

Restoring our vision of Christ

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[0 : 0 0] Let's turn back to the passage that we read in Revelation chapter 1.

We can read again verses 4 to 8. Revelation chapter 1, reading again verses 4 through 8.

John to the seven churches that are in Asia, grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come. And from the seven spirits who are before his throne and from Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead and the ruler of kings on earth.

To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

Behold, he is coming with the clouds and every eye will see him. Even those who pierced him and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him. Even so, amen. I am the Alpha and the Omega says the Lord who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty. Now, we sang earlier from Psalm 85 and as we meditated on the Psalm just a little before we sang it, it reminds us of the fact that we need often restoration and our Christian experience. And part of that is that we often need to have our spiritual vision restored, to have that renewed, to have it brought back to us the clarity that we maybe once had that has maybe gone away. It's not that God's light to us dims, but that our perception of it sometimes indeed oftentimes dims and we need to have that restored.

[2 : 3 0] And Revelation chapter one, we might say, points us to the glory of our Savior in a way that is incredibly helpful and incredibly powerful in terms of restoring that vision to us, to see who he is, the glory that belongs to him as our Savior, the one who is our light and life.

And this chapter sets before us this wonderful vision that John had right at the beginning of his experience. Of course, there are more visions, you might say that follow, but this first, this primary encounter that he has that's recorded for us here in this chapter helps us to see just a glimpse of his glory. And we need that to be renewed from time to time for it to be refreshed for us. Because, you know, it's really as we're captivated by the wonder of who Jesus is, that's really when we are renewed in our souls. We can so easily become dulled in our spiritual experience. We lose that edge that we maybe once had in our Christian experience. And I suppose sometimes we can go on and pretend that it doesn't really matter. But if we think about it, it really does. And the scriptures encourage us to look for this, to look for that renewing power of God and work in us as individuals and as God's people in a place. We need this to be restored, this vision.

And we see in this chapter, we see three things about Jesus that are incredibly powerful. So the first is that he is the eternal Lord. The second is that he is the almighty Lord.

And the third is that he is the Lord who speaks to us by his word. And these are powerful glimpses of his glory, which, you know, thinking about it, these are things we can so easily brush over because we're so used to hearing them. And yet they give us a glimpse into the glory of who he is. And so I want us to think through these things just a little this evening, to think about him as our eternal Lord, our almighty Lord, and the Lord who speaks to us in his word.

Now, in verse eight, we read these great words. I am the Alpha and the Omega, says the Lord God, who is and who was and who is to come. These words, which are repeated in a couple of forms in the chapter, they're really incredibly powerful words. We might say that these words have a myriad of wonder woven into them because they contain such depths that we simply cannot plumb them fully. But one thing that we can grasp out of these words is the fact that our Lord is not bound by time. He is not bound by time. We, on the other hand, most certainly are time bound creatures. We are those who are not eternal, in the sense that we are created as finite creatures who have a beginning. Now, we look forward to an eternity with our Lord as he grants that to us. But our experience in this world from our birth to our death is one that is bound by time. We are limited creatures, but God is not in any way limited. And he himself is the very origin of all things because he is the Creator. And we might say that he is the fulfillment of all things, all things find their existence by his grant, his gift. We, on the other hand, are so limited. We have an experience as we live in this during this life, we have an experience that is incredibly limited. We have no perception really, apart from what God grants to us beyond the moment in which we live. And yet he sees all things. Of course, the Lord grants us glimpses in his word that help us to see by faith beyond the confines of what we know by nature.

[8 : 39] But by nature, we are bound by these things. And that is one of the things that brings often fear into our experience. Fear of the unknown. We don't see what is coming. We don't see what may be a couple of hours down the line, or maybe even seconds down the line. We don't see what is a day ahead or a year ahead of the Lord grants us such time to live. But we don't know these things, but the Lord knows them all. But often we fall into fear and anxiety because we don't know these things.

And sadly, often that also brings us to a place where we are a count of our fear, experience doubt, and have little certainty that the Lord will provide for us.

Have little certainty that things are going to work out. And of course, we don't always know that they'll work out in the way that we expect, but that the Lord has these things in hand.

Sometimes things may work out in a very different way than we may expect. But what we do know, and what the Word assures us of, is that He always has these things in hand. Sometimes we may go through difficult, trying circumstances that cause us grief and sorrow, but He holds us in the midst of that. And that is His promise that He will always be with us in the midst of these things.

But we often doubt these things. Our hearts express a fear that is based on that reality, that we doubt these things. Because if we didn't doubt them, we wouldn't experience that kind of fear.

[11 : 02] Now, the Lord understands that we are frail creatures in this regard. And He is incredibly gracious towards us. And that's part of the reason why He gives us these glimpses into who He is, reminding us that He is eternal, that He does know the end from the beginning. He has always known how things are going to pan out. He's always known exactly what's going to happen. And He's always known exactly how He's going to carry you and me through these things. And that's the great comfort that we have. We're not guaranteed by the Lord that things are going to be easy. In fact, we know, we just have to look around us and consider what's happened in our own experience and the experience of people around us. We know things are not always going to be easy. But we know that He is always with us. And He is always the one who sustains us. And He's never surprised by any of these things. He's not caught on a wears. He's got these things all sorted already. We maybe have no idea at times how things are going to work out. We might find ourselves in circumstances and we might say to ourselves, how? We might even find ourselves in a situation where we feel like we might even go out of our minds with doubt and fear. But He holds us in the midst of that.

This glimpse of who Jesus is as our eternal Lord is a powerful truth that brings comfort, encouragement and speaks into our experience even in the depths of our experience or in the heights of our experience. It doesn't matter what our situation is. This truth is relevant for us. It speaks right into our experience and brings us back to whom we serve. We serve a great Lord, an eternal Lord who knows all things and who sustains us, who holds us in the palm of His hand, who keeps us and carries us even when we have no strength.

And when we grasp that truth, we can say as Paul said, that when I am weak, then I am strong.

Not because we have any strength in ourselves, but because we cast ourselves upon Him who is our strength. We also see in this chapter that we have an Almighty Lord in the verse 12 through to verse 18 says this, then I turns to see the voice that was speaking to me and on turning I saw seven golden lampstands and in the midst of the lampstands one like a son of man clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash round his chest. The hairs of his head were white like wool, as white as snow. His eyes were like a flame of fire. His feet were like burnished bronze, refined in a furnace and his voice was like the roar of many waters. 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. 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 and the living one. I died and behold I am alive forevermore and I have the keys of death and Hades. And we see in this vision that John had of the

Lord. We see the Lord's power and his position and his authority set before us in symbolic form.

[16 : 01] For instance the robe and the sash that are mentioned are symbols of authority. Even in modern times a robe and a sash are worn by the Queen at various times symbolizing her authority.

They are regal garments and so we are being shown here that Christ is king. He has authority over all things. He has the power to act. I suppose in our day when monarchs generally speaking have very limited power, at least in the west of course there are those who sit as some kind of monarch in various other countries where they have almost in human terms almost unlimited power, whatever they say is done. Now sadly most of the time under these kinds of regimes people live in fear, terrible fear. I suppose I should avoid being political but I saw a program the other day where a man was visiting Russia and interacting with people and asking questions about various things and after he had visited he came back with the sense that people were afraid. It didn't matter who they were, whether they were supportive of the regime or not, they generally lived in a kind of fear because they knew that if they stepped over a certain line that they were liable to suffer the consequences. There's power that the regime has. Now that is human power and of course affected by sin and everything that flows from that but Christ's power is holy, perfect and so we are reminded here that he acts on behalf of his people as their king exercising that authority on your behalf and mine. He is almighty, there is no limit to his power. And we are also reminded in the various other images or in some of them anyway we are reminded of his holiness for instance we see the image of his hair being as white as wool, as white as snow, speaking of his purity connected with his holiness. We see his eyes are said to be like a flame of fire. Another image in relation to holiness, his feet were like burnished bronze that has been purified, refined in the furnace, another image of purity and of holiness. And so we're reminded that this power is perfectly holy and he exercises it according to his holiness. He is not an arbitrary God, he is not a God who does not care about his subjects, he is the perfect king after all.

And so we are encouraged here to depend upon him and to lay hold of the fact that if we trust in Christ we are subjects of his kingdom. After all John reminds us earlier in verse 6 that the Lord has made us a kingdom from middle of verse 5, he says to him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood and made us a kingdom. Priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever amen. He has made us a kingdom, what arbitrarily, what with purpose and intent and with the great intention of blessing his people. The Lord delights to bless his people.

We of course know that we simply do not deserve that, that that is his great intention. And so we are encouraged here to lay hold of the fact that he is our almighty King who governs on our behalf, who is the one who oversees his kingdom and who works things out according to his great purposes and for our good. We also see here that the Lord is shown to us as the one who has spoken to us by his word and who speaks, who continues to speak to us by his word. Now of course John was spoken to directly. He had this vision granted to him. There was a directness to John's experience that we do not experience. Generally speaking, I don't think anybody can really say that they've had the kind of revelation that John had. I suppose the Lord could grant that if he wished, but generally speaking we don't hear of this kind of experience, not to this extent at least. But the Lord does not shut the rest of us out. He doesn't exclude those of us who aren't apostles from the great blessing of what the apostles received.

Because it is written down for us, John is instructed to write this down. Verse 11, 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 Leodicea. And of course it's not limited to the experience of those churches because it was written also for our good. And what we see in the churches in Asia at the time is that there's a breadth of experience there that means that so much of what we read there speaks almost directly into our experience also.

[23 : 41] And so this is for not only the churches in Asia, it's for the church through the ages. It's for you, it's for me. The Lord speaks to us in His Word and by His Word. And He's given us this Word as a means of grace, a means to bless us. And indeed we might say it's the primary means through which we are blessed, this Word, through the reading of it, through the preaching of it, through the singing of it, through the communication of the truth of it. This Word is His Word. It has His authority.

It expresses His purposes and it brings before us the awesomeness of who He is.

So although we did not go through the experience that John had there on the ground, we still benefit from the experience that he went through. Of course we need to benefit from it by faith and to receive this Word and to seek the Lord's blessing upon this Word by His Holy Spirit.

And that's what we need more than anything else is the Lord's blessing upon it because we can learn the Word. We could memorise whole passages of it and I think it's a great thing to do, to memorise His Word. But unless the Lord's blessing is upon that, unless the Spirit of the Lord takes that and applies it in our experience, then it's not going to make a real difference. We need and we depend on the Lord in this regard. We are not to divorce the Word from the Lord who gave it. It is His Word and so we need to take it, receive it and seek His blessing upon it because we can't simply take the Word and expect that we can use it ourselves and make it a blessing to us. We need His blessing upon it because we cannot divorce this Word from Him. We need His power, His authority, His blessing upon us to make this benefit us in the way that it is intended to benefit us.

God never intended that we would take the Word and go off with it by ourselves. He intended that we would take this Word and that we would bring it before Him and ask Him to open it up to us just as He did to those on the road to Emmaus. Because without His intervention there, without His opening up the Scriptures to them, it wasn't that they didn't know these Scriptures, they knew them but they needed His intervention to open these up so that they actually understood them in a way that was powerful and transforming. And that's what we need. We need His power and work in us, taking His Word and using it to bring about His purposes, His ends in our lives, to our good and to His glory. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we do thank You and praise You for Your Word.

[28 : 06] We thank You for the glimpses that we find in Your Word of Your glory. We thank You, Heavenly Father, for the coming of Your Son into this world, that He came, that He dwelt among us, that He took upon Himself our guilt, our sin, and that He bore that sin to the cross, that He endured the wrath and the punishment that it deserved and deserves, and that He died in our place. And we praise You this evening that He is risen, that He is exalted, that He intercedes on our behalf, that He is the eternal one, that He is the Almighty One, that He is our Savior, our Redeemer, our great God and Savior. Heavenly Father, bless us, we pray, take this Word even this evening and apply it to our hearts and lives in a way that would bring a renewed vision, a renewed confidence in you, a renewed faith in the sense that our faith might grow and lay hold more and more upon who you are and who you are for us. Bless us then we pray and make us a blessing to Your glory and not only to our good but to the good of many others also, all that we ask, we ask in the precious name of Jesus. Amen.

Let's draw our meeting to a conclusion, singing from Psalm 130 in the Scottish Salta, we'll sing the whole Psalm to God's praise. Lord, from the depths to thee I cried, my Lord, voice, my voice, Lord, do thou hear unto my supplications voice, given a tent of ear, Lord, who shall stand of thou, O Lord, should mark iniquity, but yet with the forgiveness is that fear thou mayst be. I wait for God, my soul doth wait, my hope is in His word, more than they that for morning watch, my soul waits for the Lord. I say more than they that do watch the morning light to see, let Israel hope in the Lord, for with Him mercies be, and plenteous redemption is ever found with Him, and from all His iniquities He Israel shall redeem.

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Now may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us all. Amen.