

Catch the Vision!

Rev 1;1-20 NIV

SWAC am Ch 6/6/2010

Everywhere the churches were experiencing pagan opposition. But when God identified the most serious problems confronting Christians, they were *INSIDE* the churches. Congregations were plagued with: barren activism, fear of the future, sexual immorality, selfish pride, spiritual deadness, apathy and indifference.

What were the root causes of these problems? Some might have said that the problems could be overcome by pepping up the church services, or starting a new programme. But the Lord God made a different diagnosis. What was missing~ in these churches? Love for Christ, faithfulness to Him, commitment to the truth of God's Word, standing against evil, spiritual vitality. The difficulties in the Seven Churches in Rev 2 &3 were serious, and called for radical change -not a change of programme, or even performance merely, but a change of heart.

When the apostle John received the Revelation, the State persecution of Christians was well under way. Many might have thought that this was *the big threat* to their wellbeing. But the Letters to the Seven Churches (Rev 2 &3) identified *internal* problems... issues that have been seen in every generation since. What was needed was a clear word from God and a vision of Jesus Christ, the Lord of the Church. Through those Letters we are reminded that being a Christian is not just a matter of what you do, but why you do it. Heb 4:12 says: *For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.*

Being a Christian is not just a matter of looking good, but of being good.

1. Divine Revelation vv.1-2

The last book of the Bible has often been called the "Apocalypse" after the first main word in Ch.1 v, 1 '*Apocalupsis*' which means "Revelation" or "Unveiling". What we could not have seen. or known, by natural means has been revealed supernaturally.

Firstly, we notice that this book of the Bible is ;;*the re\`elation of Jesus Christ.* . It has that in common with all the other books of the Bible because a[1 divine revelation comes through Christ and centres all Him (Heb 1;1-2).

Secondly, it is a revelation which God gave to Christ. Our Lord Jesus is the great trustee of divine revelation. Through Him we know what we can expect from God and what He expects from us.

Thirdly, Christ "*made (the message) known by sending his angel*". The angels are God's messengers - Christ's servants. All spiritual and supernatural powers are under His authority.

Fourthly, the angel *communicated the message to John* -the servant of Christ. It was a message about the future: "*what must soon take place*"(v.1)

When God gave the Revelation, it was not to a religious hermit living in a cave, or to a mystic praying alone on a mountain. It was revealed to one who was probably the last apostle still living. John was highly respected in the Church as "*dearly loved*" by Christ (In 13:23). He was an eyewitness of Jesus' deeds and teaching, and an author of Holy Scripture: the fourth Gospel the three letters. and the Revelation. Nothing in the Revelation was contrived or imagined by John. This book of the Bible is truth from God revealed.

2. Three Vital Promises vv.3-8

A. The Revelation is the only book in the Bible that holds out a special promise to those who read it. Verse 3: "Blessed is the one who reads the words of this prophecy. and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it, because the time is near. "

We find this somewhat intriguing because many Christians shy away from reading this book because they say it's too difficult to understand. But God wants us to read it. I wonder if you have read it? The promise of v.3 should be our incentive.

(a) We can expect some difficulty because of the heavy Old Testament content (esp. from Daniel and Ezekiel). Most of *us* are not well versed in the OT. This means we are not at home in a book such as Hebrews, or the Revelation.

(b) Many Christians who have read the Revelation once or twice have given up because of details they don't understand. But they should keep reading and picking up on what they *DO* understand. The less obscure passages will become clearer in time.

(c) In the last book of the Bible we find some of the most exciting, some of the most encouraging facts about Christ that we can know. (It can be read aloud in little more than an hour.)

Anyone who decides not to read this book will miss out on one of the most enriching experiences a Christian can have. I'd like to suggest A Little Project read Revelation without pausing from Ch. 1 to Ch.22. I will be amazed if you don't come out with an overwhelming impression. (*Someone might tell us about it next week?*)

Verse 3 reminds us that it is a privilege to read the Bible ourselves. It is also a blessing to hear it read by others who are qualified to explain the meaning. However, it doesn't end there. Verse 3 says we are to «*take it to heart*». It is much more than a mental exercise. We must apply the Bible in our lives. Bible reading must lead to Bible doing. God has given us the Bible so that we (... and HE) can change our lives!

Verse 4 explains the transmission process. The message --the Revelation--was given by God the Father to His Son Jesus (v.1). Jesus gave it to "*his angel*". The angel gave it to John. And John passed it on to "*the seven churches in the province of Asia*" (v.4)

The broad principle still applies. Those who want to know God's truth can expect to find it in churches where the apostles' teaching is the rule. From the earliest days of the Christian Church the teaching of the apostles was the standard by which all other ideas were tested (eg. Ac 2:42). The life-giving message to be proclaimed by Christian churches is the Word of God -the Holy Bible. Christians are to honour and serve Jesus Christ as I-le has explained. He must be central in our thinking and our practice.

Brothers and sisters, when you understand the 1st Chapter of the Revelation, you realise the solemn responsibility of the pastors and elders of Christian churches. They are to preach and teach the Bible -God's revelation -in all its breadth and balance. They are to honour and exalt the Lord Jesus Christ as our King, and King of the universe. And we who claim to be Christians must respond to the Word of God and live it out day-by-day (Rev 1;3).

B. A second great promise is found in verse 7 ...

Look, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him. even those who pierced him; and all the peoples of the earth will mourn because of him. So shall it be! Amen.

The last book of the Bible begins and ends with a prediction of the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ This truth should never be far from our minds. Think about this when you watch the news at night. When you are badly treated or wrongly accused, remember that Jesus is coming. When you read or hear about the suffering of Christians in various parts of the world, recall that the Judge of all the earth is coming to wreak vengeance on those who hate Him. and to vindicate and honour those who love Him. The whole history of the world is moving towards that end-point.

C. Verse 8 reaffirms the sovereignty of our Lord .Jesus Christ.

Like God the Father (v.4) and the Holy Spirit ("*seven spirits*" v.4), Jesus is eternal. This is expressed in Rev 1:8 as: "*Alpha and Omega*" (cf. In 1;1-3 Col 1:16-17 Heb 13:8 Rev 1:17 2:8 22:13). Since Jesus is Lord of all from eternity (past) to eternity (future). we know that we have the ultimate security through our relationship with Him, nothing and no one can hinder the purposes *of the Almighty*". The Day of Reckoning is a certainty. For genuine believers it will mark the fulfilment of our salvation. That prospect strengthens and comforts us through the tough times. how we come to ...

3. A Glorious Vision of the Lord Jesus Christ vv.9-20

In v.9 the apostle writes

9 I, John, your brother and companion in the suffering and kingdom and patient endurance that are ours in Jesus, was on the island of Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.

We understand that John was exiled on the Isle of Patmos because of the State persecution of Christians (v. 1). He and the rest of God's people needed reassurance and renewed hope. What they needed was a fresh vision of the Lord Jesus Christ.

In the Church today. the same need exists. but for a range of reasons. In affluent societies like ours our vision is dominated by the Sony or the Samsung. The images being processed by our minds have been chosen for us by TV programmers. Many of them run counter to Christian thinking and principles.

In parts of the world where poverty rules. people are bending all their energies to acquire enough food to exist. They are living literally from-hand-to mouth. Christians there are more likely to be Christ-centred.

In other places where believers are being tortured and shot, we can assume they are thinking about Jesus and eternity.

How often are we thinking about Him and His plan for our lives? Have we become so distracted by our worries and problems that we have lost sight of Him. Are we so focussed on what we have, that we have lost sight of what we are missing? It took a widespread persecution to awaken the seven churches to their need.

Put simply, the first thing that John saw in his vision (vv.10-17) was Jesus Christ standing in the midst of the seven churches. ([hat is the meaning of "lamp stands" - see v.20). The "seven stars" or "angels" are the pastors of the churches. The Lord of the Church (Capital "C") is not only accessible to His people. He stands in the midst of the congregations (v.13a).

The risen Lord has told John to write on a scroll what he sees (v.11) and send it to the seven churches, The revelation must certainly be inspiring for the aged and exiled apostle. But it is also meant for the seven churches, and all churches. It remains true that Jesus is among the churches. He is in OUR church. He wants us to reflect His light to those around us. He is Lord, not only of the Church, but of the universe. This is the meaning of the phrase: "son of man" (v. 13). It comes from Dan 7: 13-14 in reference to a mighty ruler -One who would reign over His people and His enemies. 1Chron 29;11)

The expressions in vv.10-17 cover a wide range and repay careful study. Broadly speaking, they refer to Jesus' supreme majesty, great high priesthood, infinite wisdom, and power over life and death. John says simply (v. 17) *When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead.* There was nothing artificial about John's reaction. He was awestruck. There was nothing he could say. The experience was overwhelming. Although John was an elderly apostle and great spiritual leader, he was utterly humbled .. almost overcome by fear. He describes the next development v.17b *Then (the Son of Man) placed his right hand on me and said: "Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last."* In tender love the Lord Jesus reassured Him. *"Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last..."*

In our services today, there will be Christians who are worried and some who are casual -even indifferent. Others will be confident, and perhaps one or two in despair. I don't know your situation, but I assure you of this: there is no substitute for knowing Jesus His power and His love. We stand where they stood: the aged apostle, the pastors, and the members of the Seven Churches.

What we all need is ...

The Glorious Vision of the Lord Jesus Christ