

*One of my favorite TV programs is the Star Trek series, and if you didn't know, Star Trek Day, which celebrates 55 years of Star Trek, was last Wednesday.*

*In one of the Star Trek episodes of Deep Space Nine, Worf, who is an officer assigned to the space station, is captured by the evil Dominion and taken to their training camp. Now if you don't know, Worf is an alien who comes from a brutal warrior race called the "Klingons" and they have a well-known reputation for being very fierce fighters, and Worf's captors intend to use him as a practice dummy in their combat training.*

*They bring out soldier after soldier to fight Worf, but he is a master at hand-to-hand combat, and he beats them up, one by one, until they "tap out" and quit.*

*So, after Worf has been taking on all comers for most of the day, the Dominion finally bring out their biggest and baddest soldier – the one they know will be able to defeat Worf. They begin to fight, but Worf is just too weak from the day's struggles. He is little more than a punching bag for the Dominion soldier, but Worf will not give up. He keeps getting up, no matter how many times he is knocked down, no matter how badly he is injured – he simply will not quit.*

*As the fight continues, it is obvious that Worf has gained the respect and the admiration of all the Dominion soldiers because of his warrior spirit – including the one now beating him to a pulp. They all begin to beg Worf to tap out and to quit, but he will not.*

*Finally, out of sheer exasperation, the soldier who is beating Worf up quits and "taps out" himself. When asked by his enraged commander why he has stopped, the soldier answers, "I cannot defeat this man. I can only kill him."*

Think about those words for a moment. *"I cannot defeat this man. I can only kill him."* I would hope that those are the kind of words that could be said for each of us by our enemy – the devil. Instead of giving up, instead of taping out, we continue to endure and persevere no matter how difficult the circumstances.

When thinking about the Apostle John, who wrote the book of Revelation, those may have been the kind of words spoken by his enemies as they attempted to stop him from sharing the gospel.

Last week we began our study of the book of Revelation, starting with the greeting and the introduction, and as a reminder, the word "revelation" simply means to uncover, to unveil, to disclose. This book is the revelation of Jesus Christ, and in this book, we will discover things about Jesus that we have not seen before.

So, let's pick up where we left off. If you have your Bible, turn to **Revelation 1** and we will begin with **verse 9**. Continuing with the introduction, we read,

**<sup>9</sup> I, John, your brother and fellow partaker in the tribulation and kingdom and perseverance which are in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. <sup>10</sup> I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like the sound of a trumpet, <sup>11</sup>saying, "Write in a book what you see, 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."**

At the time of the writing of this letter, around 95–96 A.D., the known world was under the reign of Roman Emperor Domitian. Domitian saw himself as a deity, as a savior and lord – a god, and he demanded that those under his rule worship and serve him as such. Obviously, that was a huge problem for true followers of Christ who were convinced that Jesus was “The Way, the Truth, and the Life.” They knew that Jesus was the true Savior and Lord – the Lamb that God had sent to take away the sin of the world – not the emperor, and so they could not abide by the emperor's demand. As a result, for those who did not “tap out” and bend under the pressure to compromise, followers of Christ were severely persecuted by the Roman authorities, and the Apostle John was not immune to this persecution.

John acknowledged they were suffering together in the kingdom, he was their partner in affliction, he joined them in their distress, in fact, John was exiled to the small barren volcanic island of Patmos, which is located off the western coast of Asia Minor – modern day Turkey. Patmos was an island surrounded by shark infested waters thought to be used as a Roman penal colony like Alcatraz. It was the destination for criminals and political prisoners – an ideal place for punishment and forced labor in the marble mines, and many there died of exposure, many died from violent attacks by other prisoners, and many died from starvation.

John was exiled there because of his boldness in speaking of Jesus and sharing the gospel message. The Roman authorities could not defeat John – they could not shut him up, and to kill John would make a martyr of John and create a huge uproar, so it's off to this tiny rocky dot in the ocean for John. The Roman authorities assumed that there was nothing John could do on that island to promote the cause of Christ, but how wrong they were.

I am reminded of what the Apostle Paul tells us in **Romans 8:28**,

*And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.*

The Roman authorities exiled John to Patmos because of his faith in Jesus and preaching of the Word of God. They took matters into their own hands, thinking they had the upper hand, but as part of God's purpose and plan, God used this situation so that John could receive and record this divinely inspired revelation.

From a human point of view, what John experienced was certainly unwanted, maybe even unexpected. He's afflicted and suffering, and surely this isn't where he wanted to be. I mean John is the last Apostle – in the center of God's will. John's doing what God wanted him to do, and because he was doing what God wanted him to do – he now finds himself on a barren rock called "Patmos". John is on Patmos because of God, and from a human perspective, this may not seem right, but from God's perspective, this was an ideal situation for John to receive this revelation. What the Roman authorities did to shut John up, God used as a springboard to produce one of the most popular books in the entire Bible.

God causes all things to work together for good to those who love Him, to those who are called according to His purpose, and I repeat that because there are some here who may feel as if God has put you on Patmos, so to speak. You are not where you expected to be. You are not where you want to be, and as far as you know, you are walking with the Lord, but you find yourself in a difficult and barren place.

In the study of "Red Sea Rules" by Robert Morgan, the first rule is this: God means for you to be where you are. The trials that you and I face are not the result of some cosmic mistake. God is not caught off guard or surprised by our difficulties. Our hardships are not something that have occurred outside of God's control or apart from His love. As followers of Christ, we should not think that God has abandoned us, or forsaken us, or forgotten us on Patmos.

*A.W. Tozer said, "To the child of God, there is no such thing as an accident. He travels an appointed way... Accidents may indeed appear to befall him and misfortune stalk his way; but these evils will be so in appearance only and will seem evil only because we cannot read the secret script of God's hidden providence."*

God has a divine purpose and a plan for each of us; and we need to realize that God means for us to be where we are. There are some experiences, some hard Patmos experiences that are necessary for us to draw closer to God and for God to do something in our lives. God meant for John to be on Patmos.

John tells us in **verse 10** that he received this unique revelation on the **Lord's Day** – a Sunday, as he was worshipping God, yielding to the presence and the influence of the Holy Spirit, on the prison island of Patmos. **Did you get that?**

John is still worshipping God even though he is in exile on a rock because of God. He didn't blame God. He didn't shake his fist at God in anger screaming "*I did what You wanted and this is how You repay me!*" He didn't doubt God's love. "*I thought You loved me, but now it seems You don't.*" No, instead, John worshipped God and he had an experience with the Spirit of God. In spite of his suffering, John understood that God was doing something, something greater, something bigger than himself, and he was part of it.

Then John tells us that he heard a voice **like the sound of a trumpet** – it was crisp and clear and loud to John, and he is told to, "**Write in a book what you see, and send it to the seven churches.**" John hears, he sees, and then he writes it down. That's a regular pattern throughout this book. John gets the revelation and we get the book.

Now before we press on to the next section, I need to remind you of something I mentioned last week. Portions of this book, this next portion for example, are presented in an apocalyptic writing style – a style that uses signs, and numbers, colors, and vivid images to represent deeper truths and meanings, and as we navigate through this apocalyptic writing, it's important that we identify and appreciate what is to be taken literally and what is to be considered symbolic to help us understand what is being revealed. Let me give you a good example from a well-known TV commercial.

*If I ask you to picture a little green talking gecko, **what comes to mind?** A literal insurance company comes to mind. Geico has chosen an animated talking gecko for their commercials as a symbol for their company. When you see a talking gecko, you think of Geico, and in that context, if you don't accept the gecko as merely being symbolic, but instead take it literally, then you've got a bigger problem – that being to explain how a gecko can actually speak English. The insurance company is a real literal company, but they are represented by a symbolic image and it's important that we understand which is which.*

So, without getting too deep into the symbolic weeds, let's look at this next section in Chapter 1. We are told beginning in **verse 12**,

**<sup>12</sup> Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking with me. And having turned I saw seven golden lampstands; <sup>13</sup> and in the middle of the lampstands**

**I saw one like a son of man, clothed in a robe reaching to the feet, and girded across His chest with a golden sash.**

Let's stop there. In this passage, John sees Jesus moving amongst **seven golden lampstands**, and if you drop down to the last portion of **verse 20**, we are told the seven lampstands are symbolic of the seven real churches. Sometimes the symbols are explained to us, and sometimes they are not, but this time we are fortunate.

So, we are told that Jesus is in the midst of these churches. He is moving among the churches and ministering to the churches as the high priest, given the description of the clothing that Jesus is seen wearing in this scene. Jesus is in the midst of His people as the high priest and this was important to hear as they faced persecution and suffering. The church, God's people, needed to understand that He cares about what is going on in their lives. Jesus knows the struggles of each church and He knows the personal struggles of each person within each church, for He is in the midst of the church for it is His church.

Each lampstand represents a church, and it's helpful to point out that a lampstand is not a lamp. Jesus is the lamp. He is the light in a dark and dying world, and the purpose of the church is to glorify Him, to point Him out, and lift Him up for He is the only One who can save. The church is the lampstand and Jesus is the lamp.

John continues with his description of Jesus and he says beginning with **verse 14**,

**<sup>14</sup> His head and His hair were white like white wool, like snow; and His eyes were like a flame of fire. <sup>15</sup> His feet were like burnished bronze, when it has been made to glow in a furnace, and His voice was like the sound of many waters. <sup>16</sup> In His right hand He held seven stars, and out of His mouth came a sharp two-edged sword; and His face was like the sun shining in its strength.**

Okay, these are the kind of passages that I tend to struggle with. I know they are symbolic in nature, and I know this because to take this passage literally would suggest that the eyes of Jesus are on fire and a sword literally comes out of His mouth – and that's kind of scary to think about. This is a symbolic description of Jesus – this is what Jesus is revealing about Himself to John. This is what Jesus wants John to see and to write down for the church.

I want to tell you there are several ideas for interpreting the meaning of this passage. There is a lot of speculation about what represents what – and I don't want to create any confusion and lose sight of Jesus in the process, so I am going to offer some suggestions for you to consider. Again, they are just suggestions.

When describing Jesus in this revelation, we are told that His head and His hair are **white** like **wool** and **snow**, which even today, appears to be symbolic of wisdom. The Lord is omniscient, meaning He knows everything. **His eyes were like a flame of fire** – suggesting that He sees all, nothing is hidden from Him, and therefore, He can judge righteously. **His feet were like burnished bronze** – He is a powerful king and His enemies will become nothing but footstools under His feet. He is omnipotent, He has unlimited power. His voice is **like the sound of many waters** for He cannot be ignored.

We are also told that in His right hand, Jesus held **seven stars**. That's an easier one to figure out because in **verse 20**, it is explained to us. The seven stars are **the angels of the seven churches**. Now, the Greek word for **angel** means a *messenger of God*, and that is open to some interpretation. Some suggest that each church has a guardian angel of sort, and I guess that would be the simplest interpretation – it says **angel** so **angel** it is, but to go out on a limb, I think these messengers here are actually the pastors of these churches, and I think this way because of the flow I mentioned last week. Look back at **verse 1**.

*The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show to His bond-servants, the things which must soon take place; and He sent and communicated it by His angel to His bond-servant John.*

It starts with God the Father, it's given to Him – the Son, then it is communicated by an angel to John. That's the flow we see, and it would make sense that it would then flow from John down to the pastors, not flow back up to angels. **Does that make sense?** I will admit that this is somewhat foreign to me, for no one has ever called me an angel. My own mother didn't even call me an angel, but be that may, I think these messengers are the pastors of these churches.

Okay, back to our passage. In **verse 16**, we are told **out of His mouth came a sharp two-edged sword; and His face was like the sun shining in its strength.**

Elsewhere in the Bible, the Word of God is described as a **sharp two-edged sword**, telling us that Jesus speaks with authority using God's Word, and lastly, the face of Jesus was like **the sun shining in its strength**. This seems to refer to the Lord's glory, and if you recall the Transfiguration of Jesus on the mountain, it was there that John first saw the face of Jesus shining in glory like the sun.

So, this is all revealed to John. This is how Jesus reveals Himself to John. John sees all of this, **and how does he react?** Let's continue with **verse 17**.

**17 When I saw Him, I fell at His feet like a dead man. And He placed His right hand on me, saying, “Do not be afraid; I am the first and the last, <sup>18</sup> and the living One; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of death and of Hades.**

When John saw Jesus, he fell at His feet like a dead man. Worship follows revelation. This is the only right response, but Jesus touches John and tells him **“Do not be afraid.”** How many times did Jesus tell His disciples that – *“Do not be afraid, do not fear”*?

Jesus can tell John not to fear this because He is the **first and the last**. Jesus is the Lord from before the beginning of time until the end of time, and the time between time. Jesus can tell John not to be afraid because He is **the living One**. There is no need to fear death, because Jesus died and is alive, having conquered sin and death. Jesus can tell John there is no need to fear eternity because Jesus has the **keys of death and Hades**. “Do not be afraid.”

Now, we come to the last two verses in the chapter, and we have already covered **verse 20**, so let’s see what **verse 19** has to tell us.

**19 Therefore write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after these things. <sup>20</sup> As for the mystery of the seven stars which 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.**

So, John just gave us an outline for the book of Revelation. The **things which you have seen** would apply to Chapter 1. These are the things John just saw. The **things which are** would apply to the churches in John’s present day. This will include special messages to the seven churches which we will see in Chapters 2 and 3. Then there are **the things that will take place after these things**, and those are the things that shall be hereafter – referring to the end times outlined in Chapters 4 through 22. Does the outline seem unbalanced?

Sure, it does, but it’s intentional because it is about the future. God’s people needed to know that in spite of their present reality – they have a future. Jesus will return just as He promised, He will be victorious, good will triumph over evil, and in the end, it will all be worth it for those who overcome – who don’t “tap out” – who don’t quit.

*Ignace Jan Paderewski, the famous Polish pianist, was scheduled to perform at a great concert hall in America. It was a high-society extravaganza. Present in the audience that evening was a mother and her fidgety nine-year old. She had brought him in the hopes that when he heard the great composer play, he would be encouraged to practice.*

*As the mother turned to talk with some friends, he slipped away and was strangely drawn to the grand Steinway piano on the stage. Staring wide-eyed at the keys the boy sat on the stool; placed his small fingers on the keys and began to play “Chopsticks.” Now, I’m not musical in any shape, form or fashion, but apparently “Chopsticks” is the easiest song for a beginner to play. Anyway, this nine-year old boy is up on the stage playing this song and the roar of the audience came to a hush as frowning faces now focused on him. Someone began to shout, “Get that boy away from there!” “Where is his mother?” Somebody get that kid.”*

*Backstage the master composer overheard the sounds out front. He quickly realized what was happening and hurried toward the stage. Without one word of announcement, he stooped over behind the boy, reached around on both sides, and began to improvise a countermelody to harmonize with and enhance the song. As they played “Chopsticks” together, the composer kept whispering in the boy’s ear, “Keep going; don’t quit. Keep playing; don’t stop. Don’t quit....”*

**Isn’t it the same for us as we walk with the Lord?** Our playing of “Chopsticks” may not be impressing anyone, but about the time we’re ready to give up, we hear the Master say, “Keep going; don’t stop; don’t give up.”

Source Material:

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