

What can we learn about the character, role and purpose of Jesus Christ from Revelation chapters 1, 5 and 19?

In what ways would the particular aspects of Christ's character and activity which are presented here be relevant to a church facing opposition and persecution?

Introduction

In the book of Revelation, we see Christ presented in various ways, and although a part of the Bible which is seen by the majority as difficult to understand, we can gain a great understanding of the person of Jesus through John's writings.

The imagery portrayed, which could be interpreted as contradictory, can help us to explore and understand more about the whole character of Jesus, and what His role and purpose are. This in turn helps us to understand the relevance of Christ's sufferings to Christians struggling against persecution and opposition in modern society.

Christ's character

In Revelation 1:13-16 we see Jesus described in all the splendour that one would expect of the divine Son of God, which makes the writer fall to his feet in awe. This royal, majestic portrayal of Jesus is continued in Revelation 19:11 where He is described as riding a white horse, a creature symbolic of authority and power. Despite His power and majesty, Jesus is also portrayed as a gentle comforter in Revelation 1:17, reassuring the writer not to be afraid.

This powerful description of Jesus as a powerful and awesome ruler is then contrasted by the picture of him as a slain lamb in Revelation 5:6. This conjures up an image of someone weak and frail, who is devoid of power

Revelation 19 also paints a contrasting picture of Jesus' character. In verses 15-19 we see that He is vengeful, waging war against His enemies yet it is "with justice He judges and makes war" (verse 11).

These descriptions of Jesus' character may appear dichotomous. I would however suggest that the weak, slain lamb is able to be the triumphant Lion of Judah as described in Revelation 5:5, because His blood was shed. (Revelation 5:9). Goldsworthy acknowledges that "John illuminates the central paradox of the gospel. The victory of God was the humiliation and death of His Son."¹

Similarly, the just and vengeful nature of Jesus described are "the two sides of divine character"² and this a reflection of God the Father, as, for example, described in Deuteronomy 32:43.

Christ's Role

These chapters of Revelation can be seen to attribute four roles to Jesus: messenger, redeemer, judge and king. These can be linked to the Old Testament offices of Prophet, Priest and King.³

We read in Revelation 1:1 that part of Jesus' role was to share a revelation from God to people on the earth. This idea is continued in Revelation 5:1-8 where Jesus is the only one "worthy to break the seals and open the scroll" (verse 2).

Wilcock points out that "many commentators note that it His redeeming death which qualifies Christ to break the Seals."⁴ The role of Christ as Redeemer is identified in Revelation 5:9-10.

Christ "holds the keys of death and Hades" (1:18) and having been described as the faithful and true witness in Revelation chapter 3, He now becomes the "faithful and true judge"⁵. We see Christ also having a role as a royal leader in Revelation 1:5 and 19:16.

¹ Goldsworthy, *The Goldsworthy Trilogy*, p169

² Wilcock, *The Message of Revelation*, p183

³ Wilcock, *The Message of Revelation*, p35

⁴ Wilcock, *The Message of Revelation*, p68

⁵ Marshall, Travis and Paul, *Exploring the New Testament*, p314

Christ's Purpose

If there are many attributes of Christ's role described in these chapters of Revelation, then there are also a number of aspects of Christ's purpose identified.

Revelation 1:6 suggests that part of Christ's purpose is to lead people to worship God the Father. In a similar vein, Jesus' purpose is to receive the worship and praises which are described in Revelation 5:13.

Revelation also identifies Christ's purpose as Saviour. He "has freed us from our sins by His blood" (Revelation 1:5) and this theme is also repeated in Revelation 5:9. Finally, it is suggested in Revelation 19:15 that part of Christ's purpose is to be ruler of the nations, and in His royalty, He is therefore "to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honour and glory and praise". (Revelation 5:12).

Relevance to the persecuted church

First of all, I think the greatest relevance here is that Christ himself endured suffering. Although He was divine, He still chose to endure the crucifixion in order to save humanity and restore the relationship between man and God.

Secondly, is the notion that Christ has achieved victory. He is the "ruler of the kings of the earth" (Revelation 1:5) and although Christians may suffer persecution today, there will be a time when Christ will exercise His judgement against His enemies which is described in Revelation 19:15-19.

Finally, Jesus' suffering was necessary for him to win the victory. His endurance was not in vain. As Revelation 5:1-8 describes, He could only fulfil His role of sharing God's message with the world because He had suffered. A church facing opposition may not be able to understand the bigger picture at the time, but can trust that God will use their sufferings to bring glory to Himself.

Goldsworthy summarises this in saying “the victory of Christ is real, for He has overcome the world. Until He comes, however, the Church must suffer in the world”.⁶

Conclusion

The portrayal of Jesus’ character using the imagery of the slain lamb and majestic lion are particularly helpful, as this allows the reader to visualise the broad spectrum of Jesus characteristics. When read alongside the description of Jesus as a vengeful warrior makes the description even more vivid and helps us to understand Jesus’ role and purpose where He is “seated at the right hand of the Father and He will come to judge the living and the dead⁷”.

Reflecting on the meaning of Christ’s suffering can help the persecuted church to “stand firm in the knowledge that their own sufferings are utterly consistent with the reality of God’s kingdom in this present age.”⁸

WORD COUNT: 989

⁶ Goldsworthy, *The Goldsworthy Trilogy*, p189

⁷ The Apostles Creed

⁸ Goldsworthy, *The Goldsworthy Trilogy*, p180

Bibliography

Drane, J, *Introducing the New Testament*, Oxford: Lion Publishing, 1999;

Goldsworthy, G, *The Gospel in Revelation (featured in The Goldsworthy Trilogy)*, Milton Keynes: Paternoster Press, 2000;

Marshall, H, Travis S & Paul, I, *Exploring the New Testament Vol 2*, London: SPCK, 2002;

Travis, S, *New Testament Introduction*, Nottingham: St John's Extension Studies, 2006;

Wilcock, M, *The Message of Revelation*, Nottingham: Inter-Varsity Press, 1991 (2nd ed);

Websites

<http://cofe.anglican.org/worship/liturgy/commonworship/texts/word/creeds.html>

accessed 20080714



This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 2.0 UK: England & Wales License. To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/2.0/uk/> or send a letter to Creative Commons, 171 Second Street, Suite 300, San Francisco, California, 94105, USA.