

“Which Christ Did Paul See?”  
 Sermon for 11 July 2021  
 Texts: Galatians 1:12; Rev. 1:12-20  
 Pastor Sam Richards

It is not an idle question. And I wish to speak theologically first and then historically to this question. I. Theologically. We have “The Revelation to John” to guide us for that revelation followed the ascension of Christ by some sixty years—the Spirit has been given, and Christ has been enthroned on high from whence he intercedes for the church, for all his saints. Sixty years more or less from his post-ascension revelation to Saul and that disclosure was such, in scope and majesty, on glory and truth that it utterly turned Saul around and on the basis of that revelation Paul came to believe in the divinity of God in Jesus—that even as he believed in God so he should believe in Jesus. And so should we all. John refers to Jesus as **the Son of Man, Lion of Judah, Lamb and Word of God**. God gives this revelation, this full disclosure, to Jesus and **He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John**. (Rev.1:1) Also transmitted was a scroll (5:7): **the Lamb. . . went and took the scroll (which revealed the things that soon must take place v.1) from the right hand of the One seated on the throne**. And 6:1-2: **I watched when the Lamb opened one of the seven seals, and I heard one of the four living creatures say with a voice like thunder, “Come!” And I looked and behold, a white horse! And its rider had a bow and a crown was given to him, and he came out conquering and to conquer**. And this advent initiated warfare on the earth.

But the description of the glorified Lord precedes this business. It occurs in Rev. 1:12-20:

**12 Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking with me. And after turning I saw seven golden lampstands; 13 and in the middle of the lampstands I saw one like [a]a son of man, clothed in a robe reaching to the feet, and wrapped around the chest with a golden sash. 14 His head and His hair were white like white wool, like snow; and His eyes were like a flame of fire. 15 His feet were like [fine brass] burnished bronze when it has been heated to a glow in a furnace, and His voice was like the sound of many waters. 16 In His right hand He held seven stars, and out of His mouth came a sharp two-edged sword; and His face was like the sun [c]shining in its strength.**

**17 When I saw Him, I fell at His feet like a dead man. And He placed His right hand on me, saying, “Do not be afraid; I am the first and the last, 18 and the living One; and I [d]was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of death and of Hades. 19 Therefore write the things which you have seen, [e]and the things which are, and the things which will take place after these things. 20 As for the mystery of the seven stars which 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.**

One can hardly improve on this stunning picture of the glorified Lord. When John beheld it, he writes **I fell at his feet as though dead**—now that is what you call impact!—and something similar happened to Paul and company when *they saw the light from heaven on the Damascus Road!* They were either knocked or fell on the ground. *Both reactions recorded as scriptural and non-speculative!* An image like that would be utterly convincing—especially when the person speaking to you is supposed to have been “dead and buried.” My point is: that would do it!

- the voice like a tumult, **many waters**
- hair like **whitest wool (the Ancient of Days?)**, a full length robe and **golden sash**
- **flashing, fine brass feet** with **searing heat**
- a handful of **seven stars**, a mouth equipped with **a two-edged sword**
- eyes, **a flame of fire**, a face like **the shining sun**
- all in the likeness of a son of man—Jesus’ title for himself, **who walks among the seven golden lamp stands** and **holds the seven stars**

Acoustical, kinesthetic, and visual images of divine majesty, splendor and glory. That would get one’s attention, change one’s mind, alter one’s reality and, of course, that is what it did for Paul. It made a believer out of Saul. Seeing Jesus, he saw his divinity, he saw God! Let’s attend to another passage, John 14:1-7:

**1 "Do not let your heart be troubled; [a]believe in God, believe also in Me. 2 In My Father’s house are many [b]rooms; if *that* were not so, [c]I would have told you, because I am going *there* to prepare a place for you. 3 And if I go and prepare a place for you, I am coming again and will take you to Myself, so that where I am, *there* you also will be. 4 And you know the way where I am going.” 5 Thomas \*said to Him, “Lord, we do not know where You are going; how do we know the way?” 6 Jesus \*said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father except through Me. 7 If you [d]had known Me, you would have known My Father also; from now on you know Him, and have seen Him.”**

Here is the critical verse: **believe in God, believe also in Me.** Meaning, you believe in God, believe likewise in me—the Father and I are one, to know one is to know the other, to see one is to see the other. Jesus was God in visual, embodied form! Believe likewise, in the same manner as you believe in God, “Immortal, invisible, God only wise. In light inaccessible hid from our eyes. Most blessed and glorious, the Ancient of Days, Almighty, victorious, Thy great name we praise.” (Hymn 12)

Believe in his Godhead, believe in his capacity to create, provide, guide, direct, save (**he uttermost**—Hebrews 7:25) and comfort—to resolve all things, to accomplish all things, to save and sanctify, to cast out Satan and defeat evil, to abolish iniquity and establish both mercy and justice . . .

Let's pause: let us remember that in the beginning, when God **created the heavens and the earth, The earth was without form and void and darkness was over the face of the deep.** (Gen.1:1-2) Out of that formlessness, and chaos, and emptiness—out of that nothing!—God brought into being form, and structure, design, materiality—all that we can see, sense, study and discover! And he cancelled the reigning darkness. It was nothing to him, like the flipping of a switch, and the light was on! God empowered everything all at once. He was the central main power, the originator. Omnipotent. Believe in Jesus like that! For truly, he was there in the beginning with the father in the work of creation (**He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any things made that was made. And in him was life, and the life was the light of men.** (John 1:2-4) *Both life and light were sourced within the God head!* **He (Jesus) is the image of the invisible God, the first born of all creation** (meaning co-existent/coeternal with God prior to creation). **For by him all things were created in heaven and earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones to dominions, or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him.** And he is before all things and in him all things cohere. (Col.1:15-17) **4 Therefore, concerning the eating of food sacrificed to idols, we know that an idol is at nothing at all in the world, and that there is no God but one. 5 For even if there are so-called gods whether in heaven or on earth, as indeed there are many gods and many lords, 6 yet for us there is only one God, the Father, from whom are all things, and we exist for Him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we exist through Him. (1 Cor. 8:4-6) **And all things are from God.** (1 Cor. 11:12c) That is Jesus, with whom we have to do!**

II. Historically. De-throne money, and self and social position, natural abilities, temperament and disposition, skill and talent and education—all social, mental and emotion habits and instincts! Sweep aside knowledge, wisdom, feelings, intuition, innate properties and the acquired, ideology and philosophy, culture and technology, all artifacts and products and commodities, all economics, psychology and politics, too. Jesus is Lord, enthrone him! Nothing compares to Jesus, nothing better, true—no one else can save. There is none able to bring out of ruin and devastation what God does. God rebuilds, restores and renews—whether we are talking about the ravages of violent death, a collapsed condo, earthquake, tsunamis and floods, drought and fire, plagues of insects and killing frosts. **“Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, Nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him** (1 Cor. 2:9) . . . Believe in God's creative power! His providing and sustaining power! His power of restoration and innovation!

18 “Do not call to mind the former things,  
 Or consider things of the past.  
 19 Behold, I am going to do something new,  
 Now it will spring up;  
 Will you not be aware of it?  
 I will even make a roadway in the wilderness,  
 Rivers in the desert.<sup>20</sup> The animals of the field will glorify Me,  
 The jackals and the ostriches,  
 Because I have given waters in the wilderness  
 And rivers in the desert,  
 To give drink to My chosen people.<sup>21</sup> The people whom I formed for  
 Myself Will declare My praise. I am creating a new heaven and a new  
 earth. (Isaiah 43:18-20)

Take the particular and known instance of Jesus’ raising of Lazarus. This was a brand new thing! Happening right before their eyes and ears in Bethany—God created “a meeting room for his presence” there! God was present, but some thought it was only Jesus. Lazarus died of natural causes, his health was destroyed, he declined and died—was entombed. He was in a state of ruin and devastation—and Mary and Martha had been witnesses to all. Martha cried, **Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.** (John 11:21) ***Kept from dying is about as far as her hope extended!*** Prior to arriving Jesus confides in his disciples, **Lazarus has died, and for your sakes I am glad that I was not there so that you may believe.** (v. 15) This sounds off, if not downright anti-social; but no one knows what Jesus knows, as God knows, what is about to unfold! ***Only God can raise the dead—only God can save.***

Back to Martha, Jesus declares to her, **I am the resurrection and the life, whoever believes in Me through he died, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die.** **DO YOU BELIEVE THIS?** (v.25-26) This seems so tone deaf! There’s a funeral going on, grief and mourning, weeping happening here. Martha does not answer such an astonishing (bold, disruptive—seeming out of touch) question directly. She demurs, **“Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God who is coming into the world.”** (v.27) Her words are a deflection, not “I believe that those who believe in you, Lord, will never die . . . or even live.” **Your brother will rise again** (11:23) what, in such a setting, could this mean? ***There were the object lessons lying behind the current, intimate and familial crisis of death—why Jesus allowed Lazarus to die*** (that you might believe); and behind **Did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?** (v.40); and behind Jesus’ very public prayer, **Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I knew that you always hear me BUT I SAID THIS ON ACCOUNT OF THE PEOPLE STANDING AROUND THAT THEY MIGHT BELIEVE THAT YOU SENT ME.** (v. 41) The content of that prayer (that Lazarus be raised from the dead?) is not recorded, only the act of prayer itself. Jesus’ entire confidence that Lazarus be raised stands on its own—a general belief in resurrection somehow, someday differs widely from this bold,

world-shattering petition! This demonstration of belief was catalytic—and many did believe on Jesus as evidence by the crowd surge that attended his triumphal entry in the weeks to follow. *It is incredible to suppose that Saul did not know of this notable miracle—and the reality of Lazarus' resurrection is attested to by the plot to assassinate him* (John 12:9-11):

**9 The large crowd of the Jews then learned that He was there; and they came, not on account of Jesus only, but so that they might also see Lazarus, whom He raised from the dead. 10 But the chief priests planned to put Lazarus to death also, 11 because on account of him many of the Jews were going away and were believing in Jesus.**

The Jewish authorities (the same crew who authorized Saul to persecute Christians later) did not bother to refute the death and burial narrative—these were historically/experientially validated (were falsifiable, and yet true). They sought to destroy the evidence. The dead man was walking and talking. Kill him.

This “faith act,” *the raising of Lazarus*, is consistent with Jesus’ insistence, and reinforces, that to believe in him, or on him is **life**. Two times in John 14, Jesus presses home **believe in me**, and that was amongst his disciples in the closing hours of his earthly existence—not in public, not amongst unbelieving Jews. Here, at Lazarus’ tomb site, family, friends and disciples are gathered within the parameters of formal grieving—for the finality and ruin of death has stricken the household of Lazarus, Mary and Martha and the communal response of grief, dismay, sorrow is going on apace. Everyone is acting on the fact of, the reality of death—resurrection, present and immediate, is plainly not on anyone’s scope. Lazarus had already been **in the tomb four days**.

**If you have seen Me, you have seen the Father, and if you have known me you have known the Father**—Paul saw the Son of God (we have a similitude of that in the vision of John) and he saw him both theologically as true; and historically as real. Both, to him, irrefutable. One and the same. Amen.