

**Sermon**  
**Therfield Chapel**  
**1<sup>st</sup> June 2008**  
**Revelation 1: 9-19**

<sup>1</sup>Now tonight, before we think about this section from the book of Revelation, please turn with me to a passage from Mark's Gospel Chapter 4: 35 – 41

I want to link the two passages together

<sup>35</sup>That day when evening came, he [Jesus] said to his disciples, "Let us go over to the other side." <sup>36</sup>Leaving the crowd behind, they took him along, just as he was, in the boat. There were also other boats with him. <sup>37</sup>A furious squall came up, and the waves broke over the boat, so that it was nearly swamped. <sup>38</sup>Jesus was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion. The disciples woke him and said to him, "Teacher, don't you care if we drown?"

<sup>39</sup>He got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, "Quiet! Be still!" Then the wind died down and it was completely calm.

<sup>40</sup>He said to his disciples, "Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?"

<sup>41</sup>They were terrified and asked each other, "Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!"

When I began studying our passage in Chapter One of The Book of Revelation, my mind went to this passage in Mark

Can you picture the scene: here are the disciples crossing the Lake of Galilee with Jesus sleeping in the back of the boat – I guess he was tired after a busy day's work

Now, Lake Galilee is prone to unpredictable and violent storms which seem to appear almost out of nowhere – apparently the geography of the area means that there's a kind of wind tunnel from the Mediterranean Sea through to the Lake, and the cool air off the sea hits the warm land and causes storms on Galilee

And as the disciples sail across the Lake we're told that: "<sup>37</sup>A furious squall came up, and the waves broke over the boat, so that it was nearly swamped.

Now this must have been quite a storm for these men panicked – and they panicked because they knew the risks

We know that some of them at least were experienced fishermen and knew this Lake better than most and they knew what it could do to a little fishing boat like theirs

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<sup>1</sup> I am indebted to RC Sproul (The Holiness of God) for the train of thought I have used here.

The waves were crashing up into the boat and the wind was blowing them out of control

The thought of being tossed into a raging lake miles from the shore must have been pretty frightening

And in their panic they do what most people do in a crisis, they go to their leader, Jesus

They grab him and wake him and say, “Teacher, don’t you care if we drown?”

And Mark tells us that Jesus got up he rebuked the wind and said to the waves: “Quite! Be still”

Now if it was anyone other than Jesus, we would have put him down as a bit of a nutter

Try it one time – stand on the front of your cross Channel ferry during a storm and shout at the wind and the waves “Quite, be still” and watch for the reaction of those throwing up into their sick bags!

But here on Galilee we’re told that when Jesus gave his command, the wind died down and it became completely calm – like a pond I guess

We all know the story – but you know what always catches my attention when I read this, is the reaction of the disciples in the boat

Notice what is isn’t: they don’t all leap from their seats and shout, “Hallelujah another miracle from this amazing man”; “We knew you’d do it Jesus”

No, look in verse 41:

“<sup>41</sup>They (the disciples) were terrified and asked each other, "Who is *this*? Even the wind and the waves obey him!"

These men were afraid

Now they were frightened at the storm – they were frightened that they were going to die – but rather than having their fears calmed, what Jesus did actually seemed to intensify them

They were no longer afraid that they were going to die in the storm – but they were left trembling in the presence of this man, Jesus Christ

In fact the Authorised Version translates what the disciples say as this: “What manner of man is this, that even the wind and sea obey him?”

When we meet people we try to fit them into our categories

We try to place them into boxes to understand them and know how to handle them

But these disciples had suddenly encountered a kind of human being about which they were utterly unfamiliar

Jesus blew all their categories – all the fuses on their category boxes went up in smoke

If they'd not realised it before, although he may be like them in lots of ways, to put it mildly in other respects he wasn't like them at all

He had authority over the wind and the waves

He was the Lord God Almighty incarnate

The Creator of the universe become a man

They were in the presence of the Holy One

And in his presence they were afraid – and they were right to be

Let's turn back to Revelation

We've looked at the passage in Mark because it is one instance in the NT where we are given a window into the identity of Jesus Christ

And our passage for tonight is another one where the identity of the Lord Jesus is disclosed to his people

And we find a similar reaction experienced by John to what happened in the boat

Look in verse 17: "When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead". John was again terrified in the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ – we know that because the Lord put his right hand on him and the first thing that he needed to say to him was "Do not be afraid"

Interesting isn't it?

Thinking about these things again, I've had to reconsider a little my mental pictures of Jesus

I have one in my mind from a Sunday school book – it's a blue-eyed, blond-haired Jesus with children around him and others sitting on his knee

Is it correct? Is Jesus like that? Yes of course

But if we think that's all he is, then we need to re-evaluate how we see him and the Book of Revelation helps us do that

So for example, later on in the Book we find that the Word of God – Jesus - is on a horse leading the armies of heaven and with a sword he strikes down the nations who reject his rule<sup>2</sup>

Or perhaps we have an image of Jesus helplessly hanging on a cross

Well the risen Jesus is anything but helpless

He is to be feared; He is the Great King – the King of all Kings

So John is on the floor, he's in the dirt

He's where we would all be if a voice doesn't come to us and say: "Do not be afraid"

But let's go back to the start of our passage

V9 <sup>9</sup>I, John, your brother and companion in the suffering and kingdom and patient endurance that are ours in Jesus, was on the island of Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.

The year was probably 94 or 95 AD

The apostle John was now an old man – it was around 60 years since he'd seen the Lord Jesus ascend into heaven

And here we find him banished to the Island of Patmos for preaching the word of God and for his testimony to Jesus

Patmos is a small island in the Aegean Sea and is about 40 miles off the coast of Asia Minor (modern day Turkey)

Patmos was a Roman Penal colony – John was almost certainly exiled there because he refused to abide by the decree of Caesar Domitian (D meet re an) that he be called Lord

John had only one Lord and it wasn't Caesar

But that put him and all his fellow-believers on a violent collision course with the Caesar

Caesar Domitian was the ruler of the Roman Empire at this time – he called the shots – he was the most powerful man in the world (the George Bush of his day)

He inherited an Empire whose borders were the Euphrates, the Danube, the Rhine, the Atlantic Coast and the North African desert

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<sup>2</sup> Chapter 19.

He had 60 million slaves in his Empire and a vast and seemingly invincible army

Rome had conquered most of the known world and as far as it was concerned, history had reached its destiny – Rome was named the Eternal City – its own propaganda congratulated itself that would be there for ever

In one sense Roman filled the horizon

That's the context that John and his fellow Christians found themselves in – a minority reeling under the oppression of this intimidating, self-confident and self-important empire

For John personally, exile was not a soft option

Almost certainly it was preceded by a flogging after which the prisoners were kept in fetters; they wore scanty clothing, were given insufficient food, sleep on the bare ground in a dark prison and worked under the lash of military overseers

And into that setting, John is invited to imagine a different kind of world – indeed the whole Book of Revelation is an account of another world – the truly eternal world of the Son of God – and that world he is commissioned to share with the seven churches to encourage and strengthen them

Verse 10 <sup>10</sup>On the Lord's Day I was in the Spirit, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet, <sup>11</sup>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."

Revelation means uncovering or unveiling; John is able to see behind the immediate world of Imperial Rome and see who really is the King – who really is on the throne of history and it's not Caesar

And so right at the start of John's vision he encounters the Lord Jesus Christ

<sup>12</sup>I turned around to see the voice that was speaking to me. And when I turned, I saw seven golden lampstands, <sup>13</sup>and among the lampstands was someone "like a son of man," <sup>[b]</sup>dressed in a robe reaching down to his feet and with a golden sash around his chest. <sup>14</sup>His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and his eyes were like blazing fire. <sup>15</sup>His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of rushing waters. <sup>16</sup>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.

Notice that John sees seven golden lampstands and among those lampstands he sees Someone like the Son of Man

But who is he?

Well John would instantly have known for he was doubtless raised a good Jew and the Jews knew their Scriptures – what we call the Old Testament

In saying that the figure in the midst of the lampstands is like a son of man John was making a point

For he and all Jews knew that the son of man was found in the Book of Daniel where Daniel records a vision that he was given of heaven (Daniel 7: 13,14)

<sup>13</sup> "In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. <sup>14</sup> He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all peoples, nations and men of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.

This passage was doubtless in John's mind as he saw this Figure; he knew that he was none other than the Son of the Living God – the Lord Jesus Christ – and the vision from Daniel describes him ascending into heaven after completing his work of securing human salvation

And vitally for John's and our consideration, he is the one where power finally rests – for his dominion is an everlasting dominion that will never be destroyed

In seeing Jesus in this way we are reminded that he is the final source of authority in this world

Now notice that the son of man is dressed in a robe reaching down to his feet.

Almost certainly the robe represents Jesus' High Priestly role – he is the one who has shed his own blood to institute a covenant whereby human beings can be forgiven and reconciled to God

He has white hair, which represents the wisdom of years – something that commands respect in most cultures other than our own.

His eyes are a blazing fire – they are intense in their scrutiny – the suggestion is of infinite and infallible knowledge from whom nothing can be hidden.<sup>3</sup> There is nothing that he is not acquainted with. You dare not lie to the son of man.

He feet are made of bronze – they are weighty, solid and unmovable. They will trample down all his enemies.

When he speaks, his voice is the sound of many waters. Anyone who's witnessed the sight of Victoria or Niagara Falls will recognise the perfect image of power and majesty from this metaphor.

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<sup>3</sup> G Campbell Morgan, The Letters of our Lord, p15.

Out of his mouth is a two-edged sword. Most commentators think that the sword represents judgment and war upon his enemies – a constant theme of the Book of Revelation

And as we've considered, John responds to Jesus in the way he doubtless did in the boat all those years ago – he is terrified

But look in verse 16: Jesus puts his right hand on him and reassures him: "Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. <sup>18</sup>I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades.

I think that perhaps for us Christians living in the relative comfort and security of the Western World, these words can just be 'old hat' – often repeated phrases <sup>4</sup>

But if you're in the position of many Christians today or most throughout history, where just to be a Bible believer puts your liberty or possibly your life in jeopardy, Jesus saying "I am the first" would be a great comfort

He was reminding John and his fellow-persecuted believers and us that he was there before every human system of power and oppression was established

He was there before any king or ruler announced that the climax of history had arrived and all should fit in with its creeds and programme or else

For us living in our liberal democracy, we can easily forget that the churches that received these words were small and puny and that they inhabited a violently hostile world

They had no Human Rights Act to protect them to secure their freedoms

In their vulnerable state, it would have been a great comfort for them to place their trust in the Originator and Lord of History – "I am the First"

But he was also the Last

Yes, Rome was having its day in the sun – just like Greece had before it and Persia and Babylon and many more but its day would end – days always do

When Julian the Apostate - who in the fourth century sought to destroy Christianity - was on the march in his empire - there was a member of his army who was a Christian. This man was constantly tormented by the rest of the army, and one day a man mockingly asked him, 'Where is your carpenter now?' He simply replied: 'That's easy, He's making a coffin for you and your emperor'.

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<sup>4</sup> I am indebted to Hugh Palmer (All Souls Church) for this train of thought and what follows from it.

History records that a few months afterwards, Julian the Apostate received a mortal wound in battle, and realising that he was about to die, he took his hand and dipped it into the blood of his wound and he threw it up, toward heaven, exclaiming as he did so: 'Thou hast conquered, oh Galilean!'

Jesus will have the last word on everything – his opinion is what finally counts

He is the One who will wrap up history when he's given the command by his Father

The ultimate destiny of the world and our ultimate destiny is not dependent upon Caesar or Gordon Brown or George Bush or Osama Bin Laden – it's dependent upon the Son of Man – amongst a million self-appointed and self-important voices his voice will be the last one

I am the Last

“You can fast forward history to the end of time and you'll discover that Jesus is still King”<sup>5</sup>

You can stake your life on him

He notice – and don't miss this one - he is the Lord of death: v18 “I am the Living One; I was dead and behold I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys to death and Hades”

The one who holds the keys is nearly always the one to know

The truth is that because we are all sinners we're all locked in a room called death – we will all die

But into that dark and terrifying room a noise shatters the silence: it's the sound of a key turning: “I hold the keys to death and Hades”

Jesus opens the door out of death and into life and eternity and joy and meaning and purpose – into the very presence of God

There are few things more frightening than death – but Jesus has the keys out of death

But the next thing to consider is this: where is Jesus in our passage?

Verse 13 tells us that he is standing among the seven golden lampstands and the last bit of verse 20 tells us that the golden lampstands are the seven churches that John is to share his vision with

So where is Jesus? He's among the churches

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<sup>5</sup> Hugh Palmer

That matters because when you're being persecuted you need him on your side

It's as if all that power we see in the vision of him is to be used on the side of the people of God

At the present time Christians in this country are getting a little nervous about the erosion of our freedoms

The protection of the state to guarantee our freedoms has been taken for granted for several generations and now that it's being eroded there's a jumpiness found in publications such as Evangelicals Now

But we should all remember that even if the all the worst predictions come true, we will only end up where the Christians in the first century began – looking to Jesus for their security rather than to the rule of law

He's on our side – and in the end you want him to be on your side – anywhere else is highly dangerous

One thing is sure; you don't want to mess with him

Just turn over to chapter 6:

<sup>15</sup>Then the kings of the earth, the princes, the generals, the rich, the mighty, and every slave and every free man hid in caves and among the rocks of the mountains. <sup>16</sup>They called to the mountains and the rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! <sup>17</sup>For the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?"

But Jesus is with his churches – he's on their side

Such things must have reassured and comforted these believers in the plight

This Book reminds the believers that the future is with the church – and that it is the vessel that will remain for eternity

The apostle Paul wrote: "No eye has seen, nor ear has heard, nor mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him"

By time we get to chapter 18 we find that Babylon (which represents the world in its hostility to God) fallen and by chapter 21 we find the church, the people of God, the bride of Christ appearing for the great marriage supper of the Lamb – the climax of God's creation when she (the church) will be the star attraction as she is joined to King Jesus in marriage – the one who has redeemed and paid the price to be her husband

The Book of Revelation was written to reassure Christians that they were part of the grand drama of the ages – part of God’s cosmic plan

It reminds them and us that history is not out of control – it is in the hands of him who is the Lord of history – the Alpha and Omega – the Ancient of Days – the one who holds the whole universe – as we might hold a contact lens on our fingertip

You’ll notice that John writes <sup>v16</sup> your brother and companion in the suffering and kingdom and patient endurance that are ours in Jesus

They were suffering and patiently enduring

So weren’t they the losers in an Empire that glorified power and wealth and military expansion?

This passage and the whole Book reminds all believers to be careful with their conclusions about where power lies and about what constitutes success

When it comes to what matters and what has influence in this world, things are not how they seem to the human eye, to the eye without faith

Paul writes, “God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He has chosen the lowly things of this world and the despised things – and the things that are not – to nullify the things that are”

The church might be the despised outcast, but it is central to God’s plans

What does the world glory in? What does it focus on? Wealth, power, fame, drinking, status, sexual prowess, beauty, youthfulness, connections, brand labels, expensive cars, stocks and shares, big houses, going the right university

If you glory in these things be very careful – they will come to nothing

Their contribution to what really counts and is of eternal value will be nothing

In contrast, the Bible focuses on a group of people called the “the saints” – often little people, unimportant people – yet these people are God’s people – unknown to the world but known to God

The future is their’s, it is ours

Remember things are not how they seem

Peter writes, "All men are like grass. And all their glory is like the flowers of the field. The grass withers, and the flowers falls, but the word of the Lord (and all His family) stands forever" (1 Peter 1:24,25).

Jesus said, "For what is exalted among men is an abomination in the sight of God" (Luke 16:15).

So the Book of Revelation opens up another world to us – let us give attention to that world and to its king, King Jesus, risen from the death and alive forevermore

**STOP**