

Church as a Lampstand
Revelation 1:9-20
Week 7

Opening

Ask if anyone would like to open in prayer. They can pray on their own or use the prayer printed below. It also might be a good idea to reach out to a group member prior to your meeting and ask them ahead of time if they'd be willing to open in prayer. That's a great way to encourage participation without putting anyone on the spot.

Holy God, as we study Your Word and reflect on Your Church, we pray that the power of the Spirit would be at work to connect and renew us. Give us wisdom and insight and strengthen our bonds with one another and You. In the name of our risen Lord we pray, Amen.

Depending on time constraints you may want to take a bit of extra time to check in with folks and see how they're doing. You could also wait and do this at the end of the session before closing in prayer.

Check-in question

Patmos is a barren, rocky island in the Aegean Sea; it is ten miles long and six miles across its widest part. The Romans used it, together with other surrounding islands, as a penal colony for banished political offenders. Early Christian authors living relatively close to the time of the writing of the book of Revelation state unanimously that Roman authorities had banished John to Patmos because of his faithfulness to the gospel. On Patmos, the aged apostle surely endured all the hardships of Roman imprisonment. He probably was treated as a criminal, chained in fetters, given insufficient food, and forced to perform hard labor under the lash of the whip of merciless Roman guards.¹

The followers of Christ should never forget that whenever they find themselves in circumstances similar to those of John, they are not left alone. The same Jesus who came to John with the words of hope and encouragement in the midst of his hardship on Patmos still is present with His people to sustain and support them in their difficult situations.

- a. How can we understand the difference between suffering for Christ's sake and suffering for other reasons, including our own wrong choices? Or what about suffering for reasons we cannot fathom? How can we learn to trust the Lord in every situation?

¹ <https://ssnet.org/lessons/19a/less02m.html>

Read: Revelation 1:9-20

**The Message translation is printed below or you can read from your own Bible

9-17 I, John, with you all the way in the trial and the Kingdom and the passion of patience in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos because of God's Word, the witness of Jesus. It was Sunday and I was in the Spirit, praying. I heard a loud voice behind me, trumpet-clear and piercing: "Write what you see into a book. Send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, Laodicea." I turned and saw the voice.

*I saw a gold menorah
with seven branches,
And in the center, the Son of Man,
in a robe and gold breastplate,
hair a blizzard of white,
Eyes pouring fire-blaze,
both feet furnace-fired bronze,
His voice a roar,
right hand holding the Seven Stars,
His mouth a sharp-biting sword,
his face a blinding sun.*

I saw this and fainted dead at his feet. His right hand pulled me upright, his voice reassured me:

17-20 "Don't fear: I am First, I am Last, I'm Alive. I died, but I came to life, and my life is now forever. See these keys in my hand? They open and lock Death's doors, they open and lock Hell's gates. Now write down everything you see: things that are, things about to be. The Seven Stars you saw in my right hand and the seven-branched gold menorah—do you want to know what's behind them? The Seven Stars are the Angels of the seven churches; the menorah's seven branches are the seven churches."

BACKGROUND

Geography (1:9-11)

1:10 "In the Spirit," a state of spiritual exultation and acuity in the spiritual realm (2 Corinthians 12:2-4 and Revelation 4:1-2).

"On the Lord's day," that is, the day of Jesus' resurrection, Sunday, the first day of the week, when Christians met for worship and the Lord's Supper (Acts 20:7-11, 1 Corinthians 16:2).

1:11 "Seven churches" are all found in the western part of Asia Minor, perhaps churches for which John had apostolic responsibility.

1:12-20 Symbolic Representation of Christ

It's easy to over-interpret symbols. Some of the creatures depicted in Revelation are bizarre when their characteristics are depicted graphically. John's allusions are sometimes given for their

symbolic meaning, but are often "for their evocative and emotive power ... to set the echoes of memory and association ringing" (Caird). For example, the symbolic representation of Christ in this passage has several characteristics in common with the angelic character who appeared to Daniel in Daniel 10:6.²

1:12 "Golden lampstands" = churches. See Matthew 5:14-16 to understand the relationship between lampstands and faithful witness.

John sees Jesus dressed as High Priest, walking among the lampstands. The picture of Jesus walking among the lampstands points to God's promise to ancient Israel that He would walk among them as their God (*Lev. 26:12*). In Revelation, the lampstands represent the seven churches in Asia to which Revelation was originally sent (*Rev. 1:20*), and the lampstands also symbolize God's church throughout history. Through the Holy Spirit, Jesus' watchcare continues to be over His church on earth. He will be continually with His people until He brings them to their eternal home.

Moreover, the picture of Jesus as High Priest among the lampstands is drawn from the ritual practice in the Jerusalem temple. The daily task of an appointed priest was to keep the lamps in the Holy Place burning brightly. He would trim and refill the lamps that were waning, replace the wicks on the lamps that had gone out, refill them with fresh oil, and then relight them. In such a way, the priest became acquainted personally with the situation of each individual lamp. In the same way, Jesus is acquainted with the needs and circumstances of His people and intercedes for them personally.

1:13a "Son of man." This was Jesus' self-designation during his ministry. "Son of man" probably is a Hebrew way of saying "human being." But when "Son of man" is identified with the figure from Daniel 7:13, who comes on the clouds, it is an exalted title indeed.

1:14 "White as white wool," used to describe the Ancient of Days in Daniel 7:9. Purity and glory.

1:15 "Voice like the sound of many waters," like the deafening sound one hears standing at the base of Niagara or Yosemite Falls in springtime (Ezekiel 43:2; Revelation 14:2; 19:6).

1:16 "Seven stars" The seven stars represent the seven angels whom God on high gives to encourage the churches. The seven lampstands represent the seven churches. Seven means 'complete' and therefore these seven lampstands represent all churches of all time.

"A sharp, two-edged sword." The short Roman sword was tongue-like in shape (Morris). It symbolizes irresistible words (2:16; 19:15, 21; Hebrews 4:12; Ephesians 6:17).

1:17-18 "First ... last ... living one." Christ shares the divine attributes (1:4, 8).

² http://www.jesuswalk.com/revelation/1_lampstands.htm

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Initial Reactions

1. What from this passage confuses, inspires, or resonates with you? Perhaps hearing it read from a different translation caused you to notice a new word or phrase.
2. Were there stories or images you took away from Sarah's sermon on Sunday that helped you better understand this part of Revelation?

Diving Deeper

3. The vision of Christ among the lampstands (1:12-20) is much different than the Carpenter-Teacher who walked the roads of Galilee and Judea.
 - a. Why? What overall emotions is this vision of Jesus among the lampstands designed to evoke in the reader? Why is this understanding of Jesus important to a balanced faith?
4. What is the significance of the exalted Jesus walking among the lampstands? What does this teach us about the church? What does it teach us about Jesus?
5. **"Keys of Death and Hades."** Because of Jesus' resurrection, he has now conquered death. He holds the keys, that is, he has authority over it (Matthew 16:19; Isaiah 22:22; Revelation 3:7; 9:1; 20:1).

"Hades" (KJV "hell") is the Greek equivalent of Hebrew "Sheol" and stands for the abode of departed spirits. Here it is not equivalent to Gehenna, the place of torment (Mounce).

- a. What is the significance of Jesus holding the keys to Death and Hades?

The "so what?" Questions

6. How does the Christ use the local church to spread His light on earth? Share how you think First Pres. is or could better be Christ's light in our community?
7. After reading (and re-reading) this text, listening to the sermon, and discussing it with your COB, how might God be calling you to act or think differently (this can be as broad or narrow as you'd like)?

Closing

Check in if you haven't already done so and ask for any prayer requests. Encourage group members to write down these requests and follow up as necessary.