

OSJ



Office of Social Justice



LET THE MUSLIMS IN - DAVE STRAVERS

Revelation 1:12-18

Summary: Jesus is the King, enthroned at God's right hand, the rightful ruler of the whole earth, the Lord of all people, the Savior who wants to be loved and honored by every creature. He is not our private God who exists for our own personal benefit. He is not the God of America, of West Michigan, of Hudsonville, of the CRC, or the one who favors "our kind of people." He is not one god among many. He is the one and only God for everyone. His love extends to the violent Muslims of ISIS, the idolatrous Hindus of India, the wealthy atheists of China, the poorest of the poor in Ethiopia, and the gay activists of our cities. As God's children, we make all of these people our loving concern and our targets of intercession. We look for ways to connect to those people who are most different from us and most in need of God's mercy, because this connects us to the heart of God.

I'm looking at the portrait of Jesus emerging on the Evergreen stage. Turn your head to the right and let's take a look. What do you see? For a while there, as this portrait was emerging, I thought I saw the head of a lion. Maybe the Lion of Judah? Maybe Aslan of The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe? Lately however, when I squint my eyes, I start to see a bearded face. Whatever this turns out to be, somehow this does not seem to be the Jesus soft and gentle, the quiet, effeminate shepherd cuddling a little lamb. Nor is this the Jesus in agony, hanging helpless on a cross of shame.

I see an explosion of color. A powerful emanation of energy. Maybe I'll be surprised when it's finished, but right now this image reminds me of the militant powerful King Jesus, general of the angel armies of God. This Jesus was resurrected from death, given all authority and power, vindicated against those enemies who thought that they could crush him on a cross. If his enemies see this Jesus, they will cower in fear. This would be the Jesus described in the book of Revelation.

Please stand to hear the Word of God from Revelation 1:12-18.

There are pretenders to the throne of Jesus. Muslims have their impersonal Allah, not a god of love and mercy. Hindus have their many gods, some of which exude a threatening power to destroy or punish. These remind us of the gods of Canaan that Jahweh warned against. The practical atheists of our twenty-first-century secular culture have their Mother Nature god, the powerful impersonal forces of an evolving universe. And then there are we American Christians, not atheists, but all too often our God falls so far short of the Bible's presentation of a powerful Jesus who rules everyone and everything.

Ephesians 2 tells us that we have been enthroned with Christ, and we are sitting in the heavenly realms. But are we acting like it? Too often we listen to the world's idols. They tell us: "Do this. Do that. Worship this idol or you will suffer." We try to find our personal security in so many things. Trying to find security for our little private world—this is the business of idols. It's not God's business. He has already given us perfect security. That was Israel's error. All of the gods of Canaan were local gods, private gods of certain regions or certain ethnic groups or certain social classes. They ruled their little kingdoms and helped their worshipers to stand against the rest of the world. The rich to stand against the poor. The privileged to stand against the outcast. Each people group to stand against the next group. Each person to stand against his neighbors. Modern-day Arabs still recite one of their favorite proverbs: "Me against my brother. My brother and I against our cousins. My cousins and I against the world."

The God of Israel says, "I'm not your little private god. All people are mine. Widows and untouchables, Hindus and Muslims, terrorists or pacifists, they are my concern and therefore they should be your concern as well. My domain extends to the four corners of the world, even to the stars. I reign from the sky, from where I can see everyone."

If you are up in the sky, high in the air, your eyes automatically go to the horizon. If you are at 30,000 feet, and you are trying to look down on that little patch of ground where your house is located, you are missing the bigger view. You are missing God's perspective. If every prayer you pray is about your life, your children, your job, your health, your little tiny patch of planet Earth, you've made God into a Baal, a little local idol. God is so much bigger than that.

This is why we at Evergreen have welcomed strange children to our Arts Camp, and do our best to serve them and love them. It's why we send our young people to the rolling hills of West Virginia to serve those who need to see and experience the love of Jesus. This is why Jodi is already on the plane to Ethiopia and several more are joining her there tomorrow, because Jesus the King of Creation cares about the powerless children in Aware. I've not met one of them, but I'm proud to wear their names on my T-shirt.

So we are not afraid of ex-convicts, or gay activists, or committed atheists. We are not afraid of Eastern Europeans, or Syrians, or Iraqis. If you are one of them, we welcome you and we love you, because the King of Creation welcomes you and loves you. Our King, the Lord of love, is enthroned in the heavenlies, and we are there with him.

It did not seem like that to the apostle John, the one Jesus loved the most, who was in exile on Patmos. He and his fellow Christians were being hunted down and murdered, along with their wives and children. Persecution and suffering overwhelmed the early church. Believers felt powerless. Some of them wondered, Did Jesus really rise from the dead? Did he really take his place at the right hand of God? Has all authority been given to him as he promised and is he really with us? If so, then why are we being persecuted and killed?

So God sends John the vision. "One like a son of man" refers to the Old Testament messianic image. This is a vision of the ascended Jesus.

This was an awesome person. Eyes of blazing fire. Feet of bronze glowing hot at a thousand degrees. In his right hand, he held seven stars. Stars are the heavenly powers, far greater than any political powers on planet Earth. Jesus holds them easily in his hand. The only way to hold the stars in your hand is to be greater than the stars. The great suns, millions of miles in distant galaxies, are like twinkles in the right hand of Jesus.

His face was like the sun shining in all of its brilliance. There is no light more powerful. Stare at the sun for too long and you go blind. It never dims. The face of Jesus is so terrible, only the brilliance of the sun can compare.

This was a terrible person, so threatening and so powerful that John literally fainted out of fear. "I fell at his feet as though dead." Jesus' reassurance to John was, "Do not be afraid." But then it seems he gave John more reasons to be in awe: "I was dead and I am now alive forever" and "I hold the keys of death and hades."

If you met someone who was holding the keys of death, who had died and come back from the grave, whose eyes were blazing fire and whose face shone like the sun, should you be frightened? If you are not frightened, you are foolish. The prophet Isaiah understood this. He saw a vision of God and said, "I have seen the king. Woe to me, I'm going to die" (Isa. 6:1-5).

This is not some local deity, not even a great national power. This is the Lord of the universe. Every single atom in the universe is subservient to him. Every single human being on earth owes him allegiance. This is why Revelation 1:5 introduces Jesus as "ruler of the kings of the earth."

This is not a god that that you tuck into your pocket and take him out when you need him. This is not a god whose purpose is to help you win the football game against the University of Michigan or Ohio State. You don't ask him to become your little local deity. He asks YOU to acknowledge his Universal Deity. He asks you to look at the world the way he sees it. Every single human being needs to acknowledge him, and so long as there is one person who was never yet told who it is that reigns over all things, whether she lives in Michigan or Russia, or Ethiopia, or India, that person needs to hear. Indeed, that is the whole purpose of all of Scripture, the goal of all history, that all persons will know who it is that rules. That's what it means . . . the glory of God. God's glory is a global glory, a glory that spans the universe.

We need to see the world as God sees it, so that we can love the world as Jesus loves it.

This is not the god of America, who wants to keep us snug and safe from foreigners. Jesus is not an American. He does not want us to build barriers against the dangerous Muslims. I was shocked and dismayed to hear the son of Billy Graham state that, in his opinion, America should pass a law that bans Muslims from coming to America. I can't believe that he would think such a thought, much less utter it aloud. Can we really imagine Jesus saying such a thing? Don't make disciples of Muslims. Keep them away, ignorant of me and ignorant of the gospel.

85% of Muslims do not personally know a single Christian. So let's keep them ignorant. We don't want them to come to the one country where they are most likely to meet a Christian, to be befriended by a believer, to hear Good News about Jesus, who they know is a prophet but they don't yet know the truth that he is Savior and Lord. This Jesus who said, "Take up your cross and follow me." Who said repeatedly, "Do not be afraid. You will be my witnesses. Do not allow fear to trump my mission."

We need to see the world the way God sees it, so that we can love the world the way Jesus loves it. Did you know that Jesus recruited a terrorist to be one of the 12? Simon the Zealot. This is not Simon Peter, but the other Simon. Zealots were the violent terrorists of the New Testament times. They were a well-organized political party, totally committed to a violent agenda of overthrowing the Romans by whatever means. They assassinated officials. They organized suicidal attacks on troops that were better armed. They expected Jahweh Elohim to vindicate them, even in death, just as radical Muslims today expect Allah to vindicate their suicidal attacks.

>>Power point #1

The Zealots were the leaders of the Jewish rebellion against Rome in AD 67, which led to the violent destruction of the temple and the deaths of tens of thousands of people, the virtual destruction of the nation of Israel. Simon the Zealot, one of the 12.

>>Power point #2

Saul of Tarsus, the Pharisee, was not a member of the Zealot party, but when he got the chance he also acted like a terrorist. He believed that his holy God justified the murder and mayhem that he unleashed against the early Christians in Jerusalem, Judea, and Damascus. Simon the Zealot and Saul the Pharisee were both recruited into Jesus' band of disciples. Jesus did not keep them out so that the rest could be safe. Just the opposite. He sought them out. He embraced them with Good News.

>>Power point #3

Here is a photo of Prabhudas, a modern-day terrorist who in the 1980s joined a Marxist gang and began assassinating people on the university campuses of Eastern India, seeking to foment a violent revolution against the rich and powerful of his country. By his own count he had already murdered 10 people, and was just returning from killing number 11 when he saw his own face on police wanted posters that had been pasted all over the city of Calcutta. Would you be afraid if Prabhudas the terrorist moved into your neighborhood? Well watch out, and let me warn you. Because in six weeks he will be here in Hudsonville, staying only a few miles from this building.

When Prabhudas's photo started appearing on wanted posters, a former acquaintance, someone who knew him as a child, recognized him on the poster, saw him riding a bus, approached him, and invited him to come home, to make his house a safe house, out of sight of those who might arrest him.

Prabhudas slept there that first night and woke up the next morning when he heard the man and his wife talking in the next room. He heard them speaking his name. He thought that they were talking on the phone, and he burst into the room expecting to catch them in the act of informing the police. Instead, he found them on their knees talking to Jesus. That was the beginning of the transformation process.

He eventually repented, surrendered to the police, spent some years in prison, was released, and returned to his home village where he remembered that there was a small church. He was baptized and committed his life to ministry. Since then Prabhudas has personally won scores of people to Jesus, and indirectly is bringing thousands of people to Christ every year. He's the director of almost half of Mission India's ministries, a man who is totally committed to making Jesus known all over India.

If you want to protect yourself and your family from terrorists, then you would reject Simon the Zealot, the apostle Paul, and Prabhudas. Thank God, Jesus and his followers did not reject them.

Note that the seven stars in Revelation 1, the stars that Jesus holds in his hand, are the angelic powers of the seven churches. Seven is the number of completeness in Revelation, and therefore these angelic powers and churches represent the worldwide people of God. The people of God are in the hand of Jesus and the people of God share in his glory and his power over all of creation. If you are one of the people of God, imagine yourself as the instrument of this mighty Ruler. And understand that there is not a square inch of planet Earth and there is not a person living that is not placed under his feet.

How does this mighty Ruler exercise his power? What tools does he handle? What weapons does he wield? What bullets, bombs, armored vehicles, or nuclear missiles are his? What trillion-dollar bank accounts are at his disposal? If we are his instruments, what do we have that is consistent with the all-powerful person who holds us in his hand?

Back to verse 10—a loud voice like a trumpet . . . and verse 15—a voice like the sound of rushing waters. And verse 16—out of his mouth came a sharp double-edged sword. The image is a strange one. A razor-sharp two-edged sword protrudes from the King's mouth. You can hardly swing a sword with your teeth, so like most of Revelation, we look for the meaning behind this imagery. Hebrews 4:12 says the word of God is like a two-edged sword.

It's the words of Jesus that are the ultimate weapon. That's all he needs. When he was battling the most powerful created being in the universe, he used only the words of Scripture. Read about that in Matthew 4 and Luke 4. Wherever the people of God wield the words of Jesus, there is power. You can put away your guns, because Jesus gives us something far more powerful. Where the Word is strong, God's people are strong. If the Word of God is weak or rarely used, you will be weak. When the early Christian believers in the book of Acts were growing rapidly throughout Palestine, the Scriptures say, "The Word of God spread." It was not their swords and spears that spread, but God's Word that grew strong. The Word of God and the people of God always go together.

>>Power point #4

If you've read the novel by C.S. Lewis called *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, or if you've seen the movie, you remember the scene where Aslan the Lion is being described.

"Is Aslan the Lion safe?" said Mr. Beaver; "don't you hear what Mrs. Beaver tells you? Who said anything about safe? 'Course he isn't safe. But he's good. He's the King, I tell you."

And then remember the climax of the great battle, when the resurrected Aslan looks out over the battlefield, opens his mouth, and roars a mighty roar that sends all of his enemies running for their lives, and at the same time, this roar encourages and emboldens all of his followers who gather around him with great joy and celebration.

This Jesus of Revelation 1 is the roaring Jesus, whose voice is like a trumpet, and like the sound of a giant waterfall, or a hurricane-driven ocean. His roaring word goes from one corner of our planet to the other, it circles the globe, it penetrates the walls of your house, the inner city of Grand Rapids and Detroit, the woods of Tennessee, the bloodied villages of Syria, and the native huts of Ethiopia. Do not be afraid. We are servants of the Great King of all the earth. We have his most powerful weapons, and his most certain promise: "Look, I am with you always, all the way to the end of the age." And to all those who move to our communities from strange faraway places, he wants to be with them as well.