



THE BEREA PAGE

“Examining . . . to see if these things are so” ~ Acts 17.11

Jesus the Warrior

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In a notable passage, J. B. Phillips critiqued a caricature of Jesus that, in the phrasing used previously, leans too hard into his “[coolness](#).” After citing two lines of verse — “Gentle Jesus, meek and mild / Look upon a little child” — Phillips asks,

Why “mild”? Of all the epithets that could be applied to Christ this seems one of the least appropriate. For what does “mild,” as applied to a person, conjure up to our minds? Surely a picture of someone who wouldn’t say “boo” to the proverbial goose; someone who would let sleeping dogs lie and avoid trouble whenever possible; someone of a placid temperament who is almost a stranger to the passions of red-blooded humanity; someone who is a bit of a nonentity, both uninspired and uninspiring (Phillips 1961, 26–27).

As Phillips suggests, the “mild” depiction of Jesus can leave the impression that he is a push-over, not a dynamic ruler capable of giving Satan and his minions their comeuppance. The issue, of course, is not that it is incorrect to say Jesus was gentle or compassionate; it’s that the New Testament presents him as so much more. Think, for example, of the Jesus John saw one Sunday on Patmos island.

I was in the spirit on the Lord’s day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet. “Write down what you see in a book,” it said, “and send it to the seven churches: . . .” So I turned to see the voice that was speaking with me. As I turned, I saw seven golden lampstands, and in the middle of the lampstands “one like a son of man,” wearing a full-length robe and with a golden belt across his chest. His head and his hair were white, white like wool, white like snow. His eyes were like a flame of fire, his feet were like exquisite brass, refined in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of many waters. He was holding seven stars in his right hand, and a sharp two-edged sword was coming out of his mouth. The sight of him was like the sun when it shines with full power. When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though I was dead (Rev 1.10–17a NTFE).

I’ll admit, apart from Phillips, I’m not familiar with the lines he says were learned by “hundreds of thousands.” But, like most in my world, I do have vivid memories of Jesus pictures in Sunday school literature and flannel boards. And *none* of them looked like the person John saw.

Read the passage again, more closely, starting, as John did, with the *sound*; imagine a trumpet blast during your quiet time. Now, *look* at what he sees. Jesus stands, “like a son of man” (Dan 7.13–14), in the middle of seven gold lampstands. He’s wearing a robe that conveys authority. His head and hair are white as wool or snow. His eyes are like flaming fire (multiply the intensity of “the look” you got from your mother who knew what you were up to). His feet are “like exquisite brass,” hard and unyielding. His voice sounds like roaring waters—think Niagara Falls—and he’s holding seven stars in his right hand while a sharp two-edged sword protrudes from his mouth. He’s glowing like the sun at its brightest.

Unlike the statuary typical in John's world, or so many depictions of him now, the picture of Jesus in Revelation 1 is *not* "attractive" (Oster 2013, 74). It depicts a fierce warrior ready to press the battle and take no prisoners. No wonder John fell at his feet like a dead man! The Jesus he saw was no easygoing buddy who can be domesticated, summarized in a happy slogan, or appropriated for a utilitarian purpose (or marketing).

Accustomed as we are to "cool" depictions of Jesus, John's picture will be uncomfortable for some. Maybe even be a little scary. But it is precisely the Jesus John and those churches needed to see. They were under duress, slandered (2.9), imprisoned (2.10), and oppressed by Satan and his servants (2.13; 3.9). Some would die for their faithfulness (2.10; 6.9). They desperately needed something to bolster their "endurance" (ὕπομονήν, *hypomonē*, appears seven times, in Rev 1.9; 2.2, 19; 3.10; 13.10; 14.12); needed to know they had a righteous warrior who would avenge them (6.10).

Fortunately for them, and us, that Warrior made his presence known. As John lay on the ground like a dead man, Jesus touched him with his right hand, the hand of power and authority, and spoke: "Stop being afraid. I died, but I beat death—and I'm not dying again. I have the keys—the power—over Death and where the dead go. I am in charge! I am a warrior! I *will* make things right!"

Works Cited

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