

Revelation - Commentaries by W R Hartridge

Revelation of Jesus Christ, Things That Thou Sawest, The (1:12-18)

One Like Unto the Son of Man

"And I turned to see." Everything in this Book betokens its character as a revelation. It is something that had not been before, something quite new in character. Mary at the sepulcher "turned herself back, and saw" (John 20:14); "She turning round says" (v. 16). This action portrays the unexpected, unlooked-for nature of the manifestation. Seven golden candlesticks are seen, not one candlestick with seven branches as in the tabernacle, but seven separate light-bearers, each representing a church, of which it could be said to Ephesus, "I will remove thy candlestick."

"One like the Son of Man." In Daniel, the Son of Man is seen as brought to the Ancient of days. Here He possesses all the characteristics of the Ancient of days, but with other characteristics in relation to the church which was a "mystery hid" in Daniel's vision. These other characteristics are brought out in relation to the various churches, as we shall presently see. But all of them show how intimately His person is connected with the churches and their representatives, whom He is shown as holding in His right hand.

None could live in the presence of such a One, and John falls at His feet as dead. He who had lain in the bosom of the Son of Man come in grace, is at dead before the same Son of Man as judge. His authority on the ground of redemption has, however, enabled Him to give confidence. Perfect love casts out fear. He was alive, became dead, and is now alive for evermore. As first and last, everything is met in His holy Person. The keys of death and hades are in His safe keeping, no longer at Satan's disposal or in his power.

The Son of Man is a title the Lord delights in. In eternity with the Father, His delights were with the sons of men. In prophecy He applied it to Ezekiel a hundred times, and of Himself in the Gospels He uses it eighty times. No one ever uses it of Him save Stephen, who sees Him in that character standing at God's right hand. He has passed by angels to take up His glories as Man! and in and among men are these glories to be manifested both in heaven and on earth. Distinct spheres of blessing they are, and yet through Him to be intimately related in blessing. This title, then, has a very wide and far-reaching significance. It is not only that He condescended to become a Man that He might make reconciliation, but that as a Man He might bring many sons to glory, and that they might be His companions there. The thought is so vast that the creature, except divinely prepared and divinely endowed, could not—and in many cases does not—grasp it.

"Write the things which thou hast seen"; namely, that which we are now considering, the glorious characteristics of His Person, in their judicial aspect, which are the foundations of everything in this Book. It was John's special function in his Gospel to speak of Him in His character as "Son." But there it is Son of God who has come down into the world in grace to make the Father known to all such as, believing in Him, had authority to become sons of God, even to such as believed on His name, being born of God. In that same Gospel (v. 27) He has authority to execute judgment, because He is the Son of Man. The glories of His Person, therefore, are the sum and substance, pith and marrow of Holy Scripture, from beginning to end, natural or spiritual, temporal or eternal.

Revelation of Jesus Christ, Conclusion (22:8-21)

The Angel's Comments (I)

In the previous chapter, v. 5, we had the testimony of Him that sat on the throne to the faithfulness and truth of the utterances. Here it is the angel who says so. We must not take these words as they would obtain between man and man. With men they would mean that the one affirmed that he was faithful and true to the other in respect to what was said. The divine utterances are not so. In all that God says, He is true to Himself. Christ is the truth: outside of Him, all else is spurious. We get, therefore, in what God has presented in this Book, a reflex of Himself. His truth, His faithfulness, take this form. His estimate of what is due to His Christ, quite irrespective of what man may think of it or believe it to be. So again with what follows. It may be very right and proper to regard such a wondrous revelation as an extraordinary favor vouchsafed to mortal man; but whether so regarded or not, the Lord God of the holy prophets was so intent upon His Christ being an object of surpassing interest that He sent His angel to inform them of the fact, and expected them to take a surpassing interest also. Not merely on their own account, but very specially on His. Not merely as a matter of privilege, or any other reason relating to themselves, but as a matter of high importance to the Lord and Master, whose servants they were. And then the Master Himself puts in His word in His own name and person. Behold! I am coming quickly. And as all He says leaves a blessing behind it, He adds: Blessed is he who keeps [that is, lays hold of, appropriates as his own,] the words of the prophecy of this Book.

But here a very solemn and serious consideration comes before us. It is this: What heed has been paid by the servants to the message sent forth by the Lord God of the spirits of the prophets? What heed has been paid to the priceless message of the priceless Master? What have the servants done in respect to it? Who is keeping the lookout for the Master? Who, or has any one, got the blessing that He offered? The astronomer never leaves the observatory empty nor the telescope idle. Somebody is always there. The telescope never has a moment's rest. But what matters the return of a comet, or the appearance of an unseen star, in comparison to the lookout day and night for the Man that disappeared at Bethany, and who is coming in like manner? He parted from His own, who beheld Him as He went up, and stood staring at the heavens till reminded by two men that His return was the next thing, and that they were to look for it. And now that the message has come to His own, intimating that it is "shortly" and "quickly," who is on the qui vive? Who is watching for Him personally? Some are, doubtless,

doctrinally. That is something, of course, brought about by the Spirit's urgency within the last few decades. But that is not enough for His large and generous affection. Has He only died for me doctrinally? He loved me, and gave Himself for me. Therefore let us, one and all, who love His appearing, give Him no rest, but agonize in spirit before Him for His return. Perhaps He does but wait for this personal action of affection from His blood-bought ones! There will be no mistake about Judah's agonizing cry, "Oh that Thou wouldest rend the heavens, that Thou wouldest come down" (Isa. 64:1). Who can read the touching, heartbroken appeal that precedes this apostrophe to their rejected Lord without the tears flowing hot and fast for them? Who can say that we ourselves have not been brought to Bochim to stir up personal affections and quicken our sluggish regard for Him whose personal glory has been lowered in the eyes of those before whom it should have been exalted, and who now comes to us with His touching appeal: "I redeemed you: I never broke My word with you. Why have you done this?" (See Judges 2:14). Has the great calamity that has befallen us been for the special object of moving us for the last time to our innermost being before He comes? Of making us relinquish all that we have cherished for a lifetime with that hopelessness that came over David when he exclaimed, "And now, Lord, what wait I for?" My hope is in THEE.

John's Wonderment

Nothing is more common among the sons of men, than to come short of the measure of apprehension necessary to receive any message aright. There are two reasons for this. One is, that the condition of soul for receiving, must be akin to the condition of soul for giving. And the other is, that the machinery of one's thoughts is rarely exactly adapted, for various reasons to take up what is set forth. At the transfiguration, Peter made a most humiliating mistake, with the best of intentions, but the fact is, he was bewildered; "he wist not what to answer" (Mark 9:6). Cornelius, divinely instructed by a holy angel to send for Peter, to hear words whereby he might be saved, transfers the importance of the message to the messenger, and falling down to do homage, receives the rebuke, "Stand up, I myself also am a man." And so it is here. Never came such a communication to mortal man, as the angel had told out to the disciple whom Jesus loved. But that message came from Jesus through the angel. It was a revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show unto His servants; and, strange to say, the source and origin of the gracious message is left out, and His glory given to the messenger. Not he who delivers the letter, but he who writes it, is my friend. Now, great and important principles are involved in these mistakes. Who would be so ready as the precious Lord Himself to remind us that "GOD was in Christ, reconciling the world to Himself"? It was the blessed One Himself again, that had to remind His dear clinging ones, "The FATHER Himself loveth you." And so, laying hold of this principle, we may ask ourselves, Why is it that all this amazing display of love, grace, and here power, majesty, and glory, have so small an effect on our souls? Is it not that our souls are resting on something short of the fountain and origin of the glory? Honestly now, when we read the Apocalypse, do our souls keep harping on the effect it will have on Him? Or shall the truth be told, that every shred of attention, or a considerable part of it, has been, What will our position be in respect to it? It is no use denying it, we all do it. John does it, but by the Spirit of God he records the rebuke he got. Let us profit by it. The full force of this revelation is to see its effect on Jesus Christ. He is the One for whom it was made. We are accessories to His glory, no doubt—but so are the angels in their estate. We, however, derive our glory from duly estimating and appreciating His glory. All else misses its point. We are apprehended for the express purpose of apprehending Him (Phil. 3:12). It is wondrous grace in Him to think so much of us. It is the worst of all possible errors in us, to have a single thought of ourselves, where anything concerning Him is in question.

Let us pursue a little further this question as to the correct perception of truth set before us. It must be manifest that much ministry that is set before us is not assimilated by us. We hear the words, we follow and endorse the conclusion drawn, and yet are unable to feel that we have made our own the truth advanced. Why is this? Why is it that, perhaps at a future time, the very same truth lays hold of us with a divine force that makes it ours forever? Doubtless we shall find, as always, our answer in the Word of God. There, ministry is looked at as edification, or a building up of an edifice, and this figure, whether of the process in an individual or in the assembly, involves the accurate adjustment of every part to that of every other part; and all on the foundation. Every new stone must fit exactly to the stone on which it lies. Isaiah instructs us on the point thus: "Whom will He teach knowledge? and whom will He make to understand the message? them that are weaned from the milk, and drawn from the breasts? For it is precept upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, there a little" (Isa. 28:9, 10). And the Lord puts it thus: "For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance" (Matt. 25:29).

The Angel's Comments (II)

These comments of the angel are of very great value to us. Two or three words sometimes throw a flood of light where a long and eloquent discourse fails to reach us. And as we are on the subject, it is quite worthwhile to ask, Why is it that angels, who desire to look into the announcements made in the Gospel to man, by the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven (1 Pet. 1:12), should be sent to instruct and enlighten man? What is the secret of their strength, seeing that they do not themselves profess to be more than fellow-bondsmen with us? The secret appears to be an exceedingly simple one, and one well calculated to arouse us to the consciousness of dormant and unused faculties. It would be difficult to show, from the Scriptures, that they possess, or have access to, any means not already possessed by us. But two things are very manifest with regard to them that are not by any means so manifest in us. One is the unquestioning simplicity of their obedience, and the other is their child-like, unsophisticated adherence to the plain word of God. They appear to enjoy a thing simply because it is, and they appear to do a thing simply because they are told. Reasonings, or whys and wherefores, do not seem to be part of their being. Take a man—a holy man: tell him a simple fact from God; what is his procedure? First, he will morally tie himself up in twenty knots. Then he will, in that condition, give twenty different ways in which such simple fact can be construed, and finally he will select one of them which falls short of, if it does not altogether deny, the communication made to him. Take an example. Zacharias is burning incense: the angel of the Lord appears. Zacharias is troubled with fright and fear. Says the angel; "Fear not, Zacharias; thy prayer has been heard: Elizabeth shall bear a son; call his name John. You shall have joy and rejoicing. Many will rejoice at his Birth. He shall be great before Jehovah; he shall drink neither wine nor strong drink; he shall be filled with the Holy Ghost from infancy. Many of the sons of Israel shall he turn to Jehovah, their God. In the spirit and power of Elias shall he go before Him, turning fathers into little children, and disobedient ones into just and thoughtful men, making ready for Jehovah a prepared people." All plain as the sun at noon. Terse, lucid, comprehensive, grand. What says Zacharias? "How shall I know this? I am old, and so is my wife." Oh, what poverty of reception! Not a word about these twelve magnificent utterances, sent by a munificent God just about to bring His First-begotten into the world, and putting high dignity upon His standard-bearer. Nothing but Sarah's cynical laugh translated into the language of an old man's apathy. Mark the noble courtesy of the angel's reply: I am Gabriel; I stand before God; I am sent to talk to you, to bring the joyful news of these things to you. Not believe them? Stand still, then, and see God act. Be tongue-tied perforce, till your own hand has recorded the name of your son.

Oh, what fools we are! What heart-sluggards! We shall judge angels? We shall, for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it. Meanwhile, bless the Lord, ye angels of His: ye mighty in strength, that fulfill His word, hearkening unto the voice of His word! Bless the Lord, all ye His hosts; ye ministers of His, that do His pleasure! (Ps. 103:20, 21).

Daniel's instructor said, "Shut up the words, seal the book, until the time of the end." But, now the time is near. John's instructor says, "Seal not." While grace reigns, the unrighteous may become righteous, and the filthy holy. Not so in judgment. The die is cast forever. The voice of the blessed One is heard again, saying, Behold! I come quickly, and My reward is with Me.

I, Jesus. First Testimony.

Does it strike us with sufficient force, how close those two words "I Jesus," bring us to His holy Person? What a sweet home-sound there is in it, to say nothing of the sweetness there always is in the very sound of His name. Since He left His beloved ones, the day He was taken up, Stephen has seen Him, and Paul heard His voice; but otherwise His communications with us have been by the Holy Ghost, through the Word, and never, except in this Book, do we get the direct word from Himself. We stand with reverence, and hear the details from John or the angel. But every now and then, comes the utterance direct, "I am coming quickly," and we almost start at the realistic tones of His voice. Observe, the angel does not say, "He is coming," but Jesus says it Himself. Why? Why? Do not our hearts tell us why? Is the wife unaffected at the tone of her husband's voice? Does she let him call unanswered? Is He as pleased to get our response, as we are to hear His loving voice? And yet, is He not God over all, blessed forever? He is, and that is just the beauty of it. He, the great, the mighty, the terrible, whose eyes are as a flame of fire, whose feet are as fine brass—and we are never meant to forget it, either — yet has He so revealed Himself to our hearts, that His perfect love has cast out all fear, and He can say in the simplest words of affection, "I Jesus, have sent My angel to testify unto you these things in the churches." I could have kept it to Myself. I could have let the magnificence of My vindication burst upon your vision, but I wanted your sympathy and fellowship in it beforehand. I wanted you to count the days and hours with Me, till it should be My Father's good pleasure to tell Me to take the kingdom and claim My bride. I want your heart, your heart, your heart in all this. I know I shall have it in the day that My glory shall be revealed, and when I shall have set you free from every hindrance of flesh and spirit, and given you a body of glory like My own; but can you break through all opposing forces, and give Me a little of your devotion now, before the day comes. You remember David's men, how three brake through the enemy's forces to get their master a drink of water. Well, I am David's root and David's offspring, and I have got a David's feelings, for David was endued with Mine. But, oh, My bride. I am a greater than David to you. I am your bright and Morning Star, I shine with a radiance for you, where there is no eye to gaze on it but yours. I shine resplendent among the sons of the morning, when none but you are awake to watch. I am for you, and you are for Me; in known and enjoyed relationship, before the roar and bustle of the day begins. All the glories of the day are Mine to shine with you. All the royalties of David had their origin with Me, and all that the house of David foreshadowed, all that Solomon in his glory pictured, shall have its extension and fulfillment in My day. For I will say: "Awake awake; put on thy strength, O Zion! put on thy beautiful garments, O Jerusalem, the holy city" (Isa. 52:1), "But thou art fair, my love; behold, thou art fair" (Song of Sol. 1:15). I am thy bright and Morning Star.

Do our hearts in the most profound reverence gather such words from His heart? Where have we got them? Who has revealed them to us? What makes us worshippers thus? Nature knows not this love to the unseen. Nature knows no link with Him who is invisible. Nature knows nothing of Him with whom Enoch walked. The secret of all this wonderful divine converse is, We love Him, because He first loved us. He is the spring, the source, the originator. "His divine power having given us all things which relate to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him that hath called us by glory and virtue, through which He has given us the greatest and precious promises, that through these ye may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust" (2 Pet. 1:3, 4). So that all comes from Himself. He is not only the Creator of it, but by Himself it consists. It will never be otherwise. The greater the nearness the more profound the reverence. The cherubim rest not day nor night crying, Holy, holy, holy.

The Spirit and the Bride. I, Jesus. First Testimony.

What Eliezer was to Rebekah in the day of her espousals, such in surpassing measure has the Holy Ghost been to the bride, the Lamb's wife. From Abraham we learned that God would provide Himself a lamb for a burnt-offering. From Abraham we learned that God would provide a bride for His Son; not of the daughters of the land, but one of His own kindred and of His own country; born, not of corruptible, but of incorruptible seed, by the Word of God. It will be remembered with what exquisite delicacy and with what profound sagacity, and with what intense devotion, that steward of the household fulfilled his mission and brought her within measurable distance of her home. It was eventide and the day was far spent. The bride-groom had gone forth to meet his bride and to greet her as she emerged from the wilderness. She, in her turn, had lifted up her eyes, and beheld her Isaac coming to her. Who is this man that cometh to meet us? she says, descending from her camel to her faithful guide. It is my Master, says he; and she covers herself with her veil.

Can anything be more lovely as a type of what we have here? The Spirit and the bride say, Come. Not the bride alone, nor only the loving One whose delight it is to glorify the bridegroom, but both together, and the promise of the Father first in the greeting, this bridal greeting, this model of joy; for divine joy is not modeled from earth, but human joys have been modeled from divine. What would humans have known of the sacred names of father, son, husband, wife, had not these sacred relationships already existed in the Eternal mind ere He said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness"? Is it too much to say that the whole work of creation, redemption, restitution, was all brought about to procure a bride, who, with the Spirit could say, "Come," to her spouse?

Having seen, then, how He that hath the bride is the bridegroom, let us descend a little, and think of the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears Him, and rejoices greatly in heart because of the voice of the bridegroom. We have not to go far to learn who this is, for he who came in the spirit and power of Elias, declared that it was this that filled up to the full the measure of his joy. Not only did he indignantly repudiate being what he was not, but he adds force to it by repudiating possession of aught that belonged to Him. My joy is in hearing the bridegroom's voice, His in hearing the bride's voice: "Let me see thy countenance, let me hear thy voice; for sweet is thy voice, and thy countenance is comely" (Song of Sol. 2:14). Hers in hearing His. Hence the frequency of the strain, "I come quickly" (seven times). Well, the friend of the bridegroom may also say, "Come." Alas, at the moment the veil is over his heart! Soon it shall be removed, and then he will no longer use elder brother's words (Luke 15), but rejoice in the light of the heavenly city above him.

Yet once again we must descend, for it is a bridal greeting, and none must be forgotten. There are the nations that walk in the light of the heavenly Jerusalem, as well as the favored kings of the earth upon the earth. They, too, thirst, and know not whom they thirst for now. They know well the groaning creation, which nature tells them was not created for groaning. The time will come when the King shall say to these thirsty ones, "Come, ye blessed of My Father; inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." At this moment they may be savages who have never heard. That was our condition once. But they will hear, and they will obey, and they will come; for He will make them willing in the day of His power! They cannot say, "Come"; but He can, and says it for them. And now, open the flood-gates! remove every barrier! let Jordan overflow all her banks in blessing! Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely. No stint. No restriction. Can we estimate the value of His blood? Can we fathom the depth of His sufferings? Can we measure the extent of the reconciliation?

The only suited attitude at the present moment for the Church of God is one of intense, earnest, eager expectation of the return of Him who has now excelled as "the patient One," as He before excelled as "the suffering One." Not His return to earth, but to the air.

I, Jesus. Second Testimony.

The wondrous testimony of grace can never safely be committed to man, no matter who he is, without a penalty being attached to the turning of that grace into license. And this Book, though in itself a Book of judgment, is nevertheless so mingled with gracious actings that it must also be protected from the ravages of man. For man, having yielded himself to Satan, has partaken of his nature, and become a destroyer. He will not only refuse the grace for himself, but he has tried to obliterate the message, and exterminate its receiver. Failing the getting rid of it entirely, his next effort is to make it of none effect, either by adding to it tradition, superstition, idolatry; or to produce similar effect by withdrawing something from it; saying it is unprofitable, too hard to understand, etc. The former attacks the substance of the Book, what it contains; the latter the Book itself. For let it be well understood that this Book occupies a unique place in the Word of God. Every Book in the Bible—Old and New Testaments—is addressed to man, as such, direct. This Book is given to Jesus Christ. It is given Him for the special purpose of acquainting His servants beforehand with the things that are shortly to come to pass. Jesus Christ commissioned His angel to make it known by signs (that is, by what he heard and saw) to His servant John. All other Scripture has been given to men either by prophets or by His Son (Heb. 1:1). "Holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." But this Book, equally divine with all the rest, stands on another footing, inasmuch as it reaches man through angelic agency; although a man must be in the Spirit to receive it. He could not receive it as a natural man. In point of fact, it is God's vindication of Jesus Christ against man, who has rejected and opposed Him. All other Scripture, from Moses to the beloved disciple's last Epistle, is the Word of God to man, with a view to his being found among those blessed in this Book, or judged by the judgments of this Book for having rejected the Word, and slain the messengers. Hence, "The word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day" (John 12:48).

This testimony of Jesus, therefore, which is here before us, is in reference to the Book of Revelation. No doubt, man does to all the rest of Scripture what the warning comes against here. But the Book being, as already pointed out, peculiar, it needed a peculiar and special warning, lest anyone should suppose that its peculiarity should render it less sacred than the rest of Scripture. Jesus Christ in this Book is always seen subject to God, for the reason that it is God's vindication of Him for all that He, and His, have endured from the contradiction of sinners against Him and them. Hence, if any one, no matter who he is, interferes with this vindication of His dear Son, and those who have heard His Word, God shall add to him the plagues, or take away his part out of the Book of Life, and consequently out of the holy city, of which this Book treats. So let all remember, who have to do with this Book, that they tread upon sacred ground, very specially protected and guarded by God Himself. God is no respecter of persons. He must be true to His own nature, even if a Peter need rebuke, or an Uzzah do a profane thing unwittingly.

Long-suffering, gracious, merciful, as our God is, the honor of His beloved Son is so supreme, that no mere creature shall be permitted to falsify that which has for its express object, His glory. Besides which, we have to bear in mind the extraordinary condescension of the Son of God in taking His place in the likeness of men. For Him who is God to do this, is to confer such honor and dignity upon the nature of man as to surpass by it that of an angel. But lest this condescension should lead any one to suppose that His proper Godhead was, in the smallest degree, aught else in respect to it than it had always been, special guards, as the one before us, have been interposed by the Spirit of God.

I, Jesus. Third and Last Testimony.

The last and closing testimony of our beloved and much-longed-for Lord, His parting words to His bride, His servants, His friends, are very specially dear to every renewed heart. The cross, the tomb, come before us, but the resurrection, the ascension, also come before us. The Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, says to us: "For yet a very little while, He that comes will come, and will not delay" (Heb. 10:37), while our adorable Master who has testified to us so many precious things in this wonderful legacy of His thoughtful consideration for us, says: "Yes, I am coming quickly." And our answer, oh, so fervently uttered as the tear bedews the eye is, Amen. Do come, Lord Jesus.

Possessing our souls in patience, let us, on bended knee, ask what has kept our Beloved so long as eighteen hundred years and more? The answer might well be that He has not kept any one of us waiting. He has been kept waiting, and it is by the special grace of His Spirit in these closing days that any one of us knows in our measure what the sensation of waiting for Him is. It may truly be affirmed, that from apostolic days down to fifty years ago, the coming of the Lord was supposed to mean death. If anyone can find any writer speaking of the Lord's coming, let him produce him for our wonder. But now the cry has distinctly and unmistakably gone forth, "Behold, the Bridegroom cometh." And what is more, ten thousands of His saints are at this moment actually waiting to welcome Him. This very work is but the outflow of one such, and it will find a response in many a heart, for the simple reason that it simplifies what so many hearts are hungering and thirsting for. These things do not spring up by chance. The Devil is moving, and we see the effect. But God is moving also, and we see the effect. During the last fifty years Satan has been stirring up man to gather together the material for his punishment in Crisis week. Every one owns that a mighty power is impelling the fourteen hundred millions of men at this moment on the globe, and that the end must be a mighty convulsion. God has been waking up His own to the recognition of facts declared eighteen hundred years ago, which are now ripe to be put in force. As the saints are to be snatched away SUDDENLY, without a moment's notice, He has left His parting word, "I come quickly."