

Is This Jesus Comforting or Concerning?
Revelation 1:12-16

⁹I, John, your brother and partner in the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance that are in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. ¹⁰I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet ¹¹saying, "Write what you see in a book and send it to the seven churches, to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamum and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea." ¹²Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking to me, and on turning I saw seven golden lampstands, ¹³and in the midst of the lampstands one like a son of man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash around his chest. ¹⁴The hairs of his head were white, like white wool, like snow. His eyes were like a flame of fire, ¹⁵his feet were like burnished bronze, refined in a furnace, and his voice was like the roar of many waters. ¹⁶In his right hand he held seven stars, from his mouth came a sharp two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining in full strength. ¹⁷When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. But he laid his right hand on me, saying, "Fear not, I am the first and the last, ¹⁸and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades. ¹⁹Write therefore the things that you have seen, those that are and those that are to take place after this. ²⁰As for the mystery of the seven stars that you saw in my right hand, and the seven golden lampstands, the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches.

The possibility that a holy God could be anything other than dreadful to sinners should seem absurd. If it doesn't, we are out of balance somewhere. Isaiah tells the people of this directly in 8:12-13. **Do not call conspiracy all that this people calls conspiracy, and do not fear what they fear, nor be in dread. ¹³But the LORD of hosts, him you shall honor as holy. Let him be your fear, and let him be your dread.** Something about that doesn't sit well with us. Let me say also, this is not an OT/NT thing. We cannot believe that God was "dreadful" to the people of the OT, but now that we know who Jesus is from the NT He is less dreadful. God doesn't change. Jesus is fully God. The dread that fell upon the Israelites when God appeared to them from the mountain in Exodus 19 is not just an OT phenomenon. We are not only still commanded to fear the Lord in the NT, but the presence of the fear of the Lord is assumed. It is not wrong or improper to fear the Lord, to let Him be our dread.

This illustrates an important point – we struggle to see God as He is. We certainly see through a glass dimly as we eagerly wait for the day when we shall see Him as He is. Fighter Verse! 1 John 3:2. **Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is.** A certainty that one day we shall see Him as He is, and then we will be like Him. That's the day John is preparing us for in this Revelation he is writing to us. And the Jesus he sees, and writes to us about, is that Jesus. This is God, seen as He is. We've got to pay close attention, to handle the Word of God and the testimony of Jesus with great precision, to work hard to not let our selfishness, emotions, and life experiences taint the revelation of Jesus, as He is.

That's our number 1 task today as we look at these words written by John, through the Holy Spirit. And as we look at Him, clearly and carefully, the question that is the title of this sermon comes into play. Is this Jesus comforting or concerning? Try not to soften the words of John's revelation today with the picture of Jesus that we think we know. This Jesus, the one whom John is revealing to us, is the same Jesus that called the little children up into His lap, healed the man blind from birth with a touch, and refused to condemn the adulterous woman. Those images don't evoke any concern. But I submit that today's might, if we are honest.

4 things specifically about Jesus here. One, He is the son of man. Two, He is a king. Three, He is a judge. Four, He is a priest. Let's take them one by one, working to see Him as He is.

First, Jesus is the Son of Man. V. 12-13. Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking to me, and on turning I saw seven golden lampstands, ¹³ and in the midst of the lampstands one like a son of man. John turned around and saw among the seven golden lampstands (v. 20 tells us that these represent the 7 churches to which this letter is addressed) “one like a son of man.” This is not haphazard language. In the NT, Jesus is referred to as the son of man 82 times. The intention of this name is to point back to Daniel 7:13-14. I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. ¹⁴ And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed.

The term has 2 main emphases. One is the dominion and authority of Christ. John 5:22, 27. **For the Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son ... And he has given him authority to execute judgment, because he is the Son of Man.** His authority is rooted in the fact that He is the Son of Man. And that brings us to the 2nd emphasis. This dominion and authority is attained through the humiliation of the cross. Jesus had to become a man in order to die a sinner’s death in order to be granted the dominion and authority that He rightly holds.

Matthew 20:26-28 – It shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, ²⁷ and whoever would be first among you must be your slave, ²⁸ even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many. Philippians 2:8-11 – And **being found in human form**, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. ⁹ **Therefore** God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

The term Son of Man throughout the Bible is saturated with these 2 things – authority/dominion and humiliating suffering. 2 perfect opposites righteously blended into one. If we are honest, if we can put aside our inhibitions and be transparent, we will admit that on their face, both of those things are concerning. We don’t like standing before anyone with this type of authority and dominion and we certainly don’t like the idea of humiliating suffering. As we know the Bible, there is also comfort there, and we will get to that. But please don’t avoid the concern. The Word of God is too important. Interpreting it demands precision.

Second, Jesus is King. Several of these descriptions John gives reveal this kingship. V. 15. **his feet were like burnished bronze, refined in a furnace.** It is very symbolic that kings need strong feet. And bronze that has been refined in a furnace is really strong. The 4th beast in Daniel had claws of bronze, and with those claws he stamped out everything that he didn’t devour. That same image of stamping out everything, of standing on your enemies, is very kingly. And it’s used of Jesus in the Bible. Hebrews 10:12-13. **But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, ¹³ waiting from that time until his enemies should be made a footstool for his feet.** Ephesians 1:22. **And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church.** Jesus’ feet of bronze WILL stamp out His enemies.

Then the second half of v. 15. **his voice was like the roar of many waters.** It is very difficult for us to replicate this sound – frankly, if you ever truly hear the roar of many waters, it is probably too late for you. Just imagine a tsunami, and you being close enough to hear the roar. I imagine that’s similar to what was coming out of the mouth of Jesus. Raw power. Eyewitnesses of tsunamis say you don’t see them, you hear them. A mighty, unstoppable roar bearing in upon you. That’s the voice of Jesus. The voice of a King, an unstoppable king. This same description is used of God in Ezekiel 1:24. **And when they went, I heard the sound of their wings like the sound of many waters, like the sound of the Almighty, a sound of tumult like the**

sound of an army. Again, terror. Dread. Fear. The Almighty King to whom everyone bows the knee and submits. His majesty demands it.

Two more clues revealing Christ as King show up in v. 16. **In his right hand he held seven stars.** The right hand of a king symbolizes power, protection, and defeat of one's enemies. This mighty king protects the 7 angels in his right hand as he stands among the seven churches. They are his. The all-powerful, all-sovereign king is revealed in majesty through holding onto those angels in his right hand.

Then, the last part of v. 16. **His face was like the sun shining in full strength.** Light is always associated with glory in the Bible. They go hand in hand. Radiant glorious light emanating from God is also a theme. The heavenly city is described in Revelation 21:23. **And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb.** I love that phrase. "The glory of God gives it light." The brilliant power of the sun is granted to us as a puny example of the glory of God. As we understand the power of the sun more and more, the actual glory of God, which is infinitely greater than the sun, comes more and more into perspective. Jesus is King, in all of his strength, power, authority, and glory!!

Again, to come before this Jesus without any concern is both ignorant and arrogant. Bronze feet stamping out enemies, a voice like the roar of a tsunami, and a face brighter than the sun can, and should, fill us with dread. His feet stamp out sinners. His voice destroys sinners. The glory of His face melts sinners. It is the very theme of Revelation. When He is your Lord and you submit to Him, there is forgiveness and redemption that brings comfort and an eternal weight of glory. But there is a reason John, when he saw Him, fell at his feet as though dead. When standing before this King, the word "concern" doesn't even seem strong enough. Feel that today. Let the image of tsunami's and our sun and the stamping out of enemies fulfill the purpose they were created for – to image and honor the King of the universe!!

Third, Jesus is judge. Again, multiple descriptions in this passage show this to be the case. V. 14. **The hairs of his head were white, like white wool, like snow.** Our immediate response to this image is tainted. In our culture, we associate growing old with the fading of that which we think makes life worth living. As we become less and less adept at hearing, seeing, thinking, and moving, we have a negative feeling that we are in some way less than we were before. We don't value grey hair. While there are those of us who would value a full head of hair no matter the color, our society doesn't place the value on age and wisdom that biblical societies did. But be assured, the man John sees with a head of white hair presents deep and abiding knowledge and wisdom – the very knowledge and wisdom needed to rightly judge. Notice how Daniel ties these 2 qualities together in his description of the son of man in Daniel 7:9-10. **As I looked, thrones were placed, and the Ancient of Days took his seat; his clothing was white as snow, and the hair of his head like pure wool ... the court sat in judgment, and the books were opened.**

John did not see a fragile old man. He did not see weakness. He saw, as Colossians says, the one "in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." The One fully able to judge. The One who has seen all from the beginning of time until now. Jesus is capable of all judgement. This image is furthered in the 2nd part of v. 14. **His eyes were like flames of fire.** His eyes penetrate everything. Nothing is hidden from him. He is able to judge in absolute truth and righteousness because He not only has seen all throughout the ages, but everything He has seen has been precise and just as His eyes of fire penetrate every instance.

Then, the phrase in the middle of v. 16. From his mouth came a sharp two-edged sword. This word for sword is used only once outside of Revelation. That time is when Jesus is presented as a child at the Temple. Luke 2:34-35. **And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, "Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed ³⁵ (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed."** That's a heavy prophecy, especially when spoken

of a small child. But the double-edged sword coming out of Jesus' mouth here does pierce through the soul. It's target is sin. Jesus judges sin. Isaiah 11:4 says it even more blatantly. **But with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; and he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked.** This is hard. I don't know any other way to say it. It's hard seeing Jesus like this. The sword coming from His mouth symbolizes the Word – the Gospel – the very essence of reality. Sin is totally destructive. It requires this kind of response. Our difficulty taking in words like this is not due to an overreaction on the part of Jesus – it is due to our minimization of sin and the effects of sin. Jesus, as perfectly righteous, must and will judge sin. For us to stand with Him in that requires that we abhor what is evil. If we don't hate sin appropriately, we will ultimately not be comforted by Jesus. In there here and now, when we see through a glass dimly, we may find Him comforting. But when are able to see Him as He truly is, we may find ourselves at odds with Him. Brothers and sisters, I urge myself along with you, hate sin. Together, as children of God and heirs with Christ, let's fight against it!

Fourthly and finally, Jesus is the Priest. This is actually the first thing John records about Jesus, but I have placed it at the end of the sermon to emphasize it! This is where I want to finish. It's what I want us thinking about as we leave this place. V. 13. **And in the midst of the lampstands one like a son of man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash around his chest.** This mirrors the descriptions of the priests in the book of Exodus. They wore the same clothing. And their job was to offer sacrifices on behalf of the sin of the people. They were granted access to God that the rest of the nation of Israel, due to their sin, did not have. They were the people's link to God, their only hope to be in any relationship with God, the only means by which they could relate to God in any way. Hebrews 5:1 says it like this. **For every high priest chosen from among men is appointed to act on behalf of men in relation to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins.**

That's why I've chosen to finish this message with the revelation of Jesus as our high priest. He is the Son of Man, who took on flesh for us. He tasted of this evil, sinful world, for us. (Ch. 5) **⁷ In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverence. ⁸ Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered. ⁹ And being made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him, ¹⁰ being designated by God a high priest.**

(Ch 2). **But we see him who for a little while was made lower than the angels, namely Jesus, crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone. ¹⁰ For it was fitting that he, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the founder of their salvation perfect through suffering.**

¹⁴ Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, ¹⁵ and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery. ¹⁶ For surely it is not angels that he helps, but he helps the offspring of Abraham. ¹⁷ Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.

(Ch 3). Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. **¹³ But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called "today," that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. ¹⁴ For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end.**

Those words are unbelievably comforting, "if we have been subject to lifelong slavery," "if we are not hardened by the deceitfulness of sin," "if we hold our original confidence firm to the end." This Revelation of

Christ, as the son of Man, as the King, as the Judge, and as the High Priest, is comforting to all who know that sin is serious and deadly and who trust in the Son of Man as the High Priest who can atone for their sins and grant access to the eternal joy that comes in relationship with God. The repentance part means being subject to lifelong slavery – being willing slaves of God and turning away from sin. If you are willing to be a lifelong slave of God, you will find this Jesus comforting. If not, you will find Him concerning. If you hold fast to the faith that He is the High Priest who atoned for your sins, and if you hold fast to that faith until the end, you will find this Jesus comforting and you will run to Him. If not, you will find him concerning, and frightening, and you will turn away.