

CHRIST WITH HIS CHURCH

Scripture Lesson: Revelation 1:9-20

Text: Revelation 1:9ff

Songs: R5; R271 1,3,4; R98

Dear Friends in Christ Jesus Our Lord,

“Revelation 1:9.” Notice the Christ-centered nature of this verse. While John feels a responsibility to say why he is on the Island of Patmos, the thrust of the verse is what we call “Christo-centric,” that is all things revolving around Christ. He is a “brother and companion in the suffering and the kingdom.” Persecution had exiled John to Patmos. Yet what is central is Christ’s kingdom. While the occasion for being banished to Patmos is suffering the saints are experiencing in persecution, the reality is the kingdom. Like the rest of the Bible, John has a kingdom vision.

That kingdom vision comes to expression in the rest of the verse. It is this kingdom expression that Reformed Christians have always stressed. It is part of the fabric of Scripture and it comes to clear expression as the Bible concludes with this final book, Revelation.

First, there is “patient endurance that is ours in Jesus.” Perhaps there are some patient people here, but most of us are impatient people. We don’t want to stand in lines. Businesses make promises that you will not have to stand in line at the cash register. People are impatient. Yet John says that we who are in Jesus have a special patience. We have been told that Jesus is coming again, and we will patiently wait--even through persecution!--for His return. That patience is not something that is native to us, but it is the gift God gives His church to patiently wait for the return of the Lord Jesus. That “patient endurance” still characterizes us on January 25, 2009. We are still patiently waiting for Christ to return.

Second, he is on the island of Patmos “because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.” We saw last week that John was the one who in His gospel called Jesus “the Word.” The testimony of Jesus is true. He used that in the second verse and here he comes back to it again. We Christians may never minimize the word of God which is the Bible because it is the clear “testimony of Jesus.” When I was a teen-ager my pastor used to tell us Bibles that printed Jesus’ words in red letters were bad Bibles. He stressed in catechism that every word in the Bible is through the Holy Spirit and, therefore, God’s infallible, inerrant, authoritative and perspicuous word. That is right. A red letter Bible is not as bad as my pastor made it out to be, but since every single word of the Bible is valuable there is no point to a red-letter Bible. This is a red-letter Bible because it is the only way this edition was published when I purchased it. The proper understanding of this verse speaks for a Bible that has all the print in black--or all the print in red.

This emphasis on Jesus, the Christo-centric character of this part of Revelation, reminds us of the simple outline of Revelation. Chapters 1 through 11 are about Christ, the Bridegroom, and Chapters 12 through 22 are about the Bride, the church. It divides right is half. Both are important, but in Bible times the stress was on the Groom so Christ gets first billing in the book. In our culture the wedding is all about brides. It is the bride’s day. The clothing item is the bridal dress. The groom’s tuxedo may be worn by hundreds of men at a wedding, but the dress ought to be one of a kind, worn once, and then saved for when a daughter marries. That is all changed from the Bible times when the men planned the wedding, and the bride was often almost an after thought. We see that in the familiar story of Jacob’s weddings at his Uncle Laban’s. Jacob demanded a wife, and Laban felt free to substitute Leah for Rachel. The bride was covered so Jacob had no idea he was marrying Leah. Laban and Jacob planned the wedding; which daughter was the bride was secondary. So it is with Christ, the Groom of the church. That is why Revelation has 11 chapters on the Groom and then 11 on the bride.

“Revelation 1:10.” This vision was on Sunday. It immediately involved the “sound of a trumpet.” How important trumpets are in the Bible. At every major event in the history of redemption the trumpet is sounded. The trumpet tells John that what is about to happen is something important in God’s history plan. Then he is told to write what he sees on a scroll to the seven churches. We will be looking at the letters to the churches as we journey through Revelation. “Revelation 1:11.”

“Revelation 1:12.” The lamp stands get us into the symbolism of Revelation. Children may remember from Sunday School or a class in Christian School that in the Tabernacle there was a lamp stand God designed. It had seven lamps on it, one in the middle and three on each side. Today we shape candelabra like that. We have one candle in the middle with six candles cascading down on each side. In Revelation we get a bit different picture. Now there is not one lamp stand with seven lamps, but seven lamp stands each representing a church. This seven times seven reminds us of Christ’s statement about forgiveness: 70 times 7. Lamp stands are chosen because the church is God’s light to the world. If the church loses God’s light it loses its reason to exist.

Notice the last clause of the chapter, “Revelation 1:20d.” Now let’s catch the context by looking at the whole verse. “Revelation 1:20.” The “mystery” which John writes about is not the way we use mystery today. We use the word to describe a puzzle or novel. The New Testament uses the word to mean that we need to look at the evidence from a certain angle to see the significance. For example, the seven churches that are addressed here were the seven cities that had a Roman Post Office. They symbolized that through the letter of Revelation, through the distribution of the Bible, through the Word Himself, the Lord Jesus, the church would spread its light. These churches also lie in a geographical crescent in Asia Minor. The stars reminded the people of the Constellation Pleiades. In the ancient world it was thought that these stars were held together with a chain. The churches should each read this letter of Revelation and each learn from it. It will enable them to hold hands like boys and girls playing “Pom, Pom, Pull Away” where one child tries to run through a line of friends holding hands tightly. John tells them by this symbolism, “Hold together like the Pleiades on a chain.” He also mentions the seven stars because seven stars were used on the Roman money. The seven stars stood for the total supremacy of the Roman Empire. Now John is saying, “The seven stars are in Christ’s hand. It is not the Roman Emperor who has the ultimate power, Christ does.” God’s sovereignty is stressed in this symbolism. The mystery is more like a hologram: The image changes depending the direction you hold the picture. The lamp stands can picture the Word of God being sent out, the importance of hanging together, or the power of Christ over the world and His exercise of that power through the church.

“Revelation 1:13-16.” We now have a description of Jesus. It is very close to the garments worn by the High Priest in the Old Testament. The description of His head and hair come right from Daniel 7’s description of God, “Daniel 7:9.” John sees the penetrating gaze of Christ, a penetrating gaze that is repeated in Revelation 2:18 in relationship to the church at Thyatira. “Revelation 2:18.” It is repeated again in the description of the return of the conquering Messiah in Revelation 19:12, “Revelation 19:12.” The bronze feet picture stability and durability. The fact that they are bright as brass just out a blast furnace pictures that from head to toe Jesus is a picture of purity. The sharp two-edged sword that comes from His mouth reminds us that Jesus is “the Word who became flesh and dwelt among us.” In writing to the church at Pergamum we read in Revelation 2:16, “Revelation 2:16.” The ultimate description is Jesus’ face shining as bright as looking into the brilliant sun. One must turn aside rather than look directly into the sun--or God’s Son. So it with God Himself! That is why Moses had to see the backside of God; not his face or he would be blinded and die. Brilliance is a picture of the glory of God. Rev. Herman Hoekesma sums it up in a single sentence, “All elements indicate Christ is the King-Judge.” We hear the song, “Our God is an awesome God.” Seldom do we realize just how awesome He is. John did in his vision, a vision he shares with you and me here in Revelation 1.

“Revelation 1:17.” The first thing John learns about Jesus is that He is kind. If you or I had seen this vision, we, like John, would have fallen down as though dead. Notice what Jesus does, “Then he placed his right hand on me.” This is the hand that holds the seven stars. This is the hand that has omnipotent power. This is the

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hand that touches John. And He said, “Do not be afraid. I am the first and the last. I am the living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive forever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades.” This is the mouth that has a sharp double-edged sword. This is the mouth that pronounces judgment saying to the sheep, “Enter my rest,” and to the goats, “Depart from me you doers of iniquity,” whose voice tells each person about death and Hades. That voice now speaks beginning with “Do not be afraid.”

Truth is important. Deviation from doctrine can ruin a church. Yet the One Who is Doctrine personified, the One who holds the stars and speaks with a double-edged sword, He first speaks words of kindness and peace, “Do not be afraid.” We fear that our congregation or denomination will lose the truth. We may fear that the faith of our fathers will not be the faith of our children. We may fear before the majesty of a mighty God who sees our sins through the purity of His vision. But His first words are “Do not be afraid.”

In the church climate today we should take a cue from Christ. While we know and must defend the right, we who are the bride should begin where our Groom does, “Do not be afraid.” Today the lines are drawn tightly in our denominational life. We have the joy and privilege of living our lives peacefully over here in Jasper County. We don’t get bent out of shape over denominational issues. Many of our brothers and sisters in our denomination do. Some are jumping up and down banging the drums of truth. It seems that for them truth is the only thing matters--the truth as they see it. We must echo the words of our Groom, “Do not be afraid.”

I don’t know where each of you are in your personal life. I know some have lost loved ones lately. I know some have been sick. I know some have had dreams shattered. I can’t know everyone here in the sanctuary, but this I do know. Christ comes to each of us and the first thing He does is calm us with the words, “Do not be afraid.” I know that here at Sully it is our desire to be a place where the words of Christ are echoed to each person. We desire to be and work to be a congregation in which you feel the presence of Jesus who says to each of us today, “Do not be afraid.” Let’s follow in the footsteps of Jesus, “Do not be afraid.”

There is a good reason we Christians do not have to be afraid. “Revelation 1:18.” Our Room is the God who is in charge. No wonder Romans 8:28 says, “Romans 8:28.” This is where our total security lies. We need not be afraid. Jesus is alive and He has the keys to hell and heaven. Trust Him! Serve Him! Believe Him! Love Him!

“Revelation 1:19.” That is exactly what John did. That is what has given us this special book at the end of the Bible. The next three messages from Revelation we will look at the seven churches and see what we can learn for our life together here at Sully. Obviously if the words written were just for those churches in that time, the Bible would be hopelessly outdated, but the Holy Spirit had John write these words for all churches in all ages. John’s words are exciting and fun. Be with us.

