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"JESUS CHRIST – THE FIRST AND THE LAST"

– *DECEMBER 3. – REVELATION 1:1-8,17-20. –*

THE MESSAGE OF THE RISEN CHRIST – THE APOSTLE JOHN REPRESENTATIVE OF THE FEET-MEMBERS OF THE BODY OF CHRIST – IN A TRANCE HE SAW A SERIES OF VISIONS OF THE LEADING EVENTS OF THE GOSPEL AGE, THE SEVEN STAGES OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE GOSPEL CHURCH AND THE SETTING UP OF THE MESSIANIC KINGDOM – A SYMBOLICAL PICTURE OF OUR GLORIFIED LORD – THE WORD LIKENED TO A TWO-EDGED SWORD.

"Fear not; I am the First and the Last, and the Living One; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive for evermore." – Verses 17,18.

R.V.

VISIONS are not realities, although symbolically representing them. This is true, whether the visions come as Daniel the Prophet describes his or whether they come in broad daylight, as did the transfiguration scene, which our Lord declared was a vision. (Daniel 7:1; Matthew 17:9.) The visions granted to St. John, recorded in the Revelation, are in no sense to be understood as realities; and this is the significance of his statement, "I was in the spirit on the Lord's day."

Note the simplicity of the introduction to this most wonderful Book. The Apostle did not write the title as it appears in our Bibles – "The Revelation of St. John the Divine." On the contrary, he claims no credit for the revelation; for it was not his. As he distinctly explains, it was from our Lord Jesus Christ, and to Him from God the Father. Nor was it even to St. John in any special sense; but, as he again declares, unto God's servants, sent by His "servant John." This simplicity, common to all the Apostles, commends them to us as men of humble mind – the very kind we should expect our Lord

to use as special messengers to His people. This simplicity, this absence of boastfulness, so noticeable in the writings of all the Apostles, marks them as being in the ministry, not for the gratification of vanity, or for earthly rewards of any kind, but simply as the servants of God, who delighted to do His will, and to tell the Good Tidings, to the utter ignoring of themselves, except in so far as mention of themselves and their affairs might be necessary.

St. John was instructed to write, to make clear, to God's people the things already brought to his attention, and other things subsequently to be thus brought, to the intent that God's people might be enabled to comprehend with all saints the lengths, the breadths, the heights and depths of the Love of God, which passeth understanding, and which can be received only through revelation from God. And here let us note the force of the Apostle's statement (Verse 3) to the effect that there is a blessing upon those who read this revelation, even though they do not understand, and a special blessing upon those who hear and understand the words of this prophecy, and who conform their lives to the things therein written.

THE RISEN CHRIST'S MESSAGE

At the time of this vision St. John was a prisoner, exiled to the Isle of Patmos, a penal colony of those days – a rocky, barren island in the Aegean Sea. The crime for which he suffered this banishment was his faithfulness as the Lord's mouthpiece. At the time he must have been about ninety years of age – supposing that none of our Lord's disciples were younger than Himself at the beginning of His ministry.

St. John, the beloved disciple, in some measure or degree represented the last living members of the Body of Christ. Doubtless this was the meaning of our Lord's statement, "If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee?" (John 21:20-23.) St. John did not tarry; but a class whom in some respects he illustrated are represented as tarrying – a class that see with the eyes of their

understanding the visions and revelations which the beloved disciple saw in symbols in a trance.

If, then, St. John's exile in any degree represents ostracism which the Lord's followers may expect in the close of this Age – a complete isolation from others and a treatment implying that they are prisoners – they may take comfort from the thought that as our Lord's favor and revelation to St. John more than offset his persecutions, so the opening of our eyes of understanding and the granting to us of greater knowledge and appreciation of our Lord and of the Divine Plan will far more than offset the various experiences which in His providence God may permit to come upon us. His assurance is that all things shall work together for good to those who love God. Whoever rests his faith securely upon the Divine promise may indeed with the Apostle Paul count all things else as loss and dross for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus our Lord. – Philippians 3:8.

Presumably the Apostle had this vision on the first day of the week, now generally called Sunday. To Christians it is peculiarly the Lord's day – the day on which our Savior rose from the dead, and on which all the promises of God's Word received life and our hopes through Christ were quickened. We may see in the expression also a reference to the Millennial Age, called frequently in Scripture "The Day of the Lord." According to our understanding of Bible chronology we today are living in the early dawn of this Day of Christ; and it is here, properly enough, that we begin to see the wonderful things of the Divine Character and Plan. But to see and to understand we must be "in the spirit." Only those who have become New Creatures in Christ can be expected to appreciate spiritual things; and this is the class which the Apostle John represented.

There are many reasons for concluding that while the messages were given to the seven churches specified, and were applicable to

them, nevertheless these messages should properly have a still wider application to the whole Church of Christ, the number seven representing completeness and the order representing different epochs in the history of the Church. Thus the Church at Ephesus would represent the condition of the Church at the time of the writing of the messages; while the Laodicean Church would represent the Church in our day – in the end of the Gospel Age. The other churches would correspondingly represent different epochs intermediate, between then and now.

To think otherwise would be to attach too much importance to these seven comparatively small churches of Asia Minor, and would have implied an ignoring of other churches more influential than they; for instance, the churches at Jerusalem, Antioch, Corinth, etc. Furthermore, the details of the messages given these churches fit historically the one Church of the Living God, over every member of which our Lord has a care. This thought that the number seven signifies completeness we find emphasized in other symbolical representations – seven spirits, seven golden candlesticks, seven stars, etc.

"THE FIRST-BORN OF THEM THAT SLEPT"

Verse 5 clearly teaches what the creeds of Christendom ignore, and what is in direct antagonism to their statements; namely, that the risen Christ was "the first born of the dead." That is to say, our Lord was the first to experience a resurrection in the full sense of the word, the first to experience a resurrection to perfection [R5991 : page 344] and eternal life. Although some before Him were temporally awakened, they relapsed again into death; for they were only partial illustrations of resurrection, to assure men of the Divine Power to accomplish it fully in the due time appointed of God.

Verse 7 clearly teaches that at the time of our Lord's Second Advent the world will be far from converted to God; for "all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of Him." Some Scriptures

taken disconnectedly seem to teach that the world will be converted before His return; but when God's Word and Plan are viewed as a whole, these will be found to favor the opposite view – that Christ comes before the conversion of the world and for the very purpose of converting all mankind; and that the glorified Church of the Gospel Age shall share with her Lord and Head in His Reign, which is God's appointed means of blessing the world.

Christ and the glorified Church, made "partakers of the Divine nature," will be spirit beings, invisible to men. Our Lord's presence will be manifested to the world by exhibitions of power and great glory. He will not be visible to natural sight, but to the eyes of understanding, as these shall open to an appreciation of the great changes which earth's new Ruler shall effect. His presence and His righteous authority will be recognized in both the punishments and the blessings which will flow to mankind from His Reign.

Our King will reveal Himself gradually. Some will discern the new Ruler sooner than will others. But ultimately "every eye shall see [Greek, *horao*, discern] Him." But "He cometh with clouds." And while the clouds of trouble hang heavy and dark, when the mountains – kingdoms of this world – are trembling and falling, when the earth – organized society – is being shaken and disintegrated, some will begin to realize that Jehovah's Anointed is taking to Himself His great power and is beginning His work of laying justice to the line and righteousness to the plummet. For He must reign until He shall have put down all authority and laws on earth which are contrary to those controlling in Heaven.

WHAT THE BELOVED DISCIPLE SAW

St. John's attention was first attracted by a trumpet-like voice of Christ from behind him. The fact that its location is mentioned implies that it has a symbolic meaning. It signifies that the beginning of this Message was not in St. John's day, nor in the future, but that the things revealed had already commenced and were already to

some extent in the past. As some features of the Revelation show, the voice from behind went back to the time of our Lord's earthly ministry.

Turning and looking, the Apostle saw in symbol what the Lord's people may now see with the eye of faith and understanding. He saw One like *a* son of man – like a man, like a priest, as implied by the clothes described – walking amongst seven golden candlesticks, caring for them, trimming the wicks, seeing to the supply of oil, etc. Thus our Lord Jesus, our glorified Master, although absent from us, has protected the interests of His Cause throughout the past eighteen centuries, and has directed respecting His people's affairs, especially inspecting and caring for the Church as a light-bearer, a candlestick. Alas, how poor the wicks have sometimes been! How feeble the light that has sometimes shone out into the darkness of this world! How much trimming has been necessary, and how much more may yet be required!

In the Tabernacle, and subsequently in Solomon's Temple, the Golden Candlestick was placed by the Lord's direction – not seven candlesticks, but one with seven branches, representing the whole Church during this Gospel Age. In the Revelation the same candlestick, or lampstand, is brought to our attention; but the parts are separated – the union, the relationship between them, being supplied by our Redeemer, the antitypical High Priest. The lampstand symbolized the Lord's nominal people of this Gospel Age, including the members of His mystical Body. It holds forth the light of life, which shines in the darkness and which He directed should be let so shine that men might see our good works and glorify our Father in Heaven. – Matthew 5:16.

Alas! The Master evidently found but few good works, found but little glorifying light shining out from His earthly representatives in many of the seven epochs of the history of the Church. This fact is indicated by His messages, chidings, encouragements, etc., given

to each of these epoch-churches represented by the different candlesticks, or lampstands. It is to be noted that the candlestick, or lampstand, represents the nominal Church of Christ, rather than the true Church. This is shown by the fact that in addressing each of these churches the Lord finds fault with the many and approves the faithful few, especially so in the last, the seventh, the Laodicean Church of our day.

THE APPEARANCE OF CHRIST

We are not to regard the word picture of Verses 13-16 as a portrait of our Lord in glory; for it is merely symbolical. When we shall see Him in glory He will not look as here described. Nevertheless this symbolical picture has precious lessons for us, more valuable than an attempt to describe to our minds the appearance of our Lord as a Spirit Being, "dwelling in light which no man can approach unto," and which we cannot appreciate until we shall be changed to "be like Him and to see Him as He is." – 1 John 3:2; 1 Cor. 15:50-53.

His head and His hair as white as wool and snow tell us of His wisdom, His splendor and His glory. His eyes like a flame of fire tell us in symbol that our Master is all-seeing, omniscient; that He is not deceived by outward forms and ceremonies; but that He can, and does, read every thought and intent of the heart. The contemplation of His glance should of itself purge and purify our hearts to the extent of our ability, to put far from us everything which would have His disapproval.

Having described the head, St. John mentions the hands and the feet. The remainder of the body was covered with a garment reaching from the head to the feet. This may possibly represent the fact that the glory of Christ was manifested in His own person, in His own ministry, and in that of His Twelve Apostles, His representatives – St. Paul taking the place of Judas; and that with their death the body of Truth was almost veiled throughout the

eighteen centuries intervening, until now, in the end of the Age, the Feet members of the Body of Christ will be illuminated by the Truth and will shine forth – not like the Head, but as polished brass.

THE MASTER'S COMFORTING MESSAGE

When we think of the great advantage which we of the present day possess, we are inclined to say, "What manner of persons ought we to be in all holiness of living and God-likeness!" We have shining upon us with almost burning brightness the focused rays of Divine inspiration and revelation from the past 6,000 years. How it should consume in us all the dross of selfishness! How it should purify us! How humble it should make us! Even in our flesh we should be polished, bright, luminous representatives of our glorious Lord and Head.

The countenance of the majestic One present amongst **[R5991 : page 345]** the candlesticks is said to be like lightning. So great was the splendor that St. John fell as dead when he beheld it, just as Daniel did in the presence of the mighty One whom he saw, and just as Saul of Tarsus did before the majesty presented to him. (Daniel 10:4-11; Acts 9:3-9.) So it is symbolically with the Christian, when once he gets a glimpse of the glories of the Divine character. When once we get a true view of Him with whom we have to do, as the great Heart-searcher and Caretaker of His Church, we fall before Him, humbled to the dust, realizing that we are imperfect, that we cannot stand before our Master, that we are unworthy of His favor and blessing.

But as our Lord touched St. John gently, raising him up, so He has spoken to us comfort, peace and love, assuring us that we have a High Priest that can be touched with a feeling of our infirmities, One who is able to sympathize and mercifully to assist, One who has bought us with His own precious blood, and who has accepted us and will number us as His Body members as long as we abide in

Him, seeking in our hearts to know and to do His will. To us His comforting assurance is:

(1) "Fear not." The same message the Father has sent us through the Prophet, saying, "Their fear of Me is not of Me, but is taught by the precepts of men." (Isaiah 29:13.) This is one of the first lessons which we must learn. We cannot come into close sympathy with our Lord and be taught of Him respecting other features of His Plan until we learn to fear not, learn to have confidence in Him as the One "who loved us and bought us with His own precious blood," and whose purposes toward us continually are for our welfare and, if we submit ourselves to His guidance, will bring us off conquerors and more than conquerors.

(2) "I am the First and the Last." We must recognize that our Lord is the One who was the beginning of the creation of God and the end of it, the One by whom are all things, the One who is next to the Father, His very Representative in everything pertaining to the affairs of the Universe. (Colossians 1:15; Revelation 3:14; John 1:1-3; 1 Corinthians 8:6.) (3) We must recognize Him as the One who was dead, the One who really died for our sins, but who was as really raised out of death by the Father. (4) We must realize that He is alive for evermore, that death has no more dominion over Him, that the work is finished, that neither sacrifices of the Mass nor death in any sense or form ever will be needed. His work is perfect; and, as He cried on the Cross, "It is finished!"

(5) We must recognize that He has the keys, the authority, the power over the tomb, to deliver from it all who are therein imprisoned. We must also realize that He has the key, the power over death, in order that those whom He liberates from the prison-house of death, like those who have not yet gone into the tomb, but who are under the death sentence, may all be ultimately delivered, set free from the dominion of Sin and Death, delivered into the full

liberty of the Sons of God – righteousness and life everlasting.
– Romans 8:21.

"IN HIS RIGHT HAND SEVEN STARS"

This One whom we thus know, thus recognize, as the Instructor and Caretaker of the candlesticks, we are also to recognize as having in His right hand – in His favor as well as His power – seven stars, the angels, the messengers, of the seven Churches. Apparently the stars represent special ministers, or servants of the Church. In Revelation 12:1 the Church is pictured as a Woman crowned with twelve stars. These stars evidently represent the Twelve Apostles as the special lights of the Church. Similarly, in the picture before us, the seven stars which the Lord holds in His right hand seem to represent special light-bearers in the Church – in each of its seven phases or stages of development. That they are in His right hand seems to teach us that these should be considered as in some special sense under the Master's guidance, protection and care in the interest of the Churches which they represented.

It will be noticed that the messages to the various Churches are addressed to these stars, messengers, angels, as though our Lord would have us understand that the appropriate message for each appropriate epoch in the Church's experience would be sent by the Lord through a particular star, or messenger, whom He would especially commission as His representative. Our Lord Himself is represented by the great light of the sun; and His special messengers in the Church throughout the entire period of the Gospel Age are consistently enough represented as stars.

The difference between the symbols of the star and the candlestick is manifest. The star light is the Heavenly light, the spiritual enlightenment or instruction. The lamp light is the earthly light, representing good works, obedience, etc., of those who nominally constitute the Lord's Church in the world, and who are

exhorted not to put their light under a bushel, but upon a candlestick, and to let it so shine that it will glorify their Father in Heaven.

No part of the description could more thoroughly convince us that the description of our Lord given here is a symbolic one than does the statement that out of His mouth proceeded a two-edged sword. As a symbolic picture, however, it is full of meaning, speaking to us of the Word of the Lord, the Sword of the Spirit, "sharper than any two-edged sword." (Ephesians 6:17; Hebrews 4:12.) It reminds us that our Lord's words are not one-sided, not directed merely against sin in one class, but that His word is sharp, cutting in every direction, that sin is reproved by Him as much when found in His most earnest followers as when found elsewhere. It assures us that none need attempt to pluck out the mote from his brother's eye without first getting rid of the beam in his own eye; and that if we do not show mercy to those who are our debtors we must not expect mercy from Him who has proposed to extend His mercy toward us.

How heart-searching is God's Word when we understand it – not merely as a compendium of rules and regulations, but when we catch the spirit of it! Then we come to see that its requirement is love out of a pure heart; first, to the Heavenly Father; secondly, to our Lord and Head; thirdly, to all His brethren; fourthly, to the world in general, groaning and travailing in pain, waiting for the blessings of the coming Day of Christ; and fifthly, toward our enemies also, sympathetically realizing that they are warped, twisted and blinded through the deceitfulness of sin and through the machinations of the great Adversary. – 2 Corinthians 4:4.

"Blessed Bible, precious Word!
Boon most sacred from the Lord;
Glory to His name be given,
For this choicest gift from Heaven.

"'Tis a ray of purest light,
Beaming through the depths of night;
Brighter than ten thousand gems
Of the costliest diadems.

"'Tis a fountain, pouring forth,
Streams of life to gladden earth,
Whence eternal blessings flow –
Antidote for human woe.

"'Tis a mine, aye, deeper, too,
Than can mortal ever go;
Search we may for many years,
Still some new, rich gem appears."

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