

SLIDE ONE

Revelation Part III

This week we return to Revelation for our third study in the series. We have noted that there was a blessing promised to those who read aloud the messages and so we will continue to read aloud, picking up from where we left off last Sunday at Chapter one verse nine:

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.

At the time of writing John finds himself on a small Island called Patmos in the Aegean Sea. Apparently, it was frequently used for exiling those with who had fallen out of favour with the government.

There is a small cave there where it is believed that John received the vision and wrote the letter to the churches.

It is not known why John was detained on the island while the other church members at this point remained free. He does confirm however that the reason for his detention is because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.

Perhaps he had been seen as a leader in preaching and teaching the way of Jesus and thus the authorities might have thought that making him an example might discourage others from not following the party line and worshipping Caesar.

Note how John defined his relationship with his fellow believers. The NLT uses the word ‘partner’. The Greek word is often translated as ‘partnering with’ as in two or more people joining together in some sort to undertaking.

And then he defines three issues that comprise the common partnership. Three things that he and the church members share in common.

First, they are partners in the ‘tribulation’. The Greek word *thlipsis* is another Greek word with several shades of meaning. It can also be translated as persecution, suffering or pressure.

There is much discussion in Christian circles about a future ‘tribulation’ but in this case, the context would indicate that John is referring to the current tribulation, current persecution, or the current pressure to conform to Caesar worship that the Asian churches were experiencing.

Secondly, they are partners in the kingdom.

The exact meaning of kingdom here is not known.

John could have been referring to the Roman kingdom.

That is where he and his partners in the Christian community found themselves. They were living in a Roman controlled province with all its laws and regulations was their reality.

Or the word ‘kingdom’ might well have referred to the Lord’s Kingdom which he and his partners in the Asian churches were part of.

But in any case, they found themselves in a tension between the kingdom of the world, in their case the Roman kingdom which was beginning to demand their worship of the Roman king, and the Kingdom of God which demanded their loyalty and their worship of God alone.

True Christians have always experienced a similar tension, we live in a government controlled environment. For the most part we benefit from laws and regulations that keep us safe.

But there are laws and values which we find in violation of the laws and values of our Heavenly King.

And we like those believers are called to keep our eyes on our heavenly King. We are called to adopt and live out his values. Our worship and loyalty must be to our God.

And progressively the pressure mounts in our world to conform to the values of our earthly king.

A couple of years ago our Government placed new requirements on organizations seeking to make use the summer jobs program.

Christian organizations were disqualified because of our positions on the sanctity of life and homosexuality.

Eventually after much counterpressure from church groups the policy was reversed, but it remains as an omen of things to come.

Recently a potential student was refused university studies because of his pro-life views.

Doctors now are pressured to make referrals to people seeking an early end to life.

And so hopefully we can see the emerging trend, growing tension between the kingdom of our world and the Kingdom of our God.

And we must not forget the multitude of Christians living in other parts of the world who are experiencing severe persecution including death.

Churches are being burned, leaders are being imprisoned, and members are being kidnapped.

Studies would suggest that there is more persecution of Christians in our time than at any other point in history.

So, these Asian Christians, and we as Christians today, are always in a tension between the kingdoms of the world and the Kingdom of our Lord. The Kingdom of light vs the Kingdom of darkness.

Thirdly John characterized himself as a partner with the churches in ‘patient endurance’.

Patient endurance. Once again, endurance is a central theme of the book of revelation.

It is worth noting here that John makes no mention of a prayer for deliverance. No mention of a prayer for deliverance for either himself or the persecuted churches.

One would think that fervent prayers for deliverance would be a natural result of that persecution. We can only speculate why these prayers were not prevalent.

One thing that we do know is that their focus was purely on remaining true and steadfast, patiently enduring regardless of what their fate might be.

We now return to our reading at Chapter one verse ten:

I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet 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."

As John is writing his letter to the churches, he recalls the events of that special day.

Note that he makes the point that this happened on the Lord's day. This and other references suggest that the early church was observing a 'Sunday Sabbath'. A practice which became ours. The practice prevalent throughout Christianity of recognizing the first day of the week as the Lord's day.

Jesus rose from the dead on the first day of the week and thus it became known as the Lord's day.

In Acts 20 verse seven, we see that the disciples were making a practice of coming together on the Lord's day to break bread.

When Paul talks about receiving an offering in I Corinthians 16:2 it is to be collected on the first day of the week, IE the Lord's day.

So, the Lord's day was recognized as a special day and this special event, this amazing vision received by John would seem to affirm the first day of the week, the Lord's day, as a very special day.

Some other notable items here:

First, he was 'in the Spirit'. Secondly, he was given a vision and told to write what he was seeing.

When people talk about being in the spirit or having visions and dreams, we might become a bit nervous or challenge the legitimacy of such claims.

But God's practice of using visions and dreams and people being led by the Spirit are referenced many times in scriptures.

For example, in Ezekiel chapter thirty-seven beginning at verse one, we find the account of God giving Ezekiel the 'dry bones vision'.

The hand of the LORD was upon me, and carried me out in the spirit of the LORD, and set me down in the midst of the valley which was full of bones, And caused me to pass by them round about: and, behold, there were very many in the open valley; and, lo, they were very dry. And he said unto me, Son of man, can these bones live?

Returning now to our text from Revelation, note John's words 'like a trumpet'. The Greek word translated as 'like' appears fifty-six times in the book of Revelation.

This is an important point to remember. The things which John is allowed to see in the vision are well beyond

the capability of John's vocabulary. He has no words that can accurately describe what he is seeing.

And so, John repeatedly uses similes such as "a loud voice like a trumpet".

And the voice clearly defines the seven church congregations who will be first to receive that message of Revelation.

Returning now to our reading and picking up at Chapter one verse 12 (NLT). Listen for the repeated use of similes that is the use of the word 'like'

*When I turned to see who was speaking to me, I saw seven gold lampstands. And standing in the middle of the lampstands was someone **like** the Son of Man. He was wearing a long robe with a gold sash across his chest. His head and his hair were white **like** wool, as white as snow. And his eyes were **like** flames of fire. His feet were **like** polished bronze refined in a furnace, and his voice thundered **like** mighty ocean waves.*

*He held seven stars in his right hand, and a sharp two-edged sword came from his mouth. And his face was **like** the sun in all its brilliance.*

It is important to note here that the first part of the vision presents a picture of the resurrected Jesus. A little later on, John confirms that the seven lampstands represent the seven churches.

Once again seven describes completeness so it is likely that the seven lampstands represent not only the churches of Asia but the complete church, genuine followers of Jesus everywhere.

The lampstands were not candlesticks as we might picture them, but earthen bowls filled with lamp oil that was lighted. John is given a vision of seven churches being seven sources of light.

We need to remember that every church is called to be a light. It is a principle repeated throughout scripture.

God's intent was that Israel would be light to the Old Testament nations.

In Isaiah 60 verse one we read:

*Arise, Jerusalem! Let your light shine for all to see.
For the glory of the LORD rises to shine on you.*

And then in Matthew 5 verses fourteen to sixteen Jesus says:

You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

We as believers, and collectively as churches are to be a light for all to see.

But there is another important message in this picture intended for the Asian churches and for us as well.

Jesus is standing in the centre of the churches. They find themselves in the middle of persecution, but the message to them and us is that Jesus is right there with them.

And just as he was with them in their struggles, he is forever with us in ours.

In Deuteronomy 31:8 (NIV) we read:

“The LORD himself goes before you and will be with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged.”

And in Hebrews 13: 5&6 (ESV)

We read:

...for he has said, “I will never leave you nor forsake you.” So, we can confidently say, “The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me.”

Now in these next few verses we have six similes, that word ‘like’ used to describe the way Jesus appeared in the vision.

First, the person was described to be like the son of man.

John the author probably had seen Jesus during his time in earth. Indeed, if he was the disciple John, then he would have seen him many times.

So, John immediately sees a resemblance to the Jesus he knew.

Jesus had frequently used this phrase ‘son of man’ to describe himself.

And there is a striking similarity to Daniels vision that occurred hundreds of years before.

In Daniel 7:13 (NLT) we read:

As my vision continued that night, I saw someone like a son of man coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient One and was led into his presence. He was given authority, honor, and sovereignty over all the nations of the world, so that people of every race and nation and language would obey him. His rule is eternal—it will never end. His kingdom will never be destroyed.

Next, John sees the attire of Jesus. Note these words in John's description: . *He was wearing a long robe with a gold sash across his chest.*

The robe was the garb of the priests. But John makes the point that it was a long robe. The long robe was the garb of the high priest.

John's vision confirms to his readers that we have a high priest. We have a high priest in heaven, he makes intercession for us, not with the blood of bulls which could only temporarily cover sin but with his own blood paying our penalty completely and expunging all our guilt.

The long robe was also worn by kings and the golden sash probably alludes to the golden sash worn by ancient royalty.

Once again, the vision portrays Jesus as our royalty. Later on in Chapter nineteen verse sixteen, he is pronounced our King of Kings. He is the ruler of the universe and soon coming king to planet earth.

Next we note:

His head and his hair were white like wool, as white as snow. And his eyes were like flames of fire. His feet were like polished bronze refined in a furnace, and his voice thundered like mighty ocean waves.

There is a striking similarity with the description of the ancient of days found in Daniel 7:9:

As I looked, thrones were placed, and the Ancient of Days took his seat; his clothing was white as snow, and the hair of his head like pure wool;

White, biblically alluding to purity and white hair associated with wisdom.

The last notation for this morning is to consider the phrase:

and a sharp two-edged sword came from his mouth. And his face was like the sun in all its brilliance.

John's picture of Jesus with a sharp sword in his mouth would seem to be at odds with our Lord's conversation with Peter in the garden when he told him to put away his sword.

Remember this letter is written in symbolic language. The sword picture here is not the traditional ancient military weapon. Even it were it would make no sense to handle a sword with one's mouth.

Remember John the Apostle's explanation of who Jesus was? "The word became flesh and dwelt among us".

Note also that the word of God is pictured elsewhere as a sword. In Hebrews 4:12 (NLT) we read:

For the word of God is alive and powerful. It is sharper than the sharpest two-edged sword, cutting between soul and spirit, between joint and marrow. It exposes our innermost thoughts and desires.

Later on in Revelation we are given another picture of Jesus. In chapter nineteen beginning at verse sixteen we read:

Then I saw heaven opened, and a white horse was standing there. Its rider was named Faithful and True, for he judges fairly and wages a righteous war. His eyes were like flames of fire, and on his head were many crowns. A name was written on him that no one understood except himself. He wore a robe dipped in blood, and his title was the Word of God. The armies of heaven, dressed in the finest of pure white linen, followed him on white horses. From his mouth came a sharp sword to strike down the nations. He will rule them with an iron rod.

So we see here that ultimately Jesus the word of God, the living word, the all powerful word will rule and reign simply through the power of his word.

Perhaps we like those Peter spoke in II Peter 3:5 (NLT) about in forget the power of the word:

They deliberately forget that God made the heavens long ago by the word of his command, and he brought the earth out from the water and surrounded it with water.

And in Hebrews 11:3 (KJV) we read:

Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear.

So John is giving us a picture of Jesus, a picture of the one who is still alive, will always be alive, a picture of the living word of God, a picture of the one who will rule here on earth simply by the power of his word.

We close today by reading aloud the last few verses of chapter one:

17 When I saw him, I fell at his feet as if I were dead. But he laid his right hand on me and said, "Don't be afraid! I am the First and the Last. 18 I am the living one. I died, but look—I am alive forever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and the grave.

19 "Write down what you have seen—both the things that are now happening and the things that will happen. This is the meaning of the mystery of the seven stars you saw in my right hand and the seven gold lampstands: The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches.

Next week Lord willing we will look closely at the message for Ephesus.