

Jesus is King

Revelation 1 v 9-18

Context:

In the year 280 BC an enormous statue of the Greek sun god Helios was erected on the harbour of the island of Rhodes. It became known as the Colossus of Rhodes and, standing at a height of 33 metres (2/3 of the height of the modern Statue of Liberty in New York) it was the tallest statue in the ancient world. It stood at the entrance to the harbour of Rhodes so everyone arriving on the island would gaze in wonder at it as they sailed by. Not surprisingly it was regarded as one of the seven wonders of the ancient world.

As we enter the Book of Revelation, the last book of the Bible, we are confronted by an image far grander and more wondrous than that of Helios – the Colossus of Jesus! Before the apostle John addresses the seven churches of Asia Minor in chapters 2-3 and then goes on to describe the amazing and graphic vision he received from God in chapters 4-22, he first draws our attention in 1 v 9-18 to an eye-popping, breath-taking image of Jesus, who stands like a great colossus, towering over all that John will unravel in the rest of the book. We are invited in today's study to gaze in wonder at this image and to fall at his feet in worship, adoration and total joyful surrender.

Observation:

1. How does John describe himself in the first part of v 9?
2. Where was he at the time and why according to the rest of v 9?
3. What day was it and what was John doing at the beginning of v 10?
4. What did John then hear at the end of v 10?
5. What was he instructed to do in v 11?
6. What did John then do at the beginning of v 12?
7. What did he see at the end of v 12?
8. Who did he see at the beginning of v 13 and what was he wearing?
9. How are his head, hair and eyes described in v 14?
10. How are his feet and voice described in v 15?
11. What was he holding in his right hand and what came out of his mouth (v 16)?
12. How is his face described at the end of v 16?
13. How did John react to seeing this image (v 17)?
14. What did the image do to John in v 17 and what did he tell him not to do?
15. How did the image describe himself in v 17-18?

Meaning:

1. In v 9 John describes himself as a brother and companion of those he is writing to, in three particular things – suffering, kingdom and patient endurance. *Suffering* refers to John's *present* experience of persecution and *kingdom* refers to the *future* hope of heaven. So, how do you think '*patient endurance*' links the present suffering and the future kingdom?
2. John says that all three of these things – suffering, kingdom and patient endurance – are *ours in Jesus* (v 9). What do you think he means by the phrase '*ours in Jesus*' and how might this shape your perspective on your present experience of suffering as a Christian?
3. Patmos is a rocky island in the Aegean Sea about 8 miles long and 5 miles wide, located about 40 miles south-east of Ephesus. John lived in Ephesus and he gives us his reason for being on Patmos at the end of v 10 – 'because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus'. This could mean either a) he was there engaged in evangelistic mission OR b) he had been exiled there by the Roman authorities as punishment for his commitment to Jesus. Which do you think is the most likely explanation and why?
4. What do you think John means when he says in v 10 that he was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day?
5. The trumpet, or Shofar in Hebrew, was blown to signal a call to worship or war, and on Mt Sinai it describes the voice of God revealing his commandments. So, what do you think is the significance of the voice like a trumpet that John hears in v 10?
6. The seven churches or assemblies (v 11) that John is commanded to write to were located in western Asia Minor (modern Turkey) and the order in which they are mentioned in v 11 is the route a messenger carrying the letter of Revelation would travel to reach each of them in turn, beginning with Ephesus and ending with Laodicea. What does the fact that Revelation was written to real-life churches in real-life locations in real time and space indicate about how we should interpret the Book of Revelation as a whole?
7. We are told in v 20 that the seven golden lampstands that John sees in v 12 represent the seven churches of Asia Minor. The lampstand is probably a Jewish menorah, a seven-branched lampstand which stood in the Temple in Jerusalem, which burned constantly in God's presence and symbolised the Tree of Life from the Garden of Eden. It may be that John sees seven individual menorahs, each of which represents one of the seven churches or he may have seen one single Menorah, each branch of which symbolised one of the seven churches. Which of these do you think it was and what do you think we are meant to understand by this symbolism about the nature and calling of the church?
8. 'Son of Man' was probably Jesus' favourite title to refer to himself and it is likely he took it from a vision described in Daniel 7 v 13. What does this indicate about the

identity of the figure John sees in v 13 and reading Daniel 7 v 1-14 what does the use of this title tell us about how Jesus understood his own identity and mission?

9. Look at the following descriptors and OT references and discuss that they tell us about the identity and mission of Jesus:
- A robe reaching down to his feet & a golden sash round his chest (v 13) – Exodus 28 v 4, Leviticus 16 v 4
 - Head/hair like wool as white as snow (v 14) – Daniel 7 v 9, Proverbs 16 v 31
 - Eyes like blazing fire (v 14) – Daniel 10 v 4-6
 - Feet like burnished bronze (v 15) – Daniel 10 v 4-6
 - Voice like rushing waters (v 15) – Ezekiel 1 v 24
10. We read in v 20 that the seven stars in Jesus' hand (v 16) represent the seven 'angels' or 'messengers' of the seven churches of Asia Minor. What does the fact that Jesus holds the stars (literally 'grips them tight') in his hand indicate? (see the picture of Emperor Hadrian's coin in the Appendix as an example of the symbolism of holding the seven stars indicating great power and authority to rule).
11. What does the sharp two-edged sword in his mouth indicate about Jesus (see Isaiah 49 v 2, Hebrews 4 v 12)? A two-edged sword could cut both ways – in what ways does God's word cut both ways?
12. What does the shining face of Jesus indicate about him (v 16)? – see Exodus 34 v 29-35.
13. Why does seeing such a vision result in such a strong physical reaction (v 17)? – see also Isaiah 6 v 5, Ezekiel 1 v 28, Daniel 10 v 7-10.
14. What do the following titles and descriptors tell us about Jesus:
- The First & the Last (v 17) – see Isaiah 44 v 6
 - The Living One who was dead and yet is alive for ever (v 18) – Deuteronomy 32 v 39-40, Psalm 90 v 2, Isaiah 40 v 21-31
 - Holds the keys of death and Hades (v 18) – Matthew 16 v 17-19

Application:

1. Some of the seven churches John writes to were facing external pressure in the form of persecution. So, how do you think this image of Jesus would have impacted them when Revelation was read to them? What encouragement can we take from this image of Jesus when we experience suffering of any kind today?
2. Some of the seven churches John writes to were facing the internal pressure of false teaching and unholy living. So, what impact might this description of Jesus have on them?
3. Much Christian preaching today tends to present Jesus in gentle, compassionate and tender terms. Why don't we hear this description in Revelation used very often and what difference might it make if we did?

Appendix:



A depiction of the Colossus of Rhodes



A Menorah – Jewish seven-branch lampstand



The Route taken by the messenger carrying the Book of Revelation to the seven churches of Asia Minor



Emperor Hadrian's coin with the seven stars