

LAST SUNDAY OF END TIMES: CHRIST THE KING  
Revelation 1:9-18

As a suffering Christian, exiled to the island of Patmos *“on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus,”* the Apostle John writes to his fellow suffering Christians. *“I, John, your brother and partner in the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance that are in Jesus,”* he begins his letter, and all who are in Christ can expect to be partners in the same. We will suffer, but we will remain members of the kingdom of God so long as we remain in faith, and the joys of this kingdom of God, ours now in part through the gospel and forever in all fullness in eternity, work in us patient endurance. Why? In the light of eternity, everything pales. Measured against endless ages of glory, this fleeting age of crosses seems a trifle hardly worth a worry.

What John writes was revealed to him *“in the Spirit”* and *“on the Lord’s Day,”* on Sunday, as he sat exiled from his flock, an involuntary shut-in, no doubt longing for the opportunity to hear their voices in song and to join with them in resounding Amens to God’s Word and their prayers. The Lord Jesus told him to get his pen ready. What he was about to see was not only for him, but for all who are in Christ, for all who suffer for the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. And St. John kept his part of the bargain, and the Holy Spirit kept His, and we have it all right in front of our eyes and spoken into our ears today in the second lesson.

When he turned to hear the voice speaking to him, St. John *“saw seven gold lampstands.”* The seven golden lampstands represent the light of the world, the Christian Church, in particular, the seven churches to whom St. John was commanded to write. Jesus told His disciples already in the Sermon on the Mount, *“You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven”* (Matthew 5). The true Church must always shine. It must stand fast in the faith and confess the good news of Christ our Lord, even when doing such brings nothing but bad news.

In the midst of the seven churches stood *“one like a son of man,”* and thank God for that. He who so often called Himself the Son of Man promised His frightened flock at the Ascension, *“And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”* Earlier He had assured them, *“For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them.”* Like the Emmaus disciples, we may not always recognize or appreciate it at the time, but Christ is always with His people, eager to sustain and build them up.

Christ is clothed in a long robe, the robe of the high priest (Exodus 28, 29). High Priest and the Lamb of God, the One offering the sacrifice and the Sacrifice Himself, Christ has once and for all taken away the sin of the world, has crushed the Serpent's head, has conquered death, has removed the veil that separated us from God the Father, and has opened the kingdom of heaven to all believers. Christ's golden sash on His priestly robe is a sign of His kingship. He is Prophet, Priest, and King.

Jesus' hair is *"white, like white wool, like snow."* He is sinless, pure, righteous, and holy. Nothing stains His perfect life. He is a Lamb without blemish or defect. Satan, whose name means "Accuser," has nothing of which to accuse Him. He is the King of Heaven to be worshipped and glorified together with the Father and the Spirit.

His eyes are *"like a flame of fire."* Nothing is hidden from the sight of our Judge. All the evidence, every damning tidbit is laid out before Him. Fire was used for testing by the ancients. Only that which was genuine would survive the flames. The same is true of the Last Day. Only that which is genuine will survive. His eyes see and test you, not only what you've done in the light of the day, but what you've done in the darkness, not only what you've shouted from the rooftops, but what you've whispered in the ear.

His eyes are *"like a flame of fire"* and all that is not genuine will be burned, and apart from Christ, we are the best charcoal money could buy. There is nothing genuine in us, and there is nothing we can do to hide that from His eyes or the fire's testing. Only in Christ, only through His death and resurrection, will believers be saved, be found innocent in His sight and proven genuine through His judgment. There is not tricking the Son of Man, and there is no fooling the fire!

His feet are *"like burnished bronze, refined in a furnace."* He is steadfast, tried and true. He isn't going anywhere, and He isn't changing His mind. His judgment is final. He will crush His enemies, all those who oppose His kingdom and will, under His bronze feet.

His voice is *"like the roar of many waters."* His word is the Word and the final word. His authority is indisputable. His voice roars with truth and power. He need not shout to win the argument. With His voice, the debate is over. He is true God. He is Christ the King. His voice brought forth creation and His voice will restore it.

*"In His right hand He held seven stars."* The seven stars are the seven angels, that is, the seven messengers of the churches. In this case, the angels are the pastors called to preach to them the message of law and gospel, of sin and forgiveness. Christ Himself holds them in His hands, to guide and guard them. They speak for Him, and He speaks through them, and their light, like that star over Bethlehem, is to lead the churches to Him who has come to ransom His captive believers.

*“From his mouth came a sharp two-edged sword.”* Last time I was in Wittenberg, I remember seeing in the Black Cloister a two-edged sword. It was the sword of judgment, the executioner’s sword. The two-edged sword coming out of Christ’s mouth is His judgment, and His judgment will be based upon law and gospel. Sin must be punished. The innocent must be set free. On our own, we know where we stand, and we’d best not grow to love our heads too much. But in Christ, according to the gospel, received through faith, we are the innocent, dressed in white like our Savior, washed of our sins and covered in His innocence. In Christ, we have a Head, and we are members of His body, the Church. Remain in Him and your head will remain on your shoulders, for His sword has two edges, law and gospel, and He delights in nothing more than the gospel, for the gospel is the good news of Him.

*“His face was like the sun shining in full strength.”* Christ is the Sun of Righteousness (Malachi 4:2), the Light that has dawned upon the people sitting in darkness, whose face shone like the sun in the Transfiguration and whose resurrected glory will never fade. The sun is life to the world. The Sun of Righteousness is life to His Church. Outside of Him we can only wither and die. In Him, we sprout and grow.

When John saw Jesus, the same Jesus with whom He had walked and talked and ate for three years, He *“fell at His feet as though dead.”* Seeing Christ in His glory, which of us wouldn’t do the same? Only the impious and most hardened wouldn’t bow in His presence, and if ever His presence ceases to stir in you a reverent fear, you’d best be concerned. Christ is no clown, fool, or pushover. Christ is the eternal King and Judge of all, and we do well to remember that.

But notice what Christ, He who is dressed in so much splendor and whose presence strikes such fear in even the most believing, does next, as St. John plants his face in the ground in awe, fear, and trembling: *“But he laid his right hand on me, saying, ‘Fear not, I am the first and the last, and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades.’”*

He is ever Savior, always Christ Jesus, *“He who saves.”* Today, as you meet Him, as you confess your sins and sincerely desire to amend your life, as you are all too convinced of your lost condition, He lays His right hand on you, the hand of His power, but also one of the hands pierced for your transgression, the hand of blessing, and He preaches the gospel, *“Fear not.”* Why? *“I am the first and the last, and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades.”* You are in good hands when you’re in His. Remain in His, for He is Christ the King. Amen.