

Revelation

Part Seven

I Am With You Always

(Revelation 1:9-13a)

With Study Questions

*Pastor Paul Viggiano
Branch of Hope Church
2370 W. Carson Street, #100
Torrance, CA 90501
212-6999
pastorpaul@branchofhope.org
www.branchofhope.org
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I, John, both your brother and companion in the tribulation and kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was on the island that is called Patmos for the word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ. ¹⁰ I was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day, and I heard behind me a loud voice, as of a trumpet, ¹¹ saying, "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last," and, "What you see, write in a book and send *it* to the seven churches which are in Asia: to Ephesus, to Smyrna, to Pergamos, to Thyatira, to Sardis, to Philadelphia, and to Laodicea." ¹² Then I turned to see the voice that spoke with me. And having turned I saw seven golden lampstands, ¹³ and in the midst of the seven lampstands *One* like the Son of Man (Revelation 1:9-13a).

Introduction

With the intensity of the subject matter, Revelation can be a difficult book to preach through in a culture that has always been relatively friendly to the Christian faith. The comforts, encouragements and applications of Revelation are more suited to those under the thumb of Nero, Caiaphas or later, perhaps Torquemada.

To be sure, our current political and religious climate has been moving in a hostile direction for a number of generations. Heretics and defectors are on the rise. Never in my life have I seen, what appears to be the primary call in Revelation (which is to persevere in the faith), more suited to an audience. Nonetheless, we are certainly not experiencing what the seven churches initially receiving this letter had to endure.

When a pastor reads a portion of Scripture with the intention of preaching, he will inevitably highlight the portions of the passage he believes his congregation, or culture, needs the most. One thing that jumped out at me as I examined this morning's passage was how, early in my Christian life, the true impact of this passage would have escaped me.

I had, by many definitions, what many would have considered to be a vibrant faith. Yet it was never a matter of emphasis that I should be baptized or join a church. It will be difficult to enjoy the power of this portion of Revelation when we function in a Christian culture that has downplayed the value of what it means to be part of the church.

Brother and Companion

John begins this section by identifying himself as their “**brother and companion.**” Herein lies the very unique role of those who desire to minister (not speaking here only of those ordained). In many professions, once the hour is up, the professional moves onto the next patient. Counselors, doctors, lawyers, educators, etc., don’t commonly socialize with their patients, students or clients. But if you desire to minister, you must be willing to sit in the ashes, followed by having dinner. You do not have the luxury of remaining distance.

Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep (Romans 12:15).

We begin to see a defined relationship between John and his readers. And what is the nature of this bond, of this brotherhood/companionship? It is “**the tribulation and kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ.**” Numerous times I’ve written sermons in the second person plural (you) and had to go back and change all the pronouns to first person plural (we/our). John was no stranger to what his readers were being challenged with. We all need the message found in Scripture. If we think we need it less than others, in all likelihood, we need it more.

John is a companion in “**the tribulation.**” In the modern, and more sensational, forms of eschatology, you will read of *the tribulation* as if it is a cataclysmic future event. There is a great amount of debate as to whether or not the church will be raptured before the tribulation (pre-trib) or after the tribulation (post-trib). Respectfully, I think both of these positions are wrong.

To be sure, Christians must be willing to endure tribulations of many kinds throughout the course of history.

I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world (John 16:33).

But you will hear people make a distinction between tribulation and *the* tribulation. The definite¹ article (*te*) seems to point to a specific tribulation. To whatever extent that is true (the seven churches were most certainly undergoing a uniquely difficult time), John is including himself in **“the tribulation.”** This is yet another example of how the Revelation is addressing the difficulties and deliverance of the first century church rather than some event thousands of years in the future.

But, as we have said many times, this does not mean there is no encouragement or application for all Christians throughout history who find themselves in similar situations. Let us ever notice and appreciate the remarkable contrast in John’s words.

John had pronounced a blessing to the recipients of this letter (Revelation 1:3). Grace and peace from the living God is extended (Revelation 1:4, 5). The cleansing through the blood of Christ and the commissioning of those cleansed to the office of a kingdom of priests is laid out (Revelation 1:6). Jesus is heralded as the **“ruler over the kings of the earth”** (Revelation 1:5). Yet in apparent contrast to all of this good news, that which bonds John with his readers is his inclusion with them in the tribulation!

Tribulation for Christians, though difficult and often sorrowful, is not an occasion for despair. As we read earlier, we are to **“take heart.”** After being beaten for their faith, the apostles...

...departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name.

⁴² And daily in the temple, and in every house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus *as* the Christ (Acts 5:41, 42).

John is also a companion in the **“kingdom.”** If ever a word in Christian circles has become ambiguous to the point of meaninglessness it

¹ Attributive article in the Greek.

is this word. I recall being shocked when I read in the Westminster Confession of Faith that...

...The visible church...is the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ, the house and family of God, out of which there is no ordinary possibility of salvation (WCF 25, 2).

The confession does also speak of the “invisible church” (WCF 25, 1), which one can easily argue is more critical, for these are truly the elect of God. But I fear we almost take an unhealthy comfort in that which is invisible at the expense of that which is visible. How often, in our negligence, do we say, “God knows my heart?” As one theologian quipped, “yeah, that’s the bad news.”

R. C. Sproul, in writing of our witness for Christ conveyed,

To bear witness is to give testimony, evidence, or manifestation of something that is not seen.²

He then quotes Calvin, who wrote,

The primary task of the invisible church is to make the invisible kingdom visible.

At the risk of getting too deep, it would be irresponsible for me to neglect pointing out that the currently more popular (Dispensational) view of the kingdom (which is that it is concurrent, and synonymous with their view of the millennium) is that it has not yet begun, and will not begin until the Second Coming.

I recall listening to one popular Dispensational pastor vehemently addressing his congregation, as they met together for worship, with the words, “This is not the kingdom of God!” Yet that which bonds John with his readers is that they are together in the kingdom, enduring or suffering for the cause of Christ.

² Truths We Confess, Sproul, p 47.

A Letter to Churches

John is writing from Patmos, a small, rocky island in the Aegean Sea off the coast of Asia Minor (present day Turkey). It was for political prisoners, especially those who would not yield to Caesar. Keep in mind, religious persecution and the offense of the Gospel from those who reject Christ often amounts to some form of being socially ostracized. But when your **“testimony of Jesus Christ”** proclaim Him to be a King above the kings of the earth, it is then that you will feel the weight of those with a standing army.

When the religious persecutors of Jesus were seeking to get Pilate, a Roman governor, to crucify Jesus, the accusation that got Pilate’s attention was that He was claiming to be a King (Luke 23:2). And when Pilate asked them if he should crucify their King, they gave us one of the earliest examples of taking the mark of the beast with the words, **“We have no king but Caesar” (John 19:15).**

John was **“in the Spirit”** when we take to mean to mean that he was moved in a uniquely prophetic/apostolic way to proclaim the infallible and inerrant word of God.

...for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1:21).

It was **“the Lord’s Day”** which provides a convincing argument that the Sabbath was not abrogated in the New Covenant (see also Acts 20:7 and 1 Corinthians 16:2). John hears **“a loud voice, as of a trumpet.”** A trumpet is a beckoning and a call to action. Let us notice here a verbal and literary pattern to help us better understand this book. John **“heard”** then in verse 12 John will turn and **“see.”** And what he sees will help us more fully understand what he saw. For example, John will be told of the **“Lion of the tribe of Judah” (Revelation 5:5).** But when he looks, he will see a **“Lamb” (Revelation 5:6).**

John is then commissioned by God, **“the Alpha and the Omega,”** to write what he sees **“in a book.”** Word of mouth (oral tradition), dramas, drawings, etc. all have their place. But there is something solid about the written word. The Westminster Confession of Faith, chapter one, paragraph says it nicely. When it comes to the will and word of God...

...for the better preserving and propagating of the truth, and for the more sure establishment and comfort of the church against the corruption of the flesh, and the malice of Satan and of the world...[committed his word]...unto writing.

One need merely look at the number of times Jesus asked, **“Have you not read”** (Matthew 12:3; 19:4; 21:42; 22:31; Mark 2:25; 12:10, 26; Luke 6:3; 10:26, etc.)?

He is then told to send what he writes to seven churches, which were on a Roman postal route in Asia Minor. When we get to those seven churches, we will address the unique issues within those churches. But like any letter to any church in Scripture, there are lessons for all churches throughout all time.

Now John moves from hearing to seeing. We are given his first vision. He turns and sees **“seven gold lampstands.”** So much can be said about these lampstands and Christ as the **“light of the world”** (John 8:12). For now, let us recognize that in The Holy Place of the tabernacle there was a single candelabra with seven lamps (Exodus 35:36-40; Zechariah 4:2). But here we read of seven candlestands, which verse 20 indicates to be **“the seven churches.”**³

The churches are not the lamps, the light or the candles. The churches are the stands on which the Light is held. And if the church is not faithful in her commission to herald the true Light and persevere in her love, the lampstand will be removed (Revelation 2:5).

I Am With You Always

Back now to what I opened with. The Revelation is written to the churches. That most certainly includes the individuals within those churches, for any collective of people is formed by individuals. But we are addressed corporately. We are addressed as the church. And it is in this context that we see something remarkable! John turns and sees something, really someone, in the midst of the seven lampstands (which are the churches). He sees **“One like the Son of Man.”**

³ Some will convincingly argue that this speaks to the decentralization of the people of God from one nation, Israel, to all nations. The universal nature of the New Covenant church.

We are all familiar with that great promise which accompanies the Great Commission, “**and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age**” (Matthew 28:20). We must understand that this is not restricted to an expression of Christ’s (as truly God) omnipresence (all of God being all places at all times). It is the presence of Christ in a very sanctified and unique sense. Next time we will discuss the only description of Christ we find in the New Testament. It is how we are to think of Him in the midst of our functioning as His body.

But for now, we will stop and meditate upon the fact that He is here, in the church, in a very consecrated way. As Beale observes,

Jesus’ constant presence with the churches means that he always knows their spiritual condition, which results either in blessing or judgment. ⁴

I am tempted here to say we have a special guest in the room, who we need to consider. But such a statement would be backward. It is His house and we are the guests. He has called us to Himself, and we are to ever respond faithfully.

⁴ Beale, G. K. (1999). [*The book of Revelation: a commentary on the Greek text*](#) (p. 209). Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, Cumbria: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press.

Questions for Study

1. Do you find Revelation a difficult book in terms of application? Explain (pages 2, 3)?
2. How are ministerial relationships different than other types of relationships (page 3)?
3. All Christians must be ready to embrace tribulation. Is this different than “the tribulation?” How (pages, 3, 4)?
4. Is the kingdom of God past, present or future? Explain that term as it relates to the church (pages 4, 5).
5. Why was John writing from Patmos (page 6)?
6. Discuss the ‘turn and look’ literary pattern (page 6).
7. God committed His word to writing. Can you explain why (pages 6, 7)?
8. What are the golden lampstands and how is Jesus with them in a unique way (pages 7, 8)?