

# John: In the Spirit on the Lord's Day

*Locked Up with Nowhere to Go*

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**Bible Text:** Revelation 1

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*Heavenly Father, as we turn now to the Scriptures to the Apocalypse of John, we ask that you would minister to us, speak to us, speak to us in our hearts and in our souls, draw us to yourself. How we long to fellowship and have communion with you, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. So do it, pour out your Spirit that we might, indeed, be in the Spirit on the Lord's day. And we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Please be seated.

Now we are in a series called "Locked Down with Nowhere to Go" and learning from characters in the Bible who found themselves in prison and this morning we are in the first chapter of the book of Revelation and John has been imprisoned there on the isle of Patmos. So Revelation 1.

1 The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show to his servants the things that must soon take place. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John, 2 who bore witness to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw. 3 Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear, and who keep what is written in it, for the time is near. 4 John to the seven churches that are in Asia: Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven spirits who are before his throne, 5 and from Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth. To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood 6 and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. 7 Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him, and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him. Even so. Amen. 8 "I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty." 9 I, John, your brother and partner in the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance that are in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. 10 I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a

loud voice like a trumpet 11 saying, "Write what you see in a book and send it to the seven churches, to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamum and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea." 12 Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking to me, and on turning I saw seven golden lampstands, 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. 14 The hairs of his head were white, like white wool, like snow. His eyes were like a flame of fire, 15 his feet were like burnished bronze, refined in a furnace, and his voice was like the roar of many waters. 16 In his right hand he held seven stars, from his mouth came a sharp two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining in full strength. 17 When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. But he laid his right hand on me, saying, "Fear not, I am the first and the last, 18 and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades. 19 Write therefore the things that you have seen, those that are and those that are to take place after this. 20 As for the mystery of the seven stars that you saw in my right hand, and the seven golden lampstands, the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches.

Well, so far God's holy and inerrant word. May he add his blessing to the reading of it, indeed, blessed is the one who reads these words, John says, and blessed is the one who hears and keeps what is written herein.

There's a debate and I won't go into the details as to when the book of Revelation was written. There are those and my dear friend, departed friend, Dr. Sproul, believe that the book of Revelation was written before the fall of Jerusalem, sometime in the late '60s and that has a lot of implications as to the interpretation of the book of Revelation, many things therefore in the book of Revelation are depicting and anticipating the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple that went along with it. For my part, I've always believed in the strength of the case and, indeed, the majority case that the book of Revelation was actually written much later, some 30 years later in the mid '90s, not under the reign of Emperor Nero but under the reign of Emperor Domitian, and that also, of course, therefore has implications that what is being revealed to us in the book of Revelation is not actually the fall of Jerusalem but something towards the end of time and the Second Coming of the Lord Jesus. But what is of interest to us this morning is to identify why it is that John the apostle is on this island called Patmos. John would now be in his mid to late 80s if he was 20 something when Jesus called him and his brother James, James who was martyred in Acts 12 and Herod Agrippa. So if he was in his early 20s when Jesus called him, he would now be in his mid to late 80s. He died, John died in the year 100 and that's possibly some five or six years into his future.

He was, of course, we might call him the minister at large in the church at Ephesus, and because of his preaching of the Gospel under the reign of Domitian and Domitian is one of those Emperors who engaged in a severe persecution of Christianity, the Apostle John was arrested and sent to this island in the Aegean Sea on the northwest side of what we

would call Turkey. It's a small island. It has no trees. It's a rocky island. It's 13 square miles, about a tenth of the size of the actual city of Columbia, if that helps. It has a beautiful breathtaking harbor that goes quite a bit inland, and the island sort of goes round the harbor. At its most elevated, we're talking 800 feet or so. And there would have been a company of soldiers there. There might have been a few buildings in which the soldiers would live but the prisoners and it's hard to know how many prisoners, perhaps there were several hundred of them, and they would be engaged in mining and we don't know what they were mining for, and therefore you have to envisage how difficult this was for John in his mid to late 80s and engaged in mining. If you're a tourist on the isle of Patmos as some of you have been and, of course, there are like 3,000 people living on Patmos today and several little villages and it's a tourist attraction and cruise ships and so on go there, and you'll be taken on a tour to the cave where John purportedly saw the visions that are now the book of Revelation.

What I want us to think about is four things and the first of which is this: what is it that John knew? What is it that he knew? And he tells us that he was in the Spirit on the Lord's day. Now I don't know about you but in this season I'm confused as to what day it is. I have to check my watch. I have to check my calendar as to what day it is because every day seems to be fairly much the same, and it's quite astonishing and revelatory in some ways that John is aware of the fact that this is the Lord's day. There were no printed calendars. He didn't have an iWatch. So there's a consciousness of the rhythm of the week and he's conscious that this is now the Lord's day.

This is the first reference to the Lord's day in the New Testament and we need to think about it for a minute or two, that for a while the early church would have still kept the Jewish Sabbath, the Shabbat, and therefore worship perhaps on Friday evening, but more and more at least within a generation and you see this evolving in the book of Acts, that there is a departure from Judaism and the symbols and signs of Judaism to something that is now more identifiable as Christianity. At first it's a Jesus movement within Judaism but by now and we're two generations away from the death of Jesus, there is a very deliberate consciousness of the Lord's day and the Lord's day becomes the equivalent, the New Testament new covenant equivalent of the Sabbath, the fourth commandment to keep the Sabbath holy and to rest on the Sabbath day. That now becomes not the Jewish Sabbath but the New Testament Lord's day, the day of Jesus' resurrection, the newness of that becomes the day that Christians kept holy.

Now there are those, of course, who don't believe that there is a mandate to keep the Lord's day holy, that all days are holy. They go to places like the 14<sup>th</sup> chapter of Romans or the 2<sup>nd</sup> chapter of Colossians where Paul seems to say fairly negative things about the Sabbath but he's not talking about the Sabbath as such but he's talking about the holy days, and I think he's talking about the liturgical calendar of the Old Testament which is no longer mandatory to be kept by Christians. But it seems to me that it's instructive that twice in the book of Hebrews, people point out, for example, that there is no specific allusion to the fourth commandment in the New Testament, all the other commandments are referred to in some form or another but there is no specific allusion to the fourth commandment in the New Testament. But I was reading yesterday Sinclair Ferguson's

wonderful little appendix in his book called "Devoted to God," he has a little appendix on the Sabbath day, the New Testament Lord's day, and arguing that they are more or less equivalent and that the fourth commandment to keep the Sabbath holy is now applicable to the Lord's day. And he pointed out, for example, that in the book of Hebrews twice there is a reference to the promise of the new covenant in Jeremiah 31, "For this is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my laws on their hearts and write them on their minds." Now what laws is the author of Hebrews thinking about? And surely he's thinking not about the ceremonial laws, not the civil laws of the Old Testament, but he's thinking about the 10 Commandments. Now as he's citing this and Dr. Ferguson said something that grabbed my attention, is the author of the book of Hebrews holding his hands behind his back and crossing his fingers and saying to himself, "Now I hope they understand I don't mean the fourth commandment, I just mean nine commandments." And I think that's an impossible interpretation and it seems to me that the author of Hebrews is implicitly saying that the 10 Commandments, including the fourth commandment, is still mandatory. It is still an obligation for Christians to keep the Lord's day.

Now you know full well where this is going by way of application because I have a fear and maybe it's the Puddleglum in me but I have a fear that we've learned some very bad habits over the last three months and it's time to undo those bad habits and come back to worship, and I'm sincerely hoping that next Sunday there will be more people in this sanctuary, but I'm also and many of you have written and texted me and said to me in person how you miss being with God's people and being in church and fellowshiping and praying together corporately and singing together. Well, John was conscious, he was in prison, he was on an island called Patmos and he must be worn out and yet he's conscious, somehow or other he is conscious that this is the Lord's day.

Well, secondly, if the first question was what did he know, the second question is: what did he experience? What did he experience? And he tells us he was in the Spirit on the Lord's day and in the ESV text, the word "Spirit" is capitalized so he wasn't saying, "I was in the mood. You know, I was in the mood for some worship on the Lord's day." No, he's actually referring to the Holy Spirit. He was in fellowship with the Holy Spirit on the Lord's day.

Now I want to examine that a little because we're often perhaps more akin to saying that we have a relationship with Jesus, or perhaps in the Lord's Prayer we are addressing our heavenly Father, but here John is addressing the third person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit. He is in fellowship with the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is Jesus' representative agent. Now that Jesus, "I go away but I will come to you again," Jesus said in the Upper Room. He talked about another counselor, another paraclete, another helper, another advocate, another strengthener. He's talking about the Holy Spirit. How is the ministry of Jesus, the finished work of Jesus upon the cross, how is that going to be applied? How is Jesus going to build his church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it? By sending the Holy Spirit at Pentecost and now John is saying, "On the Lord's day, I am deeply conscious of being in the Spirit."

Now there's an aspect of this that is perhaps unique to John. John is an apostle. John is one of those men in the Old Testament that God employs to bring to pass his Scripture, his enscripturated word. Men wrote as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit and there's a sense in which John is being given a vision here that he writes down and it becomes part of Scripture. So there's a unique sense to this "in the Spirit" but there's also, I think, a more general sense in which it is true and should be true of you and me, that there is something about worship that is more than just cerebral, more than just information, more than just a lecture, more than just words. There is something of the heart. There is something of the affection. There is something of the soul, that the Spirit, as it were, takes us, all of us, our minds, our souls, our affections, and brings us into a conscious experience with God.

Well, that's what worship, true worship ought to be. You and I have experienced that on many an occasion when we're singing a hymn together, when we're praying together, when we feel deeply the word of God touching our conscience, and touching our hearts, and enlivening our souls, and calling us to worship him in spirit and in truth. Isn't it interesting that Jesus speaking to the Samaritan woman in a context that was extraordinarily difficult for Jesus, she had had five husbands and was now with a sixth and now she is talking to Jesus and there's something sketchy about what she's trying to do, and John tells us that Jesus turns the conversation into a lesson about worship because that's the ultimate thing. When you come, you were created to worship and when you come into fellowship with Jesus, the goal of that fellowship is that you would worship God in spirit and in truth. That's the goal. That's the ultimate thing.

What is the most important thing of all for us as creatures made in the image of God? As fallen creatures redeemed by the blood of Christ, what is the most important thing? That we worship God in spirit and in truth, and worship not just in a horizontal sense but in a vertical sense, that we're aware of the presence of God. Where two or three are gathered together in his name, "There I am in the midst of my people." Aware of the fact that as we sing together and as we pray together and as we read God's word together, that the Holy Spirit strengthens and assures and convicts and draws us to the Lord Jesus. "I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day."

Well, thirdly, what did John do? No, what did John see? So what did he know, secondly, what did he experience, and thirdly, what did John see and the answer, of course, is Jesus. The work of the Holy Spirit in the heart and soul of the Apostle John was to give him a glimpse of Jesus and that's always what the Holy Spirit does. He doesn't actually draw attention to himself. He is always telling us to look into the face of the Lord Jesus.

He saw Jesus standing as the Son of Man and this, of course, was Jesus' favorite self-designation. It was the term that he used and employed the most as to his own identity. Now there was a time in the 18-19<sup>th</sup> century among conservative Bible interpreters to say that when Jesus used the term Son of God he was referring to his deity, and when Jesus was using the term Son of Man, he was referring to his humanity, his Incarnate self, and I think that's entirely wrong. The term Son of Man comes from the seventh chapter of

Daniel and what Daniel is depicting in chapter 7 is not a human being, he is depicting one who has divine qualities, one is all-powerful and all-knowing and is everywhere present.

So immediately John sees a glimpse of Jesus and he sees him, of course, in extravagantly human form. This is apocalyptic writing and it tends to exaggerate features and use colors and numbers and so on, almost like a cartoon will blow a character almost out of proportion to emphasize certain qualities that he wants you to see. But the human-like figure that stands before him is no other than the second person of the Trinity. He is the Son of God and he's the Son of Man for even the Son of Man, Jesus says, did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life a ransom for many. I often think that that statement by Jesus is, and I don't want to say something that sounds a little demeaning, but it's almost as though that verse is his life verse. It's what Jesus wants us to understand the most about him, that he hadn't come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many and he identifies himself in that life verse in Mark 10 as the Son of Man.

And John sees now a figure dressed in a robe and a golden sash around his chest, and his head and his hair was white, white as snow, and eyes like blazing fire, and feet like burnished bronze glowing in a furnace, and a voice like the rush of mighty waters. Now what is John actually seeing? And what he is seeing theologians in the time of the Reformation and after the Reformation began to speak about Jesus, the person of Jesus using three figures: prophet, priest, and king. And all three of those are represented here in the vision that John sees of Jesus. He is the prophet who is revealing things to John, things that are now and things that are to come. He is the Son of Man, the king, the Lord of the universe, the one who holds the universe in the palms of his hands. And the garments that he is wearing are garments of a priest, a great high priest. He is the prophet who teaches us. He is the king who rules over us. He is the priest who forgives us of our sin.

And he's standing amongst the seven golden lampstands. The book of Revelation is written to seven churches in Asia Minor in what we would now call Turkey, and it forms the list of cities forms almost like a circle; it would have been the delivery route for mail and messages perhaps. And Jesus is standing among his churches. Even though we're in a pandemic and even though the last three months have been the strangest months in our lives perhaps, Jesus is still standing in the midst of his people and it's as though John is saying to you, "Turn your eyes upon Jesus and look full into his wonderful face, and the things of earth will grow strangely dim in the light of his glory and grace." And I trust this morning that you'll get a little glimpse of the magnificence and the beauty and the attractiveness of Jesus. In all that is ugly in this world right now, there is the beauty of Jesus. So turn your eyes away from the news for an hour or two, turn your eyes away from that which depresses you and causes you to be anxious, and look full into the wonderful face of the Lord Jesus.

Well, then fourthly, what did John do? And he tells us that he fell at his feet as though dead. He collapsed in that cave and fell at the feet of the Lord Jesus as though paralyzed by the glory that was present, paralyzed by the effulgence that manifested itself in the

presence of the apostle. There are many appropriate ways of responding to Jesus and this is one of them, and that when you are in the Spirit on the Lord's day and when the Spirit reveals to you something of the sheer glory of the Lord Jesus in his greatness, in his magnificence, the God-man, like the prophet Isaiah in chapter 6 when he saw a similar vision of Jesus and John 10 identifies the vision that Isaiah saw as Jesus, it was a manifestation of Jesus, and the prophet said, "Woe is me for I am undone!" He was paralyzed by the holiness of Jesus, the otherness of Jesus, the sinlessness of Jesus, conscious that he was still a sinner, a saved sinner, a redeemed sinner but a sinner still and John falls down as though he were dead. Before him in the words of Abraham Kuyper, "There is not a single inch of the whole terrain of our human existence over which Christ does not proclaim, 'Mine.'" Or as R. C. Sproul used to say, "There can be no maverick molecule." He holds the universe, all of it, the entirety of it.

I subscribe to the Hubble Telescope email whatever, and pretty much on a daily basis there is an update, and this week it was a galaxy very similar to our own that had been glimpsed for the very first time. Breathtaking in its beauty. Incomprehensible in its magnitude. And Jesus holds it in the palms of his hands, the Jesus who became Incarnate, the Jesus who died on our behalf on the cross, the Jesus who was buried, the Jesus who was resurrected, the Jesus who is sitting at the right hand of the Father.

There are many appropriate responses to Jesus but to fall down and be silent before him and to worship him is a very very reasonable response, don't you think? But what is even more interesting to me is that immediately Jesus puts his hand on the Apostle John and says to him, "Fear not." There are many allusions in the Bible to that expression, "Do not be afraid. Fear not." And Jesus says to the Apostle John and remember the Apostle John was, if we can put it like this, the one whom Jesus loved. That's how John identifies himself, as though he was the closest disciple to Jesus.

"When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. But he laid his right hand on me, saying, 'Fear not, I am the first and the last, and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades.'" Hades meaning what follows after death. Now dear Christian, ask yourself the question: what happens five seconds after I die? After my heart stops beating, after brainwaves cease, however you technically and medically and legally define death? So let me give you five seconds. What happens five seconds after you die? And the Bible says we are immediately in the presence of the Lord Jesus. We pass through our souls, our consciousness, if you like, passes through what I like to think of as a rent in space invisible to the human eye, and we are immediately with angels and archangels and the church of Christ triumphant, and the presence of the Lord Jesus, that is our assurance that if we died today we will be with Jesus because the keys of death and what follows after death, Hades, Jesus has the key to take us into paradise.

Now my dear friend, if you're listening and you just may be joining with us today from afar and you do not know Jesus, you are not a Christian, and perhaps you have been convicted about your sin and your need and your guilt by the Holy Spirit through all kinds of circumstances, then my dear friend, here is your opportunity. Turn your eyes

upon Jesus. Call upon him. Ask him to save you, to rescue you from sin and the consequences of sin because the Bible says again and again and again that not everybody will be in heaven. There is an undercurrent of universalism abroad today, that everybody in the end, that hell even if it exists will be empty, even Judas will be saved. The Bible knows no such thing so make absolutely certain and make absolutely sure by falling before this magnificent Savior and asking him to be your Lord and your Savior, the one who has the keys of death and Hades.

Well, may God bless his word to us.

*Father, we thank you, thank you for this astonishing vision that John saw of the magnificence and glory of the God-man, our Savior Jesus Christ who is the same yesterday, today and forever. Help us now to experience something of what John experienced being in the Spirit on the Lord's day. For Jesus' sake, amen.*