Sussex write..." And more importantly, would we have the ears to hear what the Spirit says to the churches?

I have asked two questions: (1) What would he say; and (2) would we have ears to hear?

I have the answer to the first question and can only pray for the second. But the answer to the first question has been forever captured in the canonizing of these seven historic letters. That is, these letters were specific enough to address the timely needs of a specific congregation in history and yet general enough to address the needs of any and every church throughout history. I believe with all of my heart that Christ is addressing us when he addresses these seven churches. I believe with every fiber of my being that we are to be asking of ourselves as we read these letters, "How are we like Ephesus? How are we like Smyrna? What are the similarities between Sussex and Sardis?"

As we read these seven letters we are to open ourselves up to the fiery gaze of the resurrected Christ. As we read the letters we are to open ourselves up to the seven eyes of the seven spirits of Christ. These are to be letters of examination.

Revelation 2:1 (ESV)

<sup>1</sup> "To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: 'The words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand, who walks among the seven golden lampstands.

Revelation 2:8 (ESV)

<sup>8</sup> "And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write: 'The words of the first and the last, who died and came to life.

Revelation 2:12 (ESV)

<sup>12</sup> "And to the angel of the church in Pergamum write: 'The words of him who has the sharp two-edged sword.

Revelation 2:18 (ESV)

<sup>18</sup>“And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write: ‘The words of the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and whose feet are like burnished bronze.

Revelation 3:1 (ESV)

<sup>1</sup>“And to the angel of the church in Sardis write: ‘The words of him who has the seven spirits of God and the seven stars.

Revelation 3:7 (ESV)

<sup>7</sup>“And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write: ‘The words of the holy one, the true one, who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, who shuts and no one opens.

Revelation 3:14 (ESV)

<sup>14</sup>“And to the angel of the church in Laodicea write: ‘The words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of God’s creation.

When we read the letters to the seven churches we are reading the very words of the risen Christ who walks with us, yes; but who also stands over us. Oh these are words of comfort but he is still no tame lion. He may bid us to put our hands on his main but he is not tame.

### **Conclusion:**

Similarly, when we come to the Lord’s Table, this is to be a time of examination. If Jesus could send you a personal letter, what would he say? “You have left your first love... I know your works... I know you do not deny my faith... I know you have a reputation for being alive, but you are dead... I know that you tolerate the woman Jezebel as you practice immorality... I know your patient endurance that though you have little power you have not denied my name...” What would he say?

Do you think he is disinterested in your life? Do you think you can keep your heart hidden from his eyes?