

Revelation A Wednesday Night Bible Study

Lesson #4
Revelation 1:17-20
7/12/2006

Revelation 1:17 And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead. And he laid his right hand upon me, saying unto me, Fear not; I am the first and the last:

Revelation 1:18 I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death.

Back in verse eleven John told us that he heard a great voice behind him, “as of a great trumpet.” Then he turned to see the One Who spoke. From that time, in verse 12, John has been describing the One he saw. He continued in verse 13 by telling us that the One he saw was “like unto the Son of man.” In other words, he saw Jesus.

Verse seventeen begins by describing his actions when he saw Jesus. It is the first description of an act of worship in the book. It indicates to us how we are likely to respond to seeing Jesus in heaven.

Before we continue it is appropriate for us to ask ourselves a question. Does how John respond to recognizing that he is in the presence of Jesus provide any guidance for how we should worship Him while we are here on earth. Surely it does. Surely it indicates something about how we are to worship our Lord here if this is the way we will worship Him in heaven.

“...when I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead...”

John ***“fell at His feet as one dead.”*** He was overcome with fear, quite a contrast with the attitude many express towards Jesus today. Yes, before we finish the verse we see that Jesus told him not to fear. However, we need to stop and consider what prompted this type of response from John and, as we think about John’s response to Jesus, we might do well to think about our attitudes and actions when we come before Him. There are some things we need to consider.

First, Jesus was no stranger to John. When Jesus walked upon the earth there was no one closer to Jesus than John and, though it had been about sixty years since Jesus had last walked and talked with John on the earth in His physical body, the memory would certainly have been clear to John. John walked with, ate with, talked with Jesus person to person. Then Jesus died upon the cross and appeared to John in His resurrection body. That was the situation when John had last seen Jesus. Though Jesus was in His resurrection body the last time John saw Him, He apparently looked very much like what John had been used to seeing, but things were different now.

Second, John had just described the Jesus he saw in heaven (verses 13-16). Jesus looked drastically different now. He was looking at the glorified Jesus. He was seeing Jesus in His heavenly body. Though John had respected and adored Jesus when He was here on the earth we have no record of him falling down before Him in fear. As John looked upon Jesus, the Jesus he loved and with Whom he had spent three years, it was the same Jesus, but different. Previously, the Jesus John had seen had been without His glory. He had been in His state of humility, “in the form of a servant” (Philippians 2:7).

Third, since that time, the ***“Father had highly exalted Him and given Him a name which is above every name”*** (Philippians 2:9). The Father had glorified Jesus with the glory which He had with the Father before the foundation of the world (John 17:5) and restored to Jesus everything He had willingly left behind in heaven when He humbled Himself to incarnate Himself in a human body.

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Therefore, we can better understand John's holy fear and overcoming sense of reverential awe when he saw Jesus for the first time in heaven. The Jesus John saw is Jesus as He is today — Awesome, Holy, Fearsome, Righteous and Omnipotent! It is the same Jesus we go before when we pray and worship God.

If the recognition of this fact weigh upon our minds and we realize that we enter into the presence of such a Awesome, Holy, Righteous, Omnipotent Jesus when we worship it will surely affect how we present ourselves before Him. We will not dare to treat Him as trivial or common or irreverently. We may also think, like John, that we should fall upon our faces before Him!

John was conscious of his sinfulness in the presence of His Lord. Even though we, like John, have had our sin covered by His blood in order that we might be clothed in His righteousness, we should also be aware of our sinfulness in the presence of One Who is so holy, righteous and omnipotent.

God The Father had restored Jesus to His pre-incarnate glory when John saw Him. He had ***“highly exalted Him and given Him a name which is above every name”*** and at that name ***“every knee shall someday bow and every tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is Lord...”*** (Philippians 2:9-11). When the unrepentant sinner bows his knee and makes his confession it will do him no good for he will then be cast into the eternal ***“lake of fire”*** (Revelation 20:15), but for John there was nothing to fear because his sins had been covered and forgiven to be ***“remembered no more”*** (Hebrews 10:17).

“And he laid his right hand upon me, saying unto me, Fear not.”

As John turned towards the voice he acknowledged in verse ten and described what he saw in verses twelve through sixteen, he saw Jesus presenting Himself in this new form as He had been glorified by The Father. He had never seen Jesus like this before and, as we have pointed out, it brought into sharp focus the contrast of his sinfulness and Jesus' holiness. His actions reflected that and the words and actions of his Lord reflected His character also.

Jesus, who had walked and talked with John on the earth, was now at the right hand of God The Father. Whereas He had come to this earth as a servant of man and a substitute for sinful man, having been restored to His position of glory, He was now serving in His priestly role of intercessor, interceding for His own. And John was one of His own.

God's Word tells us that He is ***“at the right hand of God ... making intercession for us”*** (Romans 8:34) and that He ***“ever liveth to make intercession”*** for us (Hebrews 7:25). He is indeed our ***“High priest Who is set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens”*** (Hebrews 8:1).

Thus, our Divine Intercessor reached out a tender, loving hand and placed it reassuringly upon John and calmed his fear with His soft voice of omnipotent authority saying, ***“Fear not.”*** He had every right to make that statement for He had indeed paid for John's sins, clearing away his guilt that had stood between him and the presence of God. It is as true for us as it was for John. All that He was to John, He is to us who are His as well.

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Jesus gave four reasons why He could tell John to **“fear not.”**

1. “I am the first and the last:”

Jesus was in eternity before time and He will be in eternity when time is no more. Nothing came before Him and nothing will come after Him. The Psalmist said, “Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God” (Psalm 90:2).

2. “I am he that liveth, and was dead.”

This can be read as “I am the living One Who became dead.” This speaks of His voluntary death and victorious resurrection. He knows what it is to be dead and He knows what it is like to have victory over death because He defeated it and emptied it of its power (Hebrews 2:14) and has given to us that same victory (1 Corinthians 15:54-57).

3. “Behold, I am alive for evermore.”

This refers to His present state. As we have said previously, He is at the right hand of the throne of God The Father making intercession for us, forever! Death cannot touch Him again. It is now empty and without any strength, not only for Him, but for us also for we are in Him.

4. “And have the keys of hell and of death.”

The keys speak of authority. It does not matter where death has placed its victims for He has the keys and at His choosing and time will set the victims free forever!

Revelation 1:19 Write the things which thou hast seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter;

These verses give us the chronological order and divisions of this Book of Revelation in three time series: past, present, and future.

1. “Write the things which thou hast seen.”

Up to this point what had John seen? He had seen Jesus in His earthly ministry and he had seen the glorified Christ. He had seen how this book focuses on the glorified Christ and reveals to us His eternal deity and omnipotent authority.

2. “And the things which are.”

What are the things which are? They are the things that pertain to the church. Though most of the book does not deal with the church, chapters two and three contain Jesus’ messages to the church, to those seven churches of Asia Minor and to the church throughout these 2,000 years and however much longer the church age shall last. After chapter three the church will not be mentioned again until it is described as “the bride of Christ” in chapter nineteen. That’s one reason we know the church is not here during the time of the great tribulation.

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3. **“The things which shall be hereafter.”**

These were the things John was about to have disclosed to him about the future. The future would begin with John being caught up into heaven at the opening of chapter four. That is a picture of the rapture of the church. The rapture will be followed by the seven years of tribulation which will conclude with the victorious Second Coming of the Lord and the casting of the beast and false prophet into the lake of fire and brimstone. That will be followed by the Millennial Kingdom, followed by the great white throne judgment, which is followed by the new heavens and new earth.

Revelation 1:20 The mystery of the seven stars which thou sawest in my right hand, and the seven golden candlesticks. The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches: and the seven candlesticks which thou sawest are the seven churches.

“The mystery” indicates that symbolic language is being used. A “mystery” is a sacred secret which has not been revealed before. It is not up to men to provide their own interpretation. When God presents a “mystery” He will provide the interpretation thereof.

“The seven stars” are interpreted for us by God as being **“seven angels.”** The word for **“angel”** means messenger and the most common understanding is that these messengers of God are the pastors of these churches. That fits the context as the letters are to the churches.

“The seven golden candlesticks” are the **“seven churches”** as God again provides the interpretation.

This brings us to the section about the churches. The letters were to seven real historical churches and to the church down through the ages, picturing seven periods of church history. It is apparent that we are now in the last of those seven periods so we will learn what our Lord thinks about the church today when we get to the last letter, the Letter to The Church at Laodicea.