

A VISION OF JESUS CHRIST

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Scripture Reading: Revelations 1:1-13

Today I would like to deliver a message from the Bible that I hope can help all of us deal with the terrible reality of the present as well as realities of the future.

The President of the United States, along with other leaders of our nation, has been trying to deliver a message that will inspire hope and courage. *We must not allow terrorism to break our spirits. We must not allow acts of terror to cause us to lose our freedom. Our freedom is being attacked; and in order to defend our freedom, we will find the terrorist group or groups that are responsible and deal justice to them and to any country that harbors them. In the meantime, we must go on with our lives. The United States will survive this test, and the people of this great nation will prevail over the forces of evil. God bless America.*

This is short summary of the message of encouragement that I hear from our leaders in government. I believe it is a message that we must take to heart. And I believe that we should support the leaders of our nation, especially in such a time as this.

Last week I spoke on the need for courage and discipline while fighting in God's army. This week, in the face of immense tragedy and threat to our country from terrorist forces, I once again want to make an appeal to be strong and courageous.

But I must say some things today that political leaders would find difficult to say on public television or radio even if they believed them to be true. Political leaders encourage us to be strong and courageous and they even encourage us to turn to God. For this we are thankful. However, public leaders must be careful not to become too theological. Their statements about God must be kept very general, lest they violate the law that separates church and state.

However, to face the terrible tragedy of the present as well as the tragedies of the future, we desperately need theology. We need a vision of God that is clear. In fact, true hope and courage can only come by first attaining a correct vision of God. With a correct vision of God we shall overcome. Without such a vision, we shall surely despair.

Let me share with you a vision of God as it is presented in the last book of the Bible, the book of Revelation. It is the vision the apostle John received while on the island of Patmos.

What did the apostle John see when he was on that island? For those of you who have read the book of Revelation, you know that he saw many strange and confusing things. He saw many wild beasts. He saw angels. He saw war and many kinds of natural disasters. He saw heaven and hell in conflict. He saw the whole universe undergoing radical change. But most important of all, John saw Jesus.

In the first verse of the first chapter John writes, “The revelation of Jesus Christ which God gave him to show his servants.” In order to give comfort and hope and courage to his brothers and sisters, John, more than anything else, wants us to see Jesus Christ the same way he saw Jesus Christ.

There are actually four visions of Jesus Christ recorded in the book of Revelation, and John wants us to see them all. The book can be divided into four sections. Each section begins with the same words. In chapter 1 verse 10 John says, “On the Lord’s day I was in the spirit.” In chapter 4 verse 2 he says, “At once I was in the Spirit...” In the third verse of the seventeenth chapter we see similar words. There he says, “an angel carried me away in the Spirit.” And finally chapter 21 verse 10 says, “he carried me away in the Spirit.” Chapter 1, chapter 4, chapter 17, and chapter 21 mark the beginnings of four distinct sections in this book, and each section gives us a clear revelation of Jesus Christ. Let’s look at these sections one by one. And as we look at each section, we are going to ask ourselves three questions. First, we are going to ask where Jesus is. Then we are going to look at His description. And, finally, we are going to see what He is doing.

Let’s begin now with the first of the four visions of Jesus Christ. Please follow along with me as I read Revelation 1:10-17, and notice how Christ is revealed in the first section. “On the Lord’s Day I was in the Spirit, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet, which said: Write on a scroll what you see and send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and, and Laodicea. I turned around to see the voice that was speaking to me. And when I turned I saw seven golden lamp stands, and among the lamp stands was someone like a son of man, dressed in a robe reaching down to his feet and with a golden sash around his chest. His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and his eyes were like blazing fire. His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of rushing waters. In his right hand he held seven stars, and out of his mouth came a sharp double-edged sword. His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance. When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead.”

Please notice where Jesus is in this vision. The seven gold lamp stands mentioned in verse twelve represent the seven churches to whom the letter is being sent. In this vision Jesus is walking among the churches. And then notice the description of Jesus. His head and hair are white like wool, as white as snow. Here we see One who has existed throughout the ages. He is eternal. His eyes are like a blazing fire, able to see through anything. Here we see One who is omniscient, He knows and understands all things. His feet are like bronze glowing in a fire--a reference to the omnipresence of Christ. He is present everywhere at any time. His voice is like the sound of rushing waters. When He speaks, He does so with absolute authority. In His hands are held seven stars. These stars most likely refer to the leaders of the seven churches. Here we see Christ involved with the leaders of the churches. In His hands, these leaders receive comfort and instruction. Out of His mouth came a sharp, double-edged sword. This is a reference to the absolute truth of the words He speaks. Christ is truth. His face is like the sun, shining in all its brilliance—a reference to Christ’s absolute holiness. So the Christ described here is eternal, all knowing, all present, processes absolute authority, cares about the leaders of

His church, speaks with absolute truth, and possesses perfect holiness. No wonder when John saw Him, he fell to his feet as though he were dead. And this eternal, omniscient, omnipresent, all powerful, caring, truthful, and holy Christ is walking among the churches.

Then notice the activity of Jesus in this first vision. If you read the first three chapters, you will discover that Jesus is encouraging the churches to persevere despite all kinds of opposition they face. He is rebuking and instructing the churches so that they will overcome evil and bring glory to God by being a holy witness to the world.

So, in this first vision, we notice seven attributes used to describe our Lord, and we see Him walking among the churches, helping the churches to overcome evil be the kind of witnesses God wants them to be.

And how can this vision help us face the tragedies of our day? All day Tuesday I felt numb and paralyzed as the reality of what happened hit me. Then I heard President Bush encourage Americans everywhere to keep going. He said, tomorrow (that is Wednesday) the government offices will reopen and government officials will come to work and the airlines will begin to operate again and the financial institutes will go on. He was basically proclaiming to the public that this tragedy, as awful as it is, is not going to stop our great nation from doing what we were doing before the tragedy.

That word of encouragement reminded me of this first magnificent vision of Jesus Christ recorded in the book of Revelation. Infinitely greater than any world leader, Jesus walks among the churches and, in essence, says, "Get back on your feet and keep going." Despite this disaster or that sin which besets you, focus your attention on Me, and you shall overcome. Jesus speaks words to us that are intended to help us overcome the temptation to quit in our pursuit to be a holy witness. We are to have strength and courage so that we will persevere to the end.

Can you see the similarities and differences between what we hear public leaders saying and what we hear our Lord saying in this first vision? Both our saying, "we shall overcome." However, for the public leader, "overcoming" means not allowing the enemy to stop us from maintaining our free lifestyle that we enjoy. What you will not hear the public leaders say is this: "Overcoming means obeying the moral law recorded in the Bible (The Ten Commandments) despite how badly we are treated by others."

But this is exactly what Jesus is saying to the churches in this first vision. To Jesus, "overcoming" means not allowing attacks of evil from without or within cause us to lose our holiness. In Revelation 2:7 Jesus says "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will grant to eat of the tree of life..." Revelation 2:11 says, "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death..." The words, "he who overcomes" are repeated over and over. Verse 17: "To him who overcomes, I will give some of the hidden manna." Verse 26: "To him who overcomes and does my will to the end, I will give authority over the nations." Revelation 3:5, "He who overcomes will be dressed in white. Revelation 3:12, "To him who overcomes I will make a pillar in the

temple. And in Revelation 3:21 we read, "To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne..."

This is a strong message to the churches to take courage and keep on persevering to the end despite all the external and internal attacks upon our holiness.

President Bush has told us not give up the fight for freedom and to not allow these acts of terror to interfere with our way of life. He has also promised us that our powerful nation will find the enemy and justice will be carried out and we will remain a strong nation in the end. And He has encouraged us to turn to God. I believe President Bush has said as much as can be said by a public leader without getting into trouble. But we need to hear more.

We need the words of One who is greater than any world leader. In our first vision of Jesus, we see Him as One who is eternal, all knowing, all present, possesses absolute authority, cares deeply about the leaders of the Church, speaks with absolute truth, and possesses perfect holiness. This Jesus is also telling us not to give up the fight for freedom. And He is also promising us that we shall overcome the enemy. But Jesus is not addressing a political nation; rather, He is talking to His church. And the freedom we must fight to preserve is not the freedom to live a certain lifestyle; rather, it is the freedom to live holy lives. And the way we fight is not with swords and missiles; rather, it is with prayer and faithful witness to the truth. And the way we persevere in battle is by keeping our eyes on Jesus.

We won't persevere to the end by keeping our eyes on government leaders. The promises that world leaders make may be sincere, but they are not guaranteed promises. And we won't persevere by keeping our eyes on church leaders. The churches mentioned in this first vision were full of problems, and the same is true with churches today. The key is to keep our eyes on Jesus as He is described in this first vision. If we keep our eyes on this eternal, omniscient, omnipresent, all powerful, caring, truthful, and holy Christ who is present here in this room even as I speak, then we will have the strength to go on regardless of what is happening around us and regardless of what is happening in the world or in the church. We shall overcome.

Now please notice the second vision of Christ that begins in the fourth chapter of the book of Revelation. Rather than reading through this section, I will select two verses from the fifth chapter. Please follow along with me as I read Revelation 5:6-7. "Then I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing in the center of the throne, encircled by the four living creatures and the elders. He had seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth. He came and took the scroll from the right hand of him who sat on the throne."

Here, in verse six, we see Jesus standing in the center of the throne. This is the throne of heaven. In the Bible the throne of heaven is a place of absolute authority over all the events which take place in history. So, in this second vision, we see Christ in control of all the events of history. And notice His description. He is described as having seven horns, seven eyes, which are the seven spirits. In the first vision we saw symbolic language used

to describe seven attributes of Christ. Here we see again the sevenfold Spirit of God. Although His position has changed in this vision, His character has not. He is still the same Jesus. He is still the same eternal, omniscient, omnipresent, all powerful, all caring, full of truth and holiness God. But besides these seven attributes, there is one other listed here. In verse six, John said that he saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain. This is probably the most significant part of this vision. The One who is at the throne of heaven, controlling all events, is a Lamb who has been slain. A Savior is controlling history. In this large section of scripture, the Lamb is given a scroll, and then He proceeds to break the seals on the scroll. After each seal is broken, a portion of the scroll opens and history begins to unfold. In verse 1 of chapter 6 He breaks the first seal. In verse 3 of the same chapter the second seal is broken. In verse 5 another. In verse 7 another. In verse 9 another. In verse 12 another. And finally in the first verse of the eighth chapter the final seal is broken. In each case, when a seal is broken, terrible things happen. Disasters and suffering of all kinds take place upon the earth. The activity of Jesus in this vision is to unfold future history; and when He does, the picture is a terrible one. But we must never forget that the One who is unfolding this history is a Lamb who is slain, and His primary goal is to save.

Christ is allowing these terrible things to happen for reasons that we may never understand. I would advise you not to give simple answers to people who are struggling with the question of why did God allow such a terrible thing to happen? I personally cannot explain why God allowed what happened last Tuesday to happen. But I must understand that the One who allowed it to happen is the Lamb who is slain. For the sake of my own sanity, I must see that these things have not happened in vain. It is far too early to know all the good things that might come out of this tragedy, but I am sure that some people have begun to seek salvation who otherwise would not have.

The man-made and natural disasters we read about in this second section of Revelation will increase in frequency and intensity right up to the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. As much as we pray and hope for peace in our world, we can't be blind to the reality that there is more violence and suffering and persecution in the world today than ever before. For example, it is reported that more Christians were martyred in the 20th century than all previous 19 centuries put together. The wars and conflicts of the 20th century also testify to the fact that our modern world continues to grow more violent. It is estimated that as many as 50 million Chinese lost their lives during the Cultural Revolution, and that happened in my lifetime.

And I can go on with many more examples to illustrate how violence and suffering in our world continues to increase. But there is another side of the story. Church historians will also point out that more people have converted to Christianity during the 20th century than ever before. There are many times more Christians in Mainland China than there were prior to the Cultural Revolution. There seems to be a direct relationship between the amount of suffering and the number of people who are being saved. As one increases, so does the other. The One who is unfolding history is a Lamb, and His primary activity is to save. Remember this vision, because you will need it in order to face the future.

And now let us consider the third vision. It begins in the seventeenth chapter. But I am

going to skip over to the nineteenth chapter and ask you to follow along with me as I read verses 11 through 16. "I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice he judges and makes war. His eyes are like blazing fire, and on his head are many crowns. He has a name written on him that no one knows but he himself. He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is the Word of God. The armies of heaven were following him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean. Out of his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. He will rule them with an iron scepter. He treads the wine press of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty. On his robe and on his thigh he has this name written: King of Kings and Lord of Lords."

Where is Jesus in this vision? In the first vision we saw Him among the churches. In the second he was at the throne of heaven. Here we see him in the universe at the end of the age. In this section of the book of Revelation we see the world as we now know it coming to an end. It is a vision of Jesus at the end of the age. If you read through the symbolic language which describes Him in this vision, you will notice that He is the same Jesus as before. His eyes are still like blazing fire. Out of His mouth still comes a sword. Jesus is the same yesterday, today, and forever. He will never change. And notice His activity. In the first vision we saw Jesus working to encourage the churches to overcome. In the second vision He was working to save the people of the world. But here His activity is not to encourage, nor is it to save; rather, it is to destroy. With justice He judges and makes war against anything and everything that opposes God.

Have you heard the story of David who slew Goliath, the leader of the Philistine army? After their leader was defeated, David then led the Israelite army in pursuit of the enemy in order to destroy them. In the same way, here we have a vision of Christ who has already defeated Satan on the cross now leading the army of God to completely destroy the enemies of God.

While attending college I made a decision to commit my life to Christ. Shortly after that I attempted to defend my faith in a speech class. After the speech the teacher told me that although she respected what I had to say, she could not believe in a God who would let so many cruel things take place on this earth. The injustice she saw was preventing her from believing in God. But the vision of Jesus here tells us that total justice will be met out at the end of the age. No one will get away with sins committed against God or against man. This world is going to come to an end. There will be a final judgment. These things are clearly stated in the Bible. People all over the world are crying "Unfair! Unfair!" There is no political system where we can find justice for all. Political leaders may promise justice, but they will never be able to totally deliver on the promise. However, in this vision, we see that, in the end, there will be justice for all. Without this vision, nothing makes sense.

Finally, in chapters 21 and 22 of the book of Revelation, we find the last vision of Jesus Christ. Here we read about a new heaven and a new earth. In this vision we see Jesus in Paradise. In this vision we see Jesus described seven times as the Lamb of God. Throughout eternity we will remember that we were saved by the blood of the Lamb, and we will be thankful. In this vision Jesus is described as the groom who has come to receive

His bride, the church. Here we see that there is no need for a temple made with earthly hands, because the Lamb of God is all we will need. He will be with us throughout eternity. He will wipe the tears from our eyes. There will be no more death and suffering. The comforts of this life cannot even begin to compare with the blessings those who belong to God will experience in Paradise. Any Christian who is suffering from a terminal illness or who knows he does not have much time left upon this earth should often meditate on this vision, for it is a preview of things to come. Actually, even those of us who think we still have a long time to live should often meditate on this vision, lest we place too much emphasis on things that are sure to perish.

And we should keep the other three visions in mind as well. In Revelation 1:3 John says, "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." When we see Jesus walking among the churches, encouraging them to keep going despite adversity...When we see Him as a Savior who is controlling and unfolding the events of history in such a way as to save people...When we see Him as the One who will make everything fair at the end of the age where there will be a final judgment...And when we see Him as our Savior and Friend who will dwell with us forever in Paradise, then we shall be blessed. We will receive comfort and hope. We shall persevere to do God's will even in the midst of suffering.

Thank God for this fourfold vision. This week, take some time away from watching television to meditate on these things. It is natural for us to desire to know the details of this terrible tragedy and to speculate on how our nation will retaliate. I believe there will be severe retaliation and that many people, including people who are opposed to terrorism, will be killed. And though my heart desires for a better world and I want to do everything in my power to make this a better world, I know suffering and violence is going to increase. The terrible wars and natural disasters of the 21st century are going to happen. It is a reality from which we cannot run.

Let those of us who have experienced God's saving grace in our lives cling to the visions of Christ given in the book of Revelation. Let us cling to them with all of our hearts, and we shall overcome. Though we may not live to an old age, and though we may live to see the day when the United States as we know it no longer exists, with God's grace and the help of these visions, our testimony can remain holy and strong to the end. We shall overcome.