

Heaven, Part II

We Will See Christ As He Really Is!

2 Thessalonians 1:10; Revelation 1:12-17

by Doug Sterrett

A sculptor once carved a magnificent lion out of solid stone. When asked how he had accomplished such a wonderful masterpiece, he replied, "It was easy. All I did was to chip away everything that didn't look like a lion." I like to think of myself as a block of stone. Others may think of me like that too! No matter, for God is busy chipping away everything about me that doesn't look like Christ. And when I emerge from the stone and gaze upon the heavenly scene, as my vision clears, I don't think it will be scenery in that heavenly place, or the specially prepared mansion awaiting me, or the New Jerusalem, or even my waiting loved ones that first capture my attention. I will be awestruck by and totally focused upon Jesus. As Paul promises in 2nd Thessalonians 1:10, "*On the day when the Lord Jesus comes all the people who have believed will be amazed at Jesus.*" And I truly believe that when you and I emerge from our stony prisons of sin into the new heaven and new earth we will not give a thought to anything but Jesus and we will be amazed. That's what happened to John. Listen as he tells what happened in Revelation 1:12-17 (NIV):

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 Laodicea. I turned around to see the voice that was speaking to me. And when I turned I saw seven golden lampstands, and among the lampstands 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. Then he placed his right hand on me and said: Do not be afraid.

The beloved Apostle who had spent three years with Jesus in person was so awe struck at the sight of the heavenly Jesus that he fainted! At the end of a long life, as God chipped the last few pieces of stone away Jesus appeared greater than John could comprehend. But once Jesus assured him, told him not to be afraid, John recovered and dug down into his bag of metaphors and tried to tell us about the indescribable Jesus. What did he see? What can we expect to see?

First, we will see Jesus as the perfect priest. Verse 13 says, "*He was dressed in a long robe and had a gold band around his chest.*"

Remember, just as in his description of the city coming down from heaven which I told about in my last sermon, John was seeing something he simply could not adequately describe. He had to use metaphors, symbols of reality to give us a hint of this awesome sight. In the description of the city he used the phrase "like a" and proceeded to describe a city "adorned like a bride," with streets made of transparent gold, etc. In this case he sees one "like a son of man". Thus, we know that he literally saw a man, but this man was "like" Jesus who had called himself "the Son of Man" yet he was different from the person John had known before. It is the difference John is trying to portray in this word picture. Thus, he speaks of a man dressed in a long robe with a gold sash around his chest. The early church knew the significance of this dress. Jesus wore the clothing of a priest--one who presents people to God and God to people.²

Presbyterian ministers have some priest like duties, i.e., we administer the sacraments and intercede for you with God. But we do not call ourselves priests because we firmly believe that every true believer is a priest of God. Anyone can approach God directly. Any believer has the right to and responsibility to intercede on behalf of someone else. We call this the "priesthood of the believer." The limiting factor is that every human priest is sinful and thus needs someone to ultimately intercede with God on his or her behalf.

Jesus needs no one to intercede on His behalf. Hebrews 7:26 tells us that "*Jesus is the kind of high priest we need. He is holy, sinless, pure, not influenced by sinners, and he is raised above the heavens.*" He is the perfect priest and as such He is pure and can purify you and me. Somehow John knew this just by looking at the heavenly Jesus and again used earthly symbols to portray the image of what he was seeing. "*His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and his eyes were like flames of fire.*" (Rev. 1:14) Wool--remember he was looking at a sinless person in a sinless environment. What would such a person look like? No worry lines, no wrinkled brow. no selfishness in his smile. He would be unlike anyone we have ever seen. Such purity reminded John of clean, white wool, of newly fallen, unspoiled snow. You and I will emerge into heaven and the first thing we will see is Jesus as a priest; white-haired, snow-pure, and white hot and we will be purified by the gaze of Christ!

Secondly, we will see the absolute strength of Jesus. "*His feet were like bronze that glows hot in a furnace.* (v. 15) Eugene Peterson explains:

Bronze is a combination of iron and copper. Iron is strong but it rusts. Copper won't rust but it's pliable. Combine the two in bronze and the best quality of each is preserved, the strength of the iron and the endurance of the copper. The rule of Christ is set on this base: the foundation of his power is tested by fire."³

Every power you have ever seen has decayed. Several years ago I went on vacation full of vim and vigor, looking forward to spending a week and a half building on our cottage at Massanetta Springs Presbyterian Camp and Conference Center near Harrisonburg, VA. I couldn't wait to pick up my hammer and get to work. It was in the hottest part of August and after the first day I was almost dehydrated. By the end of that week and a half I hurt so bad that I didn't even want to think about picking up a hammer. It took me a whole week of rest here in Boone to get over the pain and feel like doing anything physical again. What happened to my strength, my

power? It decayed until my body literally stopped. All power and every ounce of strength weakens and stops. But, as John looked upon the heavenly Jesus he somehow knew he was looking upon a strength, a power that would never decay or be surpassed. When you see him you will for the first time see true strength. A strength that will never decay and will always be available for you. Indeed, it will be the source of your own strength.

Thirdly, we will hear the soothing sound of Christ's voice. The sound of a voice can be more important than the words spoken. Turn around and say to the person beside you, "I love you." Now, did the sound of your voice convince that person that you really do love him or her? Think about the sound of a voice for a moment. If you say "I love you" in a grumbling way, the person to whom you speak will not feel loved. But if you embrace that person as a parent often does a tearful child who has done wrong and say to that person, "Its all right, I love you." By the action and tone of your voice the person will know he or she is loved.

John felt as if he was near a waterfall as he heard the loving words of Jesus. "*His voice was like the noise of flooding water*" (v. 15). This is not a timid sound. In our cottage here in Boone we are never more than 15 feet from a rolling, boiling mountain stream. As it tumbles over the rocks about 3 feet horizontally and eight feet vertically from where our sleeping heads lie in our bedroom you can hear the constant, lulling sound of a small water fall. Everywhere you walk in that house you hear that water running. Even when everything else sleeps, the falling, tumbling water speaks. It is a sound we love for when we hear it all the pressures of the world seem far away and we know that this is a place of rest and refuge. The same is true of the voice of Christ. In heaven his voice is a voice always heard--a steady, loving, soothing, commanding presence.

Finally, we will see love in action. Though he undoubtedly had felt the touch of the Carpenter's callused hands John had never seen such hands as those he was seeing now. He tells us that "*He held the seven stars in his right hand*" (v. 16). The right hand in Scripture is the picture of readiness. It is a picture of action. And John sees in Christ's hand the angels of the churches, held like a soldier readies his weapon or a carpenter grips his hammer ready to strike a nail, Jesus holds the angels, ready to send them to protect his people. In a flash, even as Rome persecuted the church and kept John imprisoned, John was reassured! He suddenly knew by looking at the heavenly Jesus that our Lord has one priority, the protection of His church, his people. The stars are angels who symbolize Jesus holding the church, his people, in the palm of his right hand. He is prepared to protect his own.

He directs them with his word. "*And a sharp double edged sword came out of his mouth.*" (v. 16). This points to the Word of God -- known to us now in written form as the Bible. But, as we emerge into heaven we will constantly hear the soothing and power filled words of Jesus. The sound of his voice soothes the soul, but the truth of his voice pierces the soul. Hebrews 4:12-13 teaches us that "*God's word is alive and working and is sharper than a double-edged sword. It cuts all the way into us, where the soul and spirit are joined, to the center of our joints and bones. And it judges the thoughts and feelings in our hearts. Nothing in all the world can be hidden from God.*"

As God chips away whatever does not look like Christ from the stony block that holds us we will emerge into the new heaven and the new earth and the first thing we will see will be Jesus as he truly is--no more half truths, no more misunderstanding. Shadows will be banished by the face of Christ in this new heaven and new earth for truth will reign. John completes this image by saying that "*His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance*" (Rev. 1:16) Never again will we live in darkness for He will be the light of our life.

Max Lucado points out that when you see Jesus: "You will see unblemished purity and unbending strength. You will feel his unending presence and know his unbridled protection. And -- all that he is, you will be, for you will be like Jesus. Wasn't that the promise of John? "*We know that when Christ comes again, we will be like him, because we will see him as he really is*" (1 John 3:2). Max Lucado assures us that:

"Since you'll be pure as snow, you will never sin again.

"Since you will be as strong as bronze, you will never feel lonely again.

"Since the work of the priest will have been finished, you will never doubt again.

"When Christ comes, you will dwell in the light of God. And you will see him as he really is."⁴

Psalms 24:8-10

Who is this King of glory?
The Lord strong and mighty,
the Lord mighty in battle.
Lift up your heads, O ye gates;
even lift them up, ye everlasting doors;
and the King of glory shall come in.
Who is this King of glory?
The Lord of hosts, he is the King of glory.

And we shall see Heaven through Him.

1. Morgan, Robert J., *Nelson's Complete Book of Stories, Illustrations, and Quotes*, "Chipping Away", Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2000, p. 103
2. Max Lucado, *When Christ Comes*, Nashville: Word Publishing 1999, p. 133.
3. *Ibid.*
4. *Ibid.*, p. 137.

