

LECTURES ON THE BOOK OF REVELATION

By

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CHAPTER TWO

THE FIRST VISION

(Lecture 1:9-20)

IN our study of the first chapter last week, we got down to the first Vision of the book. The apostle John tells us that for the Name's sake of the Lord Jesus Christ he was a prisoner banished to "**the isle called Patmos**"- a little rocky island in the Mediterranean Sea. There, shut away from all Christian fellowship, God had a greater mission for him than he had ever known in the past.

You remember on the occasion when the Lord Jesus restored Peter's soul after his fall, He told him how when he was old another would gird him and lead him whither he would not, thus signifying by what death he should glorify God. Then Jesus said, "**Follow me.**" Peter turned and saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following, and said, "**Lord, what shall this man do?**" The Lord answered, "**If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? Follow thou Me.**"

You will notice that in that sentence the Lord Jesus very clearly sets forth two things that are often confounded by some Christian teachers - death and the second coming of Christ. He says, "**If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee?**" and He clearly puts "**tarry till I come**" in contrast with Peter's dying before He comes.

There is no place in Scripture where death and our Lord's second coming are confounded. For death, instead of being the second coming of the Lord, is that which is to be swallowed up in victory at that second coming. But, you know, most of us are extremists, so when the Lord said to Peter, "**If I will that he tarry till I come,**" we are told that this saying went abroad among the disciples that "**that disciple should not die**"; but Jesus said not that he should not die, but "**If I will that he tarry till I come.**" And, of course, time proved that their hasty conclusion was incorrect.

And John also died, long years ago; but some years before the end of his earthly life, while on that desolate island of Patmos, where he was banished for his faithfulness, he had a wonderful vision unfolded before him, of truth connected with our Lord Jesus' second coming, by means of which his ministry abides with us until Christ shall come again. John is absent from the body, but present with the Lord - has been for over 1800 years; but through the ministry given to us in this wonderful book of Revelation, John abides still until Jesus comes, throwing light upon all the complex problems that God's people would have to meet in this present dispensation, and gives us to understand, as no other ministry does, the great program that God Himself is soon going to carry out.

So we see that the devil really over-reached himself when Domitian banished John to the isle of Patmos; for if he had remained ministering the Word to the saints and preaching to the unsaved, he might not have been able to write the book of Revelation and we might not have the visions this book gives us. But there, shut off from all his service, on that lonely isle, the veil was rolled back, and he was enabled to give us this wonderful record of the unveiling of Jesus Christ.

He tells us he was "**in the Spirit on the Lord's Day.**" The Lord's Day is a divinely given designation for the first day of the week. I know there are those who tell us the Lord's Day here is the Jewish Sabbath, which in the Old Testament is called the Sabbath of the Lord; and they tell us that inasmuch as nowhere in the New Testament is the Jewish Sabbath done away with, it should still be observed. But, in answer to that, we may notice that nowhere in all the New Testament, after the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ from the dead, do we ever have any special honor paid to the seventh day - Israel's Sabbath. On that day, the Lord lay in the tomb. On the morning of the first day of the week, "**when the Sabbaths were past**" - as the 28th of Matthew puts it, that is, when the Jewish Sabbaths were ended - the Lord rose in triumph from the dead, and that new day became distinctly the Lord's Day.

You find in the Word of God that "**on the first day of the week the disciples came together to break bread**"; on the first day of the week the Lord met with His own in the upper room. In connection with their gathering thus together, see the 16th chapter of I Corinthians, 2nd verse: "**Upon the first day of the week let everyone of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him.**" Thus Christian giving and the weekly remembrance of the Lord are linked together. It is safe to say that if Christians everywhere carried this out, there would be no "financial problem" in the church of God to-day.

The first day of the week is preeminently the day for Christians. Whenever the earliest Christian writers refer to the term "**Lord's Day,**" they speak of it as the first day of the week; the day after the Jewish Sabbath; the day we Christians call "**the Lord's Day.**"

I venture to say that people who lived from fifty to two hundred years after the apostle John were far more likely to know what was meant by the term "**Lord's Day**" than people who live 1800 years after. I know there are some prophetic students who confuse the Lord's Day with the "**great day of the Lord,**" but there is a decided difference in the two terms. The Lord's Day is not in the possessive case in the Hebrew. The word translated "**Lord's**" is an adjective. If it were permissible to say the Lordian day, you would have the exact meaning of this word. Such an adjective has been formed from the word Christ. We say a "Christian spirit," etc.

So the Lordian or Lordly Day is the day on which the Lord Jesus Christ broke the bonds of death asunder and rose, never more to die; and we Christians love to keep this day in memory of Him.

On that day, John says, “**I was in the Spirit.**” John was far away from any Christian assembly, but he found his pleasure in the things of God. Some Christians you know go to meeting every Lord’s day when at home, but when on their vacations, or away from town, the Lord’s day is just like any other day because nobody knows them. But John, shut away from any Christian association, was “**in the Spirit on the Lord’s day.**” It is good to see a Christian take his Bible with him when on a vacation, and have daily intercourse with the Lord, or look up someone who does not know Jesus Christ and seek to make Him known to that needy one. See to it that you are in the Spirit on the Lord’s day.

Being “**in the Spirit**” on the Lord’s day, John had a glorious vision of the Lord Himself.

First he heard a voice, then he saw a form. He heard a voice saying, “**I am Alpha and Omega, the First and the Last. What thou seest, write in a book,**” etc. “**And being turned I saw seven golden candlesticks** [lampstands].”

If I understand it aright, these were not like the candlesticks in the temple and in the tabernacle. Those were seven-branched; six sidebranches, and the central shaft made the seven. But John saw seven separate lampstands. Christ is represented by the seven-branched candlestick in the holy place, and the Spirit of God is represented by the seven lamps upon it. But during His absence - during the time of His priesthood up there in heaven, His people are to be lights for Him in this world. So John sees in this first vision not one candlestick with seven branches, but seven distinct lampstands in the form of a circle, and in the midst of them he sees One like unto the Son of Man girt about the breasts with a golden girdle. It is the Lord judging in the midst of His assemblies.

Then we learn what these lampstands symbolize.

They are the seven churches situated in the Roman proconsular province of Asia, and these seven were selected from all the assemblies of God, in order that they might picture for us the whole course of the church’s history until the coming again of our Lord Jesus Christ.

In His absence, the church of God is responsible to keep a light burning in the midst of the darkness. You remember He said, while here on earth, “**I am the Light of the world,**” etc., and before He went away, He said to His disciples, “**Ye are the light of the world.**” He has gone up to the glory, and we and all the members of His church are to shine for Him here.

What kind of light are you giving out for Jesus? Do your next-door neighbors appreciate your Christianity? Do the people that you do business with think much of it? What about the tradesmen and your business associates - all these folks with whom you have to do so much of the time? I would rather get the testimony of the people with whom you have to do than of those you meet in the public assemblies. When a man is really converted, it changes him through and through.

The church of God and individual assemblies of Christians are in this world to shine for Christ. We are here not merely to enjoy the things of Christ ourselves, but to hold up Christ to the world. Speaking of the Lord's Supper, the apostle says, in I Corinthians 11:26: **"For as often as ye eat this bread and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till He come."** The word translated **"shew"** in that passage is the same word that is used elsewhere for preaching; "you preach the Lord's death." It is a testimony to sinners, as well as something for the church to enjoy. The church of God is here to shine for Christ, and we shine for Him as He is exalted in our gatherings and manifested in our lives.

"I saw seven golden candlesticks, and in the midst of the seven candlesticks, one like unto the Son of Man."

In many respects He seemed different from what John remembered Him, except when on the Mount of Transfiguration. But he knew who He was - **"One like unto the Son of Man."** John had known Him well on earth, and he knew Him the moment He appeared in that glorious vision.

Note how He is described, **"clothed with a garment down to the foot"** - the priestly garment. He is there in the long, white garments of the high priest, and girt about the breasts with a golden girdle. The girdle speaks of service. We read of the servant girding himself and waiting upon the table. Here it is a high-priestly service. Our blessed Lord is now serving us at God's right hand.

Looking back to the cross where Jesus hung in sacrifice for us, we rejoice to remember His dying words, **"It is finished."** Nothing can be added to, and nothing taken away from, that completed work.

But there is another work He is now carrying on for His people. Although up there in the glory, He is serving us still. His people need His help all along the way. The moment you belong to the Lord Jesus, you are brought into living union with our great High Priest at God's right hand.

"He is able to save to the uttermost" all those who come to God through faith by Him, seeing **"He ever liveth to make intercession for them."** He does not ask you to go in your own strength. Trust Him as Saviour, and let Him fill your heart and control your life. He will live His life in you, to His praise and glory. We are to come boldly to a throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find seasonable help. The girdle is a golden one, and Christ's service is in full accord with God's holy and righteous ways.

Notice the 14th verse: **"His head and His hairs were white like wool, as white as snow; and His eyes were as a flame of fire."**

I said last Sunday night that every figure, every symbol, found in this book is explained somewhere else in the Bible. Turn now to Daniel 7:9-13. There we read of the Ancient of Days and of the Son of Man. Now observe John said that the One in the midst of the seven lampstands was **"like unto the Son of Man."** He was undoubtedly linking that up with the seventh chapter of Daniel. He goes on to describe Him as one **"whose hair is white as snow."** He had all the appearance of great age, though the Lord Jesus was cut off at the age of thirty-three.

Observe again the 7th of Daniel, verse 9, “**And the Ancient of Days did sit, and the hair of his head as pure wool,**” etc. Who is the Ancient of Days? In the 7th of Daniel He is the Jehovah of Israel, and to Him the Son of Man comes. But we learn that the Son of Man is Himself the Ancient of Days. In other words, *the Jehovah of the Old Testament is the Jesus of the New Testament.*

Christ is Himself “**God manifest in the flesh.**”

Turn to Micah 5:2, “**But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall He come forth unto Me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting.**”

Who is the Saviour born in Bethlehem? He is the One “**whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting.**” The Lord Jesus Christ is the Ancient of Days, and this is one of the truths that Christians are called to contend for in these times of apostasy.

Ministers are telling people that we are all sons of God. They deny Christ’s virgin birth and deity, and say that He is simply the greatest of all teachers sent from God. But that is not enough for the Christian. Christ is God, or we and those in heaven are idolaters, for it is He who is worshiped there, and here.

The Unitarian believes in God the Father, but not in the Son; he says, “Don’t draw the lines too straight - Jesus is only a creature.” If that Unitarian is right, I am an idolater, for I am worshiping Jesus Christ. I worship, not Buddha, not Brahma, but Jesus, and own Him as God.

Yet some would tell me that it does not make any difference! It makes a tremendous difference, for both time and eternity. It is going to mean all the difference between heaven and hell. For the Lord Jesus says, “**Except ye believe that I am, ye shall die in your sins, and whither I go ye cannot come.**”

We confess Jesus Christ as God manifest in the flesh, the Only-begotten Son of God, the anointed One who came in grace to save lost, guilty sinners. Are you trusting Him as your Saviour?

So we see that this One in the midst is the Son of Man, yet God Himself. The Lord Jesus has that double character, and His place is always in the midst. Jesus in the midst! No company of believers deserves to be called a Christian company that does not give Him that place. But, “**Where two or three are gathered together unto My name,**” He says, “**there am I in the midst.**”

You remember when He hung on that cross, between two thieves, He saved one of them who turned to Him in faith. When He rose from the dead, and His disciples were gathered together in the upper room, “**Then came Jesus and stood in the midst.**” In the 5th chapter of the Revelation, John looked and saw the Lamb “**in the midst of the throne, in the midst of the elders, and in the midst of the living creatures.**” This is the place that ever belongs to the Lord Jesus - the central place, the preeminent place. God must have Jesus in the midst.

But let us turn back to our chapter. **“His eyes were as a flame of fire.”**

John did not know Him in that way on earth, except perhaps as He rebuked the Pharisees; but remember that all who do not accept Him now are going to see His eyes like a flame of fire. There will be nothing hid from those eyes. They will discern everything that you would fain hide. All will be out in the light, and brought into judgment. Oh, have everything out with Him now. Do you realize that the first time you meet God, you must meet Him with all your sins upon your soul? Have you had a meeting with Him yet? If the first time you meet Him is at the day of judgment, it will be too late. You can have your first meeting with Him in this world. You can meet Him by faith. Do not try to improve or to make yourself better. Come just as you are, without one plea, but that He is the sinner’s Saviour and invites you to come; you will find that those eyes, that are as a flame of fire and look into the depths of your soul, will become filled with tenderest love, and will draw you to Himself.

But John’s description goes on to say: **“His feet (were) like unto fine brass.”** Brass in the Old Testament is the symbol of judgment. The brazen altar which stood before the tabernacle was that on which the fire of God’s judgment was burning continually. It was of brass, * because brass could stand the fire. You will find throughout Scripture it is a symbol of judgment. And here He has feet like brass; for His ways are in righteousness unyielding. The day is coming when He shall put His feet on everything contrary to truth and righteousness. Everything unholy will be stamped out in divine judgment.

** The peculiar metal referred to was really a very hard copper alloy; but I use the word “brass” as employed in our English Bible.*

His voice is as the sound of many waters. When you stand on the cliff by the seaside and hear the sound of many waters, you are awed by their power. Yon ship, which looks so large and strong at the docks, what a helpless thing it is when the ocean rouses itself in furious anger. His voice is as the sound of the billows of the sea - a voice of power.

That power,

- Put forth in grace, means your salvation;
- Put forth in judgment, it means your eternal damnation!

You may pass from death into life by hearing His voice now. He can speak to your poor soul, and in a moment create your heart anew. Here is what He says: **“The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and they that hear shall live.”**

Hearing His voice, believing His word, you live! Have you heard that voice of power? Soon, His people will hear that same mighty voice calling them from earth away, **“for the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout,”** and the dead in Christ shall rise first, and the living saints shall be changed. Sometimes Christians become discouraged, but when that voice, like the sound of many waters, says from heaven, **“Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away,”** we will be caught up in a moment to meet Him in the air.

“He had in His right hand seven stars.” The stars speak of ministry committed to His saints, as responsible to shine by His light and for Him in this world.

“They that turn many to righteousness shall shine as the stars forever and ever.” He holds the stars in His right hand. **“Out of His mouth went forth a sharp two-edged sword.”** It is the Word of God (Hebrews 4:12). Men are trifling with that two-edged sword, but they will find out soon that it is powerful, irresistible.

“His countenance was as the sun shining in his strength.” Malachi 4:2; **“But unto you that fear my Name, shall the Sun of Righteousness arise with healing in his wings.”** When Saul of Tarsus was stricken down, remember what he saw - a light above the brightness of the sun. It was the glory of God in the face of Christ Jesus. It was this that John saw, and he fell at His feet. But He laid His right hand upon John, and said, **“Fear not, I am the First and the Last. 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.”**

What is death? It is the body without the spirit: **“The body without the spirit is dead.”** There is no such thing in the Bible as soul-sleeping. The spirit of the man is not in the grave. The body goes down to the grave. But the spirit is in the unseen world. Hades is the condition of the spirit without the body. Christ has the keys of both death and Hades.

In the 19th verse we get the three-fold division of the Book of the Revelation: **“Write the things which thou hast seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter”** - or, *“after these things.”*

“The things which thou hast seen” are the things of chapter one - the first division of the Book of the Revelation.

“The things which are” follow in the next two chapters and make the second division. **“The things which are”** have to do with the present dispensation. The seven churches give us a picture of the whole professing church’s history from the apostolic period to the coming of the Lord Jesus. These two chapters portray the condition of the church on earth, in seven distinct periods. The church’s history ends at the rapture, when Jesus comes as the Bright and Morning Star. That event closes the present dispensation.

“The things which shall be hereafter,” chapters 4 to the end, make the third and last division of the book - the things which shall take place after the church’s history ends - the great tribulation, the kingdom, and the eternal state.

But our time is up and I must close for to-night.

~ end of chapter 2 ~

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