

STRANGER TIMES: A BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO THE APOCALYPSE (Pete Burton)

- Where have you seen God at work in your life this week? (Share any brief examples and encouragements).
- Was there anything from Sunday's message which you found particularly inspiring or challenging?
- Was there anything else you particularly noticed?

Rev 1v12-20

Apocalypse is not "end of world" genre but revealing a heavenly perspective on an earthly situation.

This passage is full of idioms the 1st century Christians would have understood (just as we understand what is meant by someone having their "head in the clouds"). There are 7 (=perfection) depictions of Jesus.

We see Jesus as he is now:

- He was *among the lampstands* (v13) The lampstands represent the 7 churches. Jesus was not above nor outside but present with. Not embarrassed by the church.
- He was *someone like a son of man* (v13) See Dan 7v13-14. Son of Man was a central figure in Jewish history. The gospels depicted Jesus as a wandering rabbi but he said "I am the Son of Man". He talked like a king but acted like a servant. Jesus was fully God and fully human.
- He was *dressed in a robe reaching down to his feet and with a golden sash round his chest* (v13) Compare priesthood of Ex28. *Pontifex* is Latin for priest and literally means "bridge-builder". A good bridge builder knows both sides of the chasm. Jesus knows God and man.

Then follow 7 descriptions of Jesus.

1. *The hair on his head was white like wool, as white as snow* (v14) White hair in Dan 7 refers to the Ancient of Days and this reference infers divinity. White is also for purity, consider Ps51v7 as a cry for purity.
2. *Eyes were like blazing fire* (14). Many references to fire - Pillar in desert (Ex13v21), burning bush (Ex3), altar fires (Lev6v9, 1Ki18v38), fiery furnace (Dan 3), etc. Jesus looks into us, not just at us and burns away what doesn't belong.
3. *Feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace* (v15) Remember the statue in Daniel (2v31-35) Kingdoms of men have shaky foundations - Rome may have seemed dominant but it has fallen. Bronze is an alloy of iron and copper. Iron is strong but rusts; Copper won't rust but is pliable. Bronze has the best of both.
4. *His voice was like the sound of rushing waters* (v15) Early church didn't have noise as we do, only natural sounds like thunder, lions roaring and waterfalls. (Niagara Falls is 95DBa). But God's voice spoke creation, Jesus' voice calmed the storm. Jesus' voice is awesome and commanding
5. *In his right hand he held seven stars* (v16) Astrology was a big deal and in 1st century they only knew of 7 planets. The right hand was a sign of power. The idiom is of Jesus controlling the whole cosmos. In v20 John refers to the 7 stars as the 7 churches. Again, Jesus is seen to be in control.
6. *Coming out of his mouth was a sharp, double-edged sword* (v16). Jesus told Peter to put away his sword (Jn 18v11) Here "sword" means "Word of God" (Eph 6v17, Heb 4v12) It separates good from evil. We are to follow what comes from Jesus' mouth.
7. *His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance.* (v16) We live in darkness but remember the Aaronic blessing: *The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you; the Lord turn his face towards you and give you peace.* Num 6v24-26 Light brings perspective.

Jesus first words: **Do not be afraid.** *I am the First and the Last. I am the Living One; I was dead, and now look, I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades.* (V17-18)

- Do these images help put Jesus in focus? Which image do you find most helpful? Why?
- We live in strange times (Queen's death, government in tatters, post pandemic, threat of war, economic threats, etc) - how can we focus on Jesus? How can we encourage each other to focus on Jesus?
- Why do you think Jesus' first words to John were "Do not be afraid"?
- How can we apply that command in our present situations?
- Why not close your time together by praying the Aaronic blessing over each other? Consider each stanza.