

"A Heavenly View"

Encountering Christ, part 6

Revelation 5:6-14 and 19:11-16

It is good to be here with you this morning. I am absolutely amazed that God uses us to spread the good news of Jesus and proclaim this amazing thing called the Kingdom of God. Let's face it: we are all broken people. We all make mistakes. We all mess up. And yet in Jesus Christ, we get a second chance. We have a hope that we can share. God is for us, not against us. That's amazing. So if it took you four cups of coffee to get going this morning, or you didn't have time to apply makeup, don't worry. You are in the right place, here, with us.

I invite you to pray with me, with your palms open, ready to receive what God has for you.

Lord Jesus Christ, You alone are worthy. Help us to see You this morning in a new way. Help us to respond to Your love and grace. And may the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable to You, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

One thing I love about living in the Upper Peninsula is the abundance of "heavenly views." Earlier this summer, I got to see the comet Neowise from my backyard. It was amazing. How many of you have watched the sunset at Breakers, or gazed at the sky turning purple over the canal as a storm rolls in? It's simply amazing.

Big stuff, like sunsets and stars, are easy to see. But, have you ever failed to see something that was right in front of you? I miss stuff all the time because it doesn't appear where I think it will be, or it doesn't look how I think it will look. I am the guy who can't find the butter in the fridge. It's not because it's hidden or

gone, it's because I expect it to be in the first place I look, and when it's not, I give up and call my wife. She is telepathic and has x-ray vision, by the way, because she knows what I'm looking for before I even tell her, and she knows exactly where it is. I swear, she might have to tell me, "The car is in the garage, silly."

I don't just miss little things. For example: I once got lost when I went skiing. OK, I've gotten lost more than once, but this one particular time I am remembering, I was on the right trail, and I knew exactly what landmark I was looking for: a huge, glowing-red, radio tower, at least 300 feet tall. I was at the bottom of the hill, only 50 yards away. It should have been impossible to miss; however, my vision was clouded by snow. I didn't see the tower, and as a result, I spent an extra hour wandering through the forest.

In a similar way, many of us miss seeing Jesus in our lives. Jesus is powerful, a heavenly beacon of light. But we miss seeing Jesus, because He doesn't show up the way we think He will. It is not that He isn't there. We just aren't tuned in to the right channel. We have a preconceived notion of what Jesus looks like and what Jesus will do, and yet many times Jesus fails to meet our expectations. He doesn't look like the pictures we have seen. He doesn't appear the first place we look.

What is your image of Jesus? Is there a specific picture that comes to mind? Maybe one of these images? (*Show first 3, then stop on slide 4.*) Notice how many of them are the European, long-haired Jesus? It's like Da Vinci painted his picture, and now that's the number one image we have. Look at some of the alternative in this last picture, the collage.

This is the point. Write it down. If your personal image of Jesus is limited, your relationship with Him will be, too. It's easy to think that Jesus is the long-

haired rabbi from two thousand years ago, and that makes Jesus somewhat distant from us. We need to paint a bigger picture. That is why we also need this heavenly view of Jesus from Revelation. We don't want to miss this view of His awesome power.

Revelation 5 is filled with some strange images of Jesus. He is the lamb that was slain. [SLIDE] He has seven horns and seven eyes. Flip over to Revelation 19. Jesus is riding on a white horse. [SLIDE] His eyes are like blazing fire. He is crowned with many crowns. He is wearing a robe dipped in blood. That's not my image Jesus, unless I'm having nightmare.

Understand, Revelation is filled with poetic imagery, because it is an apocalyptic book. It's not meant to be taken literally. So what do these images convey? Why is there so much activity going on around Christ? Why are all these living creatures, elders, angels, and all of creation joining in praising Christ together?

The author is trying to tell that Jesus is the center of all the worship of heaven and earth. Jesus is that powerful and majestic. Our puny, human minds can barely begin to grasp that fact.

Jesus is the Son of God. In the last few weeks, we have talked about His miracles. We have talked about His power to redeem people, to surprise them, to teach them, and to save them. Here, the author of Revelation tells us what Jesus will look like in heaven. Jesus is awesome and mighty! Even though Jesus looks like one who was crucified and defeated, because of His sacrifice, He is the only one worthy of praise. He is the rider on a white horse...a king...who will conquer his enemies.

Christ is not weak. Christ is not irrelevant or distant. And the author of Revelation is trying to tell us that one day we will meet Jesus, and his power will be undeniable. Honestly, this heavenly view should cause us to fear Jesus. These images should leave us shaking in our boots.

Yet this fear doesn't have to paralyze us. We shouldn't just run away and hide. Rather, this is a fear that puts us in the proper position of humility. When we see Christ displayed this way, we should admit, like the prophet Isaiah (6:5) says, "Woe is me. I am a man of unclean lips." (And heart, and mind, and hands, as well.)

The power of Christ should overwhelm us. But remember, Jesus was slain to redeem us. So while these passages might concern us, confuse us, and even frighten us, we know that God's love was revealed in Jesus. When we submit to Him and ask Him to rule in our lives, we no longer have to be afraid of this powerful King. Instead, we can join with all creation in praising Christ. We can sing, "And I will adore You."

Honestly, it's easy to forget who Jesus is. When I'm down, I forget Jesus is the conqueror. I forget He is greater than any problem or situation I can ever face. When I was lost in the woods, I probably should have been praying, "Lord, please help me."

I honestly believe that if we pray to Jesus and open our eyes, He will show up in our lives. [SLIDE] Matthew 25:40 promises if you are serving one of the least of these, you are serving Jesus. Matthew 18:5 says if you are welcoming a little one in Jesus' name, it is the same as welcoming Christ Himself.

When a miracle happens, Jesus is there. And when you're burdened, disappointed, and mad at God for not showing up in the way you thought He had to, Jesus is there. You just need to change your point of view. Jesus is there.

When our lives are over on this earth, someday, then we will finally see that these powerful images of Jesus in the Book of Revelation are true. [SLIDE]. I don't know if Jesus will appear white, black, Chinese, or Norwegian. Maybe He will appear to be all of those, or appear different depending on our own backgrounds, but we will recognize him. And Philippians 2:10 promises that "Every knee will bow, and every tongue will confess that Jesus is Lord."

The question is, when you bow to Him, is it going to be a natural reaction based on a life-time of worship, or will it be awkward and forced, because you spent your life distant from Him? Right here, right now, I am asking you: Do you recognize the power of Jesus?

I want to challenge you this week to think of your personal image of Jesus. And rather than focus on a painting someone else has done, try to recognize Jesus by what He has done for you. In the end, it doesn't matter if Jesus has long hair or short hair, or a beard or a mustache. What matters is, He is Lord, and He loves us. I don't want to miss Jesus in my life because He didn't conform to some preconceived image I already had of Him. And I'll bet you don't either.

We all need to pray that we will see Jesus. We must ask God to show us Christ in a way we can recognize, adore, and love. And we can be blown away by who Christ is. This awesome, wonderful, amazing Son of God calls us "friend". We all have a chance to have a relationship with the most powerful being ever, who became human and lived among us, who died on a cross to save us, and who

will come again in power, not as a suffering servant, but as a conqueror. That's an image we can all keep in our minds.

(Prayer and baptism renewal follow the message.)

Memory verse

Revelation 5:12 - "In a loud voice they sang, 'Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!'"

Reflection questions

1. Have you ever failed to find something you were looking for because it appeared different than what you expected? What was it?
2. What types of images come to mind when you think of Jesus? A bearded, robed Rabbi? A crucifix? A Caucasian Jesus? A different ethnicity?
3. If Jesus showed up right now, would you recognize Him? How?
4. Have you ever thought what it would be like to meet Jesus in heaven? What do you think you would do? How are you preparing for that moment?