

John's Concern for the Church

by Cornelius Van Til

Cornelius Van Til's sermon highlights John's vision of Christ and his deep concern for the church amidst persecution, emphasizing the hope and assurance found in Christ's presence and return.

Duration: 38:54

Scripture: Leviticus 25:9, John 14:2, Revelation 1:9-10, Revelation 1:18-20

Topics: "Church"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher discusses the vision of Christ walking in the midst of the golden candlestick as described in the book of Revelation. The preacher emphasizes that Jesus, who was once seen in his humiliation and sorrow, is now seen in his glory. The preacher highlights the significance of Jesus' eyes as flaming fire, symbolizing his forgiveness and cleansing of the heart. The preacher also mentions Jesus' feet as coming feet, representing his imminent return. Overall, the sermon encourages believers to see Jesus both in his humiliation and in his glory, and to find comfort in his love and forgiveness.

Transcript

I, John, who also am your brother, and companion in tribulation and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was in the isle that is called Patmos for the word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ. I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day and heard behind me a great voice as of a trumpet, saying, I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last, and what thou seest, write in a book, and send it unto the seven churches which are in Asia, unto Ephesus, and unto Smyrna, and unto Pergamos, and unto Thyatira, and unto Sardis, and unto Philadelphia, and unto Laodicea. And I turned to see the voice that spake with me, and being turned, I saw seven golden candlesticks, and in the midst of the seven candlesticks, one like unto the Son of Man, clothed with the garment down to the foot, and gird about the patch with a golden girdle.

His head and his hairs were white like wool, as white as snow, and his eyes were as a flame of fire, and his feet like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace, and his voice as the sound of many waters. And he had in his right hand seven stars, and out of his mouth went a sharp two-edged sword, and his countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength. And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead.

And he laid his right hand upon me, saying unto me, Fear not, I am the first and the last. I am he that liveth, and was dead, and behold, I am alive for evermore. Amen.

And have the keys of hell and of death. Write these things which thou hast seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter. The mystery of the seven stars which thou sawest in my right hand, and the seven golden candlesticks.

The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven candlesticks which thou sawest are the seven churches. May the Lord add his blessing to this reading of his word. It is our privilege this morning again to have with us, ministering to us, Dr. Cornelius Van Till, Professor of Apologetics at Westminster Theological Seminary.

We pray the Lord's blessing on him as he speaks. Congregation of Jesus Christ, when Jesus was about to leave for heaven, he told his disciples, I go to prepare a place for you. If it were not so, I would have told you.

So the twelve apostles saw Jesus as he went to glory, and saw him disappear beyond the clouds. They knew that he went further than the clouds, that he went to glory. A bit later this same Jesus disappeared to the Apostle John, I mean the Apostle Paul, on his way to Damascus.

For the Apostle Paul was persecuting those that were of this way, the followers of Jesus. And Jesus, by revealing himself thus from heaven to John, to the Apostle Paul, converted him from a persecutor to an apostle. The Apostle John did not make such a conversion.

He had been with Jesus for many a day, for several years. He had been especially one who loved Jesus, and who was loved by Jesus. He had lain, as we are told, on Jesus' bosom.

He had been present when Jesus instituted the supper by which his people were to remember him. And he had seen Jesus after he had risen from the dead in all his glorified body after the tomb. And now this last of the apostles, the one remaining of the twelve, when all others had been taken away by death, some of them likely murdered and slain by some of the men of the emperors of Rome, this last one of the apostles alone remaining was cast away from the possibility of speaking of this Jesus.

He was put on lonely Patmos Isle. There was no radio broadcasting station there, nor certainly a TV transmission equipment. He was shut off.

And now he is concerned about those disciples of his, those followers of his, those seven churches of Asia Minor, which stand of course for the church of all the future, for the church of Jesus Christ even down to our day. He has a special sense of responsibility for them. If he can't speak to them anymore, who can? Then nobody can.

And so he is in the Spirit on the Lord's day, in a special sense concerned about this lot that he must soon leave behind altogether when the angel of death shall seize him too, and when the last possibility of his being restored to an opportunity of preaching the gospel will be passed away forever. And so he tells us that he is here on this rock-bound coast of this little island of Patmos with a monotonous beating of the waves that constantly comes into his ears. He can hear nothing but that noise of those waves.

He cannot hear the voice of his fellow man. He cannot speak to them. But he can speak to Jesus who is above this noise.

And if nobody else can speak of him or show himself to him, Jesus can. And he does open the doors of heaven, and he appears to John, and he appears to this last of the apostles also for the benefit of each of

the believers and of all the church of Jesus Christ. I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day and heard behind me a great voice as of a trumpet on the Lord's day in a special sense.

Of course he was concerned. Would these people be able to meet together on the radio this morning? One of our graduate students, Mr. Jonathan Chow, told us how in China there's scarcely any opportunity left today from what he hears of one of the Red Guards that has escaped for Christians to meet together. They are forbidden to meet and to consider the word of Christ together.

They must individually, secretly, surreptitiously meet with Christ and meet with him alone. Well, now John is concerned about the fact of persecution. The church then was persecuted.

They were then forbidden to meet. And it was in spite of the edict of the emperors of Rome frequently that these little groups had to meet in catacombs, in underground meeting places. And now John is concerned about them.

Now we may be concerned. We should be on this Lord's day about the Chinese church, those that cannot meet as Christians behind the iron curtain, behind the bamboo curtain. And we should also think of those in our community and of all God's children that cannot meet with us this morning or in some other house of worship because they are aged, afflicted, ill.

We thank God for the measure of recovery given to Sterling Hart, the young man of whom we were reading in the letter in the basement just before, in whom you are interested too. We thank God that he may be restored and become active again in the service of his country, most of all in the service of his Lord, that there are many who will not again come to a house of prayer. For then is our concern that with us this moment, this day, this hour, they too may see this vision which John the Apostle, the last of the Apostles, saw for us.

I saw his voice as of a trumpet. It's not only the Lord's day, but to him it is the trumpet, the season of the year of jubilee, the year that was introduced by the sound of trumpets, calling the people of the God to gather to Jerusalem, there unitedly to worship him, Jehovah, their God. And now then he says that he heard this voice speaking to him.

He was there for the testimony of Jesus. He was there as one with us in tribulation. He doesn't speak of himself as experiencing great things any more than Paul spoke of those times that he had been taken up into glory.

As Paul spoke of those things that he had with us, simple believers in common with us. So John says, I am your fellow servant with you in tribulation, but also in patience. That is, in patience, waiting for the fulfillment of this promise which Jesus gave to us that he would go out to prepare a place for us.

We shall patiently wait for this in spite of circumstances, in spite of persecution, in spite of bulla, the world of the nations and the turbulence of men that are opposed to this God and of this Christ. We shall with patience, with perseverance, abide the day of his coming. Now my fellow brethren who are with me in this tribulation and in this patience, he says, I was here for the testimony of Jesus because he had spoken.

He wouldn't have been there if he had kept his mouth shut, if he had said nothing, if he had just been listening, but he was an activist. He was one of the sons of thunder. He was converted and so as a son of thunder, he had lost his violent temper, maybe, through the influence of his master, but he was nevertheless a powerful man because he was a son of thunder.

That the voice of the thundering of Jesus might be heard about the voice of all the thundering of the nations. And so he says, I was in the spirit and I heard this voice saying, I am Elf and Omega, the first and the last. What thou see it, write in a book so that the Weller Grove Church people can also hear it.

Write in a book and send it to the seven churches so that the Weller Grove people is also one of those seven churches. Now these churches are quite different, he says to himself, I am writing about to write to them. Some of them are quite active.

They are busy in the things of the Lord, but of the best of them, he says, I, you have lost your first love. And if you do not receive again and show forth that first love, I will wipe you out from my book of life. So serious it is that God's people be always in the spirit of this first love as a bridegroom loves his bride and a bride loves her bridegroom.

In that sense, must God's people with the wholeness of devotion love their Lord and their Savior, or else they will be rebuked for this. Laodicea was lukewarm. He was about to spit it out of his mouth.

Oh, you can stand something cold, you can stand something hot, but you can't stand lukewarm. Well, this congregation is lukewarm. Now send my word to Laodicea, to Philadelphia, to Pergamos, and to all the seven churches, each of them having maybe something of the nature of these various seven churches.

Send this, write it in a book and send it to all these churches. And I be in turn to see the voice that spake with me, and be in turn I saw seven golden candlesticks, and in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks, one light unto the Son of Man. Now obviously we know what this is.

All of us understand the book of Revelation, and none of us understand it. That's not untrue, either one of them. All of us get the main impact, but it is a book of comfort.

Christ is coming to redeem his people, to save them out of the midst of this world, out of all tribulations. It's the philosophy of history in which Christ comes conquering and conquering over all the opposition of this world. And it is for the whole church of Jesus Christ, what the Heidelberg Catechism says for the individual Christian, what is your only comfort in life and in death, that I belong not to myself but to my faithful Savior Jesus Christ, and that without the will of my Heavenly Father not a hair shall fall from my head.

Well now, so the church of Jesus Christ is protected, is kept. He is coming for her. The whole of history, all of the future is the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.

We frequently think of things, well, history as a conglomeration of events. This is happening, that's happening, and the other thing is happening. And then in the midst of it, Jesus is coming.

The reverse is true. Jesus is coming. That's history, and that's all there is to history.

Everything else is subordinate to it, and must serve the purpose of his coming. He's coming to take his church, his redeemed people, into his presence. That's what the future is all about.

Be of good courage and strengthen your heart in the Lord your God. Cast your cares and burdens upon him. He will bring it to pass.

Now then, it is this Jesus who is in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks. The last verse tells us, of course, that these golden candlesticks are the seven churches. Therefore, it's Jesus walking in the midst of his church.

That's the vision that the Apostle, this last of the Apostles sees. He's not concerned about seeing Jesus alone. He wants to show us Jesus, the risen one, the glorified, in all the insignia of his glory, in just a moment.

But first, he wants to show us that he is walking in the midst of his church, that he is with his church, that in the midst of all the opposition of the world to that church, which is opposition to the Christ himself, he is the one that runs, that rules, and that overrules among men and nations. The hearts of kings are in his hands as water courses. The whole of history is subject to his bidding.

Well now, when he has given us this first general vision of Christ walking in the midst of the golden candlestick, then he goes into detail describing unto us the appearance of this risen Lord. He wants us to see him in the insignia of his glory. John has seen him in his humiliation, in his lowliness.

He saw him as a man of sorrow and acquainted with grief. He saw him weep at Lazarus' tomb. He saw his face worn and dilapidated because of the burden of the sins of his people that he was bearing.

He was restless. He was sleepless. He bore all those things, and John had seen that face that signified all those things.

He had been with him. How often has not John seen him thus in his humiliation? And now he sees him in his glory. And now John wants to tell us that as we must see him too in his humiliation, we must also see him in his glory.

And so he describes him to us, this glorified Lord, his head in the midst of the seven candlesticks, one light unto the Son of Man. Of course, this is the Son of Man, the Son of God, truly God and truly man, as the Church has always confessed. Clothes with the garment down to the foot, and girt about the paps with a golden girdle.

Now that's the first general description, a beautiful white flowing garment. You remember that on the occasion of the Day of Atonement and the Old Testament tabernacle and temple service, the high priest would be clothed with a white flowing garment. But then he had on him a girdle, a belt, which held that garment up so that he wouldn't trip over it as he was performing the services for his people, as he was taking the blood off the altar of burnt offering in the court, as he was passing through the sanctuary, as he was presenting it through that curtain, winding through that curtain and presenting it in the presence of the holiest of all.

But now this girdle is no longer around his metal, it is around his chest. He is one who is all dignity, his work, his heavenly high priestly work, his suffering in the behalf of his people, his giving his life as the priest after the order of Melchizedek rather than of Aaron. That's all finished, that's all accomplished.

Nothing remains to be done. He said on the cross, it is finished and it was finished. And here it is shown that he who finished it is now himself reaping the reward of glory and waiting for his people to come in and to join him in the everlasting presence of the Father.

He is the heavenly high priest and he is also of course the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last, that was and is and is to come. He that ruleth is the ruler of the kings of the earth.

He is the great high priest and the great king and then he speaks with the voices of thunder. His truth shall prevail. The lie that is of man, of the sinner which opposes this truth is defeated.

It's all done, it's finished. The heavenly high priest, the great king of glory and the great prophet of all prophets. He now is here in great resplendence bearing this white robe of accomplishment.

It's finished and it is done. Now his head and his hairs were white like wool and white as snow and his eyes were as a flame of fire. He has the accomplishment of dignity that goes with old age if it is honorable and he now has eyes as a flame of fire.

He means to say the apostle as he is impressed by this that this one who had eyes to see the heart of man and who knew what was in the heart of man though man himself knew it not that it is this same one that has cleansed the heart of man. The heart of man is deceitful above all things who can know it says Jeremiah but Jesus has cleansed the heart. He has looked into it, he has washed it and now his eyes are as flaming fire and you need not be afraid of them any longer for he has forgiven you.

You will look him straight in the face as he looks you straight in the face because all between you now is right. Justice has been done for your sin and you have been redeemed and you are healed as a father looks with love upon his child so Jesus looks with love upon his own. His feet like a fine brass as if they had burned in a furnace and the voice the voice of many waters.

Now his feet are coming of course symbolizes the walking process the coming. Come Lord Jesus says the last of the apostle in the end of this book come quickly we thy church have looked up to thee. You remember when the disciples went to the mount to see Jesus the son to glory that they saw him and they saw him vanish and they were looking upward and then the angels came why do you look thus upward this one who has left you thus will come again and now then he comes his feet are walking in your direction he's coming forward you do not see it perhaps you look at history today you are disheartened and discouraged you are dismayed because of the god is dead theology because of neo-orthodoxy taking the truth out of the church and replacing the preaching of the gospel of salvation by the blood of Christ with a preaching of salvation by good work as though the reformation had never occurred as though Luther had never spoken but most of all as though Christ had never died.

Now you are disheartened you are dismayed you are discouraged and you wonder whether this effort that we are putting for building a new church here hoping and praying that God will give us a fine new Christian school here in the community let's hope and pray that he will but is it all worthwhile it wouldn't be if it were not for this one full assurance that he is coming that he will establish this work and that he will use this as an instrument for the bringing in of others to whom we witness for we are impatient still those that witness John can't any longer witness it's up to us it's up to the younger ones now as the older ones disappear from our midst to witness by this church by the Christian school system by every avenue that is legitimate by the foreign mission enterprise and the

home mission effort we witness individually and collectively and then our witness is not in vain in the law be not afraid little flock it is the well the pleasure of your heavenly father says Jesus to give unto you the kingdom and now this is the assurance that he gives and he establishes this fact still further when he says and he had in his right hand seven stars now the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches that is the proclaimers of the gospel the seven churches are the churches the seven candlesticks are the churches but the angels are the preachers of the gospel now he holds them in his right hand he upholds them he sustains them if they are disheartened if they do not know what will come because they are

disheartened and it's about circumstances about apostasy in the

church and about unbelief rounded up and about men enveloped exclusively as it seems in the face of this world alone he holds them in their right his right hand he will enable them to proclaim in the face of opposition it may be true that just now in china christians cannot meet together it may become true in this country also that we cannot any longer meet together as christian believers who know how much persecution will come to us none of us know but what we do know is this that through it all beyond it all and through it all jesus is walking toward us it's coming it's upholding this and those that are seeking for him truly those that witness of him with honest unafraid they will be upheld by him even though they put be put in prison or be put to death for out of his mouth goes it to

our head sharp sword and his countenance was less the sun shineth in his strength his mouth went to a sharp sword we remember in hebrews we are told that the word of god is powerful like a sharp sword cutting a thunder to bone and marrow and it's a divider of the soft and intense of the heart well now this jesus who is now in glory said to those that opposed him the pharisee and the others that they would be defeated that he had come to establish his kingdom and when pilate said what is truth a skeptic who knows nobody knows jesus comes that i am the truth the way and the life and he now with this word the part of his mouth will conquer and he will prevail as those that are upheld by him speak that word through their mouths and when i saw him says the apostle i fell at his feet as dead is

it any wonder who wouldn't you would if i would have we don't hear of course now it isn't as close to us it isn't as real to us no matter what i try to say our language our ability is too feeble if we had dr martin lord jones speaking to us he would do the most eloquent job such as i scarcely have ever heard in my life when i was here for three evenings listening to him but even dr martin lord jones could do no justice to the overwhelming magnificence of this fact of the christ the glorified christ coming with his feet as a burnished brass walking through history approaching us encouraging us beckoning us onwards don't stop your witnessing in spite of her persecution continue it build your new church build a new school sacrifice for it more than you've ever done before it will all be

repaid to you in the glory land not as deserving repayment but as the reward of glory and when i saw him when i realized this i fell down and steve was dead with the apostle he was just overwhelmed for the moment so may we be overwhelmed by this presentation but he laid his right hand upon me saying unto me fear not i am the first and the last i am he that liveth in what's dead and behold i am alive forevermore and have the keys of hell and of death be not afraid john stand upon your feet and when the angel speaks to john i am your fellow servant worship not me but worship god then john tells us in turn oh do not look to this experience of mine something so special but look to your own experience of this self-same joy the truth is yours as well as it is mine that christ redeems that

christ has the keys of hell and of death if there's one thing in modern theology that is obvious in all movements that i know anything about it is this that nobody believes in hell anymore even in the roman catholics are now vying with the modern new protestants and the neo not the neo-evangelicals the new protestants so-called killish and nevo and nelson ray and brunner and charles bark and the many others like this they all buy with one another insane there is no such thing as death there cannot be science says there can be philosophy says there can be modern theology following science and philosophy says there can't be how do they know are they omniscient have they been there can they tell that there is no judgment coming can any man tell can the greatest the most learned philosopher

and scientists tell you the humblest believers that what the bible says is not true of course they can't they do they try to impress you with their great learning and we respect their learning in their field but we will not accept that they are god and can replace the word of god we believe that jesus who appears from heaven to john the apostle and who had appeared already also to paul the apostle that he has the keys of death and of hell we shall prepare to escape the wrath of god paul tells us that he came to bring this gospel that jesus was crucified that he was dead according to the scriptures that he was buried according to the scriptures that he rose from the dead according to the scriptures that he was seen by five thousand at once and that he is it who is the resurrection from the

dead and that we shall rise with him from the dead in glory not just continue in life hereafter as plato might speculate whether there is a life hereafter and when some they in some faint fashion the souls of men up their bodies shall continue to exist nay but as we are body and soul as we were created in god's image restored in the image of christ now glorified with christ i have the key of hell and of death i shut up hell that it can't get you provided that is that you now put your trust in him that you now confess your sins to him that you now repent of these things that you not follow the wisdom of this world and follow the crowd the philosophy and the science of the age but that you think for yourself into the fact that no man knows that this is not true and that god alone can reveal

and christ alone has revealed what are the issues of life and of death i have the keys of hell and of death now then once more he repeats as what he said at the beginning write all this in a book write these things which thou has seen the things which are and the things which shall be hereafter interpret the whole of history in a this book which is the bible which is the word of christ that is the word in terms of which we are to see all other things it is the sun in terms with all other life our life we can't take a match or an abode and ask whether the sun exists if we're in the cave it's nonsense it's because the sun does exist and has shed forth its light even if it is a little cloudy outdoors just now and we don't see the sun we know that these lights come from the power that comes

from the sun so there is one fact in this world that doesn't exist by virtue of the christ through whom it is made and no law that doesn't exist and operate except through him who is the logger the word by whom all things are made in their relation it is this knowledge that we may have and possess and therefore we have the truth as it is in jesus who said i am the way the truth and the life what a joy it is to think on this sabbath morning of this vision of the christ that appeared to john the mystery of the seven stars which thou sawest in my right hand and the seven golden candlesticks the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches and the seven candlesticks which thou sawest are the seven churches summing it all up the apostle comes back to christ walking in the midst of the

church these candlesticks are the churches the light of christ must shine out through the world through them through the believers individually through the churches collectively through the ministry of the gospel in a special sense as these servants of his are upheld by his right hand what an encouragement for a theological student to undertake his task of learning greek and hebrew and some other things now then it is for this encouragement that all of us may have to live our lives within the presence of the coming of this christ in glory appear to john and patrick's lonely eyes that we may sound out the noise that we may give forth the light of the gospel of this grave may that be your joy as in the days ahead you may worship in the new house of worship in this place and as we many of us

who have been interested in this christian school movement from the beginning may yet by god's grace be a beautiful new building in jelaton go up one of these days may all these things inspire us may they move

us may they make us filled with enthusiasm to give ourselves our whole our all to love him our god above all things else and his name receive the praise world without end amen our gracious heavenly father we do thank and praise you the father's repeat reveal thyself in this resplendent fashion to john on lonely patmas isle he was shut up on this isle he was prevented from proclaiming the gospel we are not yet resented we know not how long will be we beseech thee will thou maintain to us the liberty for the proclamation of the gospel in this land open the opportunity for the god

spread of the gospel behind the iron and the bamboo curtains be with those poor benighted children of thine who are lonely and forsaken because they cannot have fellowship with one another and with the lord jesus christ together sustain them and strengthen them bless the missionaries of the cross and and uphold them in thy right hand proclaim thy word through the preaching of this pulpit we thank thee for those who minister in this capacity here and will thou now look down upon us as thou didst look down upon john with mercy and with grace and teach us to be in the spirit on the lord's day not only but every day with enthusiasm and devotion giving ourselves and our strength to for jesus our redeemer's sake amen

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