

## Revelation 1:10-20 “Which Portrait: The Supper with M or the Son of Man?”

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The Last Supper of Christ is depicted in a famous portrait by Leonardo da Vinci, named, *The Last Supper*. A 15<sup>th</sup> century mural painting housed in a convent in Italy. In the portrait, Jesus has just announced that one of the disciples would betray Him. Da Vinci beautifully depicts the reaction of the Twelve. Not surprisingly, the portrait has been the subject of much art history. Also the subject of a conspiracy theory popularized by *The Da Vinci Code* novel and movie. Conspiracy theorists claim that the portrait contains hidden messages. For example, one notices that there is no cup on the table which Jesus clearly used to institute the Lord’s Supper (according to tradition, Joseph of Arimathea used it to collect Jesus’ blood for which it is called the Holy Grail). Why no cup? Accordingly, the figure at the right hand of Jesus is not John—as most art scholars believe—but Mary Magdalene who is supposedly Jesus’ wife, carrying his child which then makes her womb the real Holy Grail of Jesus’ blood. This theory is reinforced by the letter *M* that is formed with the body positions of Jesus, Mary, and an apostle. How does Jesus’ appear in the portrait? As the mirror image of Mary Magdalene. Jesus wears a red robe and blue cloak. Magdalene wears a blue robe and red cloak. Jesus appears effeminate. The portrait portrays an emasculated Jesus. Whether the theory is actually the Apostle John or Mary Magdalene I’ll leave for your judgment. But da Vince clearly paints an effeminate Jesus, characteristic of his fascination with blurring the sexes, genderlessness, androgyny.

Well in our text today, we find another portrait of Jesus. Which could not be more radically different. The portraits are polar opposites in their depictions of Jesus. Here we do not find an effeminate Jesus, an emasculated Jesus, but a very manly Jesus, actually, the *Son of Man*, Jesus. When we examine the portrait, we learn that *since Jesus is the Son of Man, then you and I should fall down before Him now and worship Him in reverence and awe.*

### *Context*

The time in the text is AD 95-96. Late in the reign of Emperor Domitian. (Some 6 decades after Christ ascended into heaven). We find John the old man, the aged apostle toward the end of his life, the last living of the original Twelve. Verse 9, He is on the isle of Patmos, 40 miles off of the west coast of modern Turkey in the Aegean Sea. The Roman authorities use it as a penal colony, a prison. Patmos is the ancient Alcatraz of the Aegean. The isle is a remote chunk of volcanic rock jutting out of the ocean blue. Jagged stones, sheer cliffs. Windswept, barren, desolate. The landscape itself is demoralizing which serves to break the spirit of the prisoners. Here the inmates are forced to work in the stone quarries. John’s situation. Political prisoner exiled to Patmos as the penalty for his teaching ministry and faith in Christ. Banished to slave in the quarries, “dig in the dirt until death.”

On this particular day, we don’t find John working but worshipping. Verse 10, *I was in the Spirit on the LORD’s day...* Here is John on the Lord’s Day. Why does he mention this particular day of the week? Why is that significant to the narrative? What is the Lord’s Day? The Lord’s Day is the day on which Jesus rose from the dead. Sunday. The first day of the week. The day that the early believers gathered together to worship. When Paul goes to Troas, *On the first day of the week we came together to break bread. Paul spoke to the people* (Act 20:7 NIV). Why do they come together? To hear Paul speak and break bread. They assemble to hear the

preached word and celebrate the Supper. On the first day of the week. Sunday then is the Christian Sabbath. From the beginning of the world until the resurrection of Christ, the Sabbath was the seventh day of the week. But after the resurrection the Sabbath was changed to the first day of the week. Why change? The apostles rescheduled the Sabbath Day in order to keep Christianity from appearing as a Jewish sect. So there is a Sabbath day for Christians. The Lord's Day. Not a day on which believers can neglect worship. No matter where we find ourselves. Patmos, Troas, or Florida on vacation. The *Lord's Day* is His day. A day set apart for the Lord. To unreservedly focus on the Him. His existence. To ponder the mystery of His being. To contemplate His Lordship over the cosmos. To celebrate His resurrection from the grave. To rejoice in His salvation that He bought by His own blood. To be reminded of His Story. How? By gathering with other believers to hear His word and celebrate His Supper. For that urgent reason, we assemble together for public worship on Sunday morning then home groups in the evening for community. But community is a problem for John. For he cannot gather with other believers. For one, there are probably no other believers on Patmos. Two, John is in solitary confinement. Isolated from other prisoners because of his revolutionary ideas. Yet he shows solidarity with the church universal by worshipping on the Lord's Day. As he is praying and singing, something happens that is not normal, unusual. Verse 10, *I was caught up in the spirit*. John is "elevated to a state in which the Holy Spirit replaced normal sensory experience with vision and voices" (Bauckham, in Mounce, 55).

### *Son of Man*

In this trance-like state, John sees a breathtaking staggering vision of Christ. Verse 13, *and in the midst of the lampstands one like a son of man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash around his chest*. John sees someone like a "Son of Man." As you know, this is the title by which Jesus refers to Himself in His earthly ministry. Jesus' own self-identity. How He self-identifies, as the Son of Man. Mentioned 81 times in the four gospels. *The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and give His life a ransom for many* (Matt. 20:28). Jesus self-identifies as the Son of Man. What does that mean? It is a reference to Daniel's night vision (Ch. 7). Daniel sees four horrifying hybrid creatures, mutant monsters which strike fear into the heart of those who see them. A lion, a bear, a leopard, and an iron Robo-beast. Then suddenly in his vision, Daniel sees a new figure. *"In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence.* (Dan. 7:13). The new character looks like a "son of man." In other words, he doesn't look like the four bizarre beasts. Category distinct. He looks like a son of man, a descendant of Adam. He looks human.

But he is not merely human indicated in that He is coming with the clouds. Significant. In the Old Testament, God's presence is often symbolized by a cloud. In the wilderness wanderings, a pillar of cloud by day. So He is divine. His divinity is confirmed in what Daniel sees next. Dan. 7:14, *He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all peoples, nations and men of every language worshiped him....* The Son of Man who Daniel sees is worshipped, indicating His deity. He is divine, yet He looks human. This One possesses two natures, divine and human. One person who is divine and human simultaneously. The *theanthropos*, the God-Man.

The God-Man in Daniel's vision, is the One whom John now sees on the isle of Patmos. The "Son of Man." The title by which Jesus identifies Himself. But this time Jesus doesn't look

like poor carpenter's son from Nazareth. He looks like the awe-inspiring, majestic Lord of the universe. Sovereign Ruler and Judge of history as in the context of Daniel's night vision. Dominion and judgment. Dominion: The Son of Man is given *everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed* (Dan 7:14 NIV). Judgment: Thrones are set up, the court is in session, books are opened (Dan. 7:9, 10). Dominion and judgment. Every detail of the vision serves to reinforce the big idea of Jesus appearing as King and Judge. The description of His hair, eyes, feet, and voice. We don't want to interpret the details with a hyper-literalism so that in effect, we pick apart the picture. Like unweaving the rainbow. But do want to notice the details since they undoubtedly serve to emphasize the big picture. Mounce, "John uses the allusions for their evocative and emotive power...to call forth from his readers the same response of overwhelming and annihilating wonder which he experienced" (Mounce, 58). The details serve to magnify the overwhelming and annihilating wonder of Christ's marvelous being.

First, hair. Verse 14, *The hairs of His head were white, like white wool, like white snow*. Again a reference to Daniel's night vision, in which the Son of Man approaches the Ancient of Days. The Ancient of Days is described with hair as white as wool (Dan. 7:9). White hair is a symbol of age. But for the Ancient of Days white hair does not symbolize the frailty of human aging, rather His eternity, the divine attribute of everlastingness. Now in John's vision, this feature of the ancient of Days is assigned to Jesus. *The hairs of His head were white, like white wool, like white snow*. The portrait reveals that Jesus possesses the divine attribute of eternity. He is very God of very God. Eternally present. From everlasting to everlasting. Second, eyes. Verse 14, ... *His eyes were like a flame of fire*. This symbolizes His penetrating insight, omniscience. Under the scrutinizing glare of these blazing eyes every foul deed is exposed. The blazing fire of His eyes are like an X-Rays that see deep into the human body, scanning secret thoughts, the hidden desires of the heart. Burning through every façade and disguise. No attitude can remain unseen. No opinion concealed. No lust hidden. No hidden hook-up app on a phone. All exposed. Third, feet. Verse 15, ... *His feet were like burnished bronze, refined in in a furnace* Feet are the body parts with which we tread upon the ground. But in the case of Christ, with His feet He treads upon His enemies. First promise of the gospel. God told Satan, *I will put enmity between you and the woman, your seed and her seed, He will crush your head. And you shall bruise Him on the heel* (Gen. 3:15). Messianic psalm. He will tread upon His enemies *until they become a footstool for His feet*. (Ps. 110:1). The feet of the Son of Man symbolize His strength. His victory over conquered forces. Moreover, John describes His feet as some kind of fine bronze or gold alloy. Glowing in a fire. White hot. Which conveys the idea that Christ is unconquerable. Invincible. Indomitable. No enemy can stop Him. Fourth, voice. Verse 15, ... *his voice was like the roar of many waters*. Suggesting the awe-inspiring power of a great waterfall. His voice is like Niagara Falls. Deafening roar. A sound which evokes reverence, awe. Fifth, mouth. Verse 16, ... *from his mouth came a sharp two-edged sword*. A broadsword, a weapon used to execute His enemies. A symbol of vengeance, wrath. Ch. 19:15 pictures the return of Christ from whose *mouth comes a sharp sword so that with it He may smite the nations*. By the power of His mighty Word He will execute wrath and vengeance. Conquering rebellious hearts of defiant princes and parliaments. Sixth, face. Verse 16, ... *an His face was like the sun shining in full strength*. John has squinted at this face before on the Mount when Jesus was transfigured and His clothes became as bright as a flash of lightning. Now again John sees the flash of light radiate from Jesus' face like the explosion of an atomic bomb. Same

light that Saul of Tarsus saw on the road to Damascus that temporarily blinded him. Brighter than the sun at midday. The unapproachable light of God's glorious presence.

### *Descent into Hell*

There is one more detail, the climax described by Jesus Himself. Keys. Verse 18, ...*I have the keys of Death and Hades*. Hanging from Jesus' belt are keys. Jesus is the key-keeper who possesses the keys of Death and Hades. What does that mean? Hades is the underworld. The word *Hades* is used to translate the Old Testament Hebrew word, *Sheol*. Jesus teaches on Hades in the *Parable of Rich Man and Lazarus*. Where is the rich man? *In Hades...he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus at his side* (Lk. 16: 23). According to Jesus, there are different regions of Hades. One, a place of torment for the defiant. Two, the bosom of Abraham—a separate region for believers, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and poor Lazarus who is the newest inhabitant of this region of blessed and comfort. Known as paradise, a garden in the underworld watered by a stream. The two regions are divided by a great chasm. Impassable, no one can cross either way. Hades is guarded by gates, as Jesus teaches, *the gates of Hades shall not prevail against the Church* (Matt. 16:18). At death for those before Christ, the soul pass through massive, imposing gates. Which are locked and only opened with a key. Which Jesus owns. He also has another key, the key of Death. Here Death does not refer to the experience of ending life. But Death is a place, the realm of the dead. In the Revelation, there are four references to these places, *Death and Hades*. They are always mentioned together and in this order. Death and Hades. In the Revelation, they are places. Yet, they are also personified. The fourth horseman, *I looked, and behold, a pale horse! And its rider's name was Death, and Hades followed him* (Rev. 6:8). Death and Hades are personified like characters in the story. Who formerly owned the keys which Jesus now possesses. How does He get them? The is only one explanation as articulated in the Apostles' Creed. *He was crucified, dead, and buried, He descended into hell*. A literal, spatial descent into the underworld. Between His death and resurrection, Jesus journeys to the underworld. Where the Son of Man battles the personified figures of Death and Hades, defeats them, overcomes them, then takes from them their keys. This biblical eschatology is twisted in Greek mythology. Hades is the Greek god of the underworld, the most hated of gods, after whom the underworld is named. Death is a demon in the underworld to whom the dead are sacrificed (Bass, *Battle for the Keys*, 21). As Victor, Christ triumphantly keeps the keys of Death and Hades (turning the tables on Greek mythology). He controls the gates as He pleases. He opens the gates that none can shut, and He shuts the gates that none can open because He possesses the keys of Death and Hades which hang on His belt (By the way, which gates He opens for the Old Testament believers, Abraham and Lazarus and transports them to heaven where the souls of New Testament believers now join them. He releases the captives. He took captivity captive and set the prisoners free. *When He ascended on high He led a host of captives* (Eph. 4:8). Symbolized by the keys of Death and Hades which Jesus owns).

That is the portrait of Christ. Why would this matter? Again, we cannot understand the Apocalypse outside the context and circumstances of the seven churches to which John is writing. Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, Laodicea. These are Christians who are suffering for the faith. Bitterly and severely persecuted. Some are wasting away in dingy dungeons (2:10). Some thrown to the wild beasts (6:8). Most recently in Pergamum, Antipas is executed (2:13). Many are beheaded (20:4), including the Apostle Paul,

beheaded by Nero. The believers of the Asian churches are totally disillusioned by the tribulation. Defeated. Despairing. How will they overcome the world? How will they survive the tribulation? How will the church last? How will Christianity continue? Do you see what they so desperately need? Hope! So to John is given this vision of the *Son of Man*. The ultimate divine Warrior-King who comes to punish those who persecute His church. This vision is the game-changer for them. They are encouraged to stand fast in the faith and not renounce Christ and not burn incense to Caesar and persevere until the end no matter how bitter that end might be. They do! *They overcame ...they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death* (Rev 12:11 NIV). That is the difference this vision of Christ makes. John doesn't see the Jesus of the modern American church. The, emasculated, effeminate metro-sexual dude with manicured hands. John sees, the *Son of Man*. The sovereign Ruler and Judge of history. Pre-Existent Ancient of Days. Eternally present. The omniscient One from whose blazing eyes nothing can be hidden. All Mighty, indomitable, invincible. Whose voice alone evokes fear and awe. Whose word shatters kingdoms and conquers armies. Whose glory is immeasurable in brilliance, eclipsing that of the noon-day sun. Unsurpassable in radiance. Unimaginably majestic.

### *John's Reaction*

John's reaction? Verse 17, *When I saw him, I fell at His feet as though dead*. John collapses in a state of severe distress. This is not a bowing down in an act of worship. He is lying unconscious from a spontaneous reflex to terror. Overwhelmed by fear. So clear in Jesus reply, (v. 17) *But He laid His right hand on me, saying, "Fear not."* Clearly, John is fearful. Therefore Jesus must assure him that there is no need of fear. Why? (v. 18) Jesus keeps the keys to *Death and Hades*. In Jesus' descent into hell, He conquered Death and Hades. It is Jesus who controls John's eternal destiny. That is the assurance that John need not fear. Here is the response to the vision of the Son of Man. Shock and awe, trauma. This picture of Jesus is not calming, not soothing portrait that we have in the history of art. This portrait is unnerving, terrifying. Upon seeing Jesus, John passes out cold. Unconscious. "Traumatized by glory" (Azurdia).

Such is always the reaction to Jesus' glory. Might remember Samson's parents. Manoah and his wife. Christ appears to them in a pre-incarnate form to announce the birth of their son. Then He disappears in a literal blaze of glory. What do they say? "O we shall surely interview on the 700 Club. No. *We shall surely die, for we have seen God* (Judg. 13:22). Daniel when he sees Christ,<sup>8</sup> *So I was left alone, gazing at this great vision; I had no strength left, my face turned deathly pale and I was helpless.*<sup>9</sup> *Then I heard him speaking, and as I listened to him, I fell into a deep sleep, my face to the ground* (Dan 10:8-9 NIV). Daniel overdoses on the glory of Christ and passes out. Traumatized by glory.

John's reaction should transform the way we think of Jesus. We perhaps have been influenced by the sentimentalism of the modern church. Which has a snowflake theology of Jesus, "gentle Jesus meek and mild." Were He to appear to us, we would be overwhelmed with warm happy feelings. But why do we think that our reaction would be so different from that of John? This is the John the apostle, the disciple whom Jesus loved. Upon whose chest Jesus leaned at the Last Supper. Now John is not overcome with sentimentalism, but traumatized by glory. John doesn't react like a middle school girl fawning over her boyfriend. He looks like a stroke victim, slumped over on the ground. Dead. This is the One from whom the heavens and the Earth shall flee His presence. *I saw Him and fell at his feet as though dead*.

John's reaction reminds me of a scene in the movie *Dances With Wolves*.

Kevin Costner plays the part of the army lieutenant, John Dunbar, not “Dumb-Bear” as he emphatically explains to the noble Indian. Dun-bar. Lieutenant Dunbar has taken his new post on the frontier. Unfortunately, the good officer finds the fort in dilapidated condition. So he dutifully begins to set the camp in order and make preparations for security in the event of contact with the savages. An occasion that he nervously and anxiously anticipates. Finally, the dreaded day comes when he least expects it. He is bathing. From a distance he sees some Indians lurking around his camp. So bravely runs to the perimeter to defend the fort. To his utter horror, he discovers a fierce warrior dressed in battle costume, painted face, spear in hand, on a majestic stallion, galloping at full speed toward the lieutenant standing his ground. Just when it appears that the horse will trample the lieutenant, the warrior reigns in, and screams in the Sioux language, “Don’t you see? I am not afraid of you.” He then let’s out a fierce war cry, wheels his horse around and gallops over the hill. Do you remember the lieutenant’s reaction? He feebly turns around and tries to walk back to the camp, but collapses in shock and trauma. He fell down as though dead. This is John’s reaction to the ultimate divine Warrior-King who is fierce in battle and comes to purge His church and punish those who persecute her. *When I saw him I fell at his feet as though dead.* There is no other reaction. This is not the portrait of Jesus which Leonardo Da Vince depicts—an emasculated, effeminate, androgynous Jesus. This is the Son of Man whom John sees on the isle of Patmos. The day is coming when shall all see Him. All shall fall down as though dead. I urge you to fall down now in reverence and adoration so that when He appears you shall need not fear. Amen.