

The Grace of Wrath

Studies in the Revelation of Jesus Christ

Text

Chapter 1:9-20

Topic

While suffering his own persecution on the penal island of Patmos, John writes to encourage the churches to patiently endure the pressures that they were experiencing

Title

"Patmospheric Pressure"

Introduction

There is a great line of dialog in the film, *The Ghost and the Darkness*. John Patterson has just miserably failed, having taken an untested rifle into battle, and Charles Remington says to him, "We have an expression in prize fighting: *Everyone has a plan until they've been hit*. Well my friend, you've just been hit."

Late in the first century, the apostle John had taken several hits from the Roman Empire ruled by Domitian. His latest was banishment to the Island of Patmos.

On the mainland, the churches were suffering pressures and persecutions that were only going to get worse. The hits would just keep on coming.

You and I have taken some hits; and the hits may keep on coming. Is there something we can learn from this passage of God's Word to help us?

There is. I'll organize my thoughts around two points: #1 Jesus Is Unveiled As He Lights You Up In Your Tribulation, and #2 Jesus Is Unveiled As He Lights Us Up As His Temple.

#1 Jesus Is Unveiled
As He Lights You Up In Your Tribulation
(v9)

No one's spiritual plan includes getting hit. We think God would not ever allow certain things to occur in our lives.

Then they occur; sometimes in isolation, but other times as a flurry of punches.

To continue with the boxing metaphor, if a fighter gets hit and can't recover, we say it was lights out.

For some people, it can be lights-out when they get hit with troubles. They may not blame God, or fall away; but their walk certainly suffers as they wonder "Why me?"

John will show us that taking a hit can be lights-**on**.

We're catching-up with the apostle John on the Island of Patmos. He was an old man, in his 90's, banished and subjected to forced labor. He'd be on Patmos for about eighteen months.

There's something you need to know about the events preceding his banishment.

In what he called *The Second Persecution Under Domitian*, John Foxe (author of *Foxe's Book of Martyrs*) wrote,

Among the numerous martyrs that suffered during this persecution was... John, who was boiled in oil, and **afterward** banished to Patmos.

Afterward? Wow! Boiling is a very slow, incredibly painful form of execution by torture. The condemned is stripped naked and either plunged into already boiling liquid, or tied up and placed in a giant cauldron of cold liquid, under which the executioner then lights a fire, which heats the liquid until it boils. The liquid used may be oil, water, acid, tar, or even molten lead.

Domitian commanded that the apostle John be boiled to death in oil but John only continued to preach from within the cauldron.

Tertullian, an early church figure, in his *The Prescription Against Heretics*, wrote this:

How happy is its church, on which apostles poured forth all their doctrine along with their blood... where the Apostle John was first plunged, unhurt, into boiling oil, and thence remitted to his island-exile.

Tertullian saw in John's severe tribulations something precious, something to encourage all the churches as they were going through, or would go through, tribulations. He could see the light of Jesus' presence, and of His love.

This may be a little extreme, but John, in the midst of a pot of boiling liquid, looks a little like a candle wick. Like a candle, he shone brightly for Jesus. When John took a hit, it was lights-on.

Rev 1:9 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.

Patmos is some fifty miles off the coast of Ephesus in the Aegean Sea. It is roughly 10 miles long by 6 miles wide.

It was an Alcatraz from which there was no escape. I've heard it said that John was forced to work either mining salt or quarrying marble. Did I mention he was 90-something?

John's crime, the nefarious activity he was incarcerated for, was "the word of God and... the testimony of Jesus Christ."

John was *boiled* and *banished* for being a Christian. He was sharing as the "Word of God" the "testimony" Jesus gave about Himself - that He was God come in human flesh to die on the Cross; and that He rose from the dead; and that there was salvation only in Him.

He calls himself their "brother and companion." John was one of the originals. More than that, he had been invited into the inner circle along with Peter and James. He had laid his head on Jesus' shoulder. He was an apostle. But he was content to identify with every other Christian as a "brother." No more; no less.

Only among Christians is there a true equality. We might even say, in Christ, "all men are recreated equal" in the new birth.

I might have a different office, or function, or talent, or gifting. But we are on absolutely equal ground when it comes to the love of God that is ours through Jesus Christ.

In context, John was pointing out that it could just as easily be one of his brothers or sisters suffering on Patmos. He was identifying with them in their own troubles - as if his tribulation was no worse than theirs.

That is the thought behind him calling them "companions." They were accompanying one another on the road to Heaven, sharing each other's experiences in a way that encouraged all of them.

John described our time on earth journeying heavenward as "the tribulation and kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ." Here is what I think that trio of phrases might mean:

1. We are promised "tribulation" on our journey heavenward. Jesus said in the world you will have tribulation (John 16:33). This isn't referring to the Great Tribulation. I know it isn't referring to that for many reasons, but especially because, a little later in this book, Jesus promises to keep the church from going through it. We won't be in the world for that period of time. This tribulation refers to the trials and troubles that we can count on just for being believers.
2. At the same time we are promised tribulation, we are assured of "the kingdom." Nothing is more certain than Jesus will return *for* us to then return *with* us to establish the literal kingdom of God on the earth.
3. The time of waiting for the kingdom is to be characterized by "the patience of Jesus Christ." This isn't a big dose of patience we get by merely asking. In the Bible, we are told that "tribulation produces patience" (Romans 5:3).

"The patience of Jesus Christ" means you shine as a light in the darkness of your troubles in such a way that it can only be understood as being supernatural. It can only be grace from Jesus.

Jesus can light you up in your tribulations, in the sense that others see Him in you, and through you.

When you take a hit, it can be lights-out, or lights-on. As brothers and companions, let's encourage one another to be lights that are on for all to see.

#2 Jesus Is Unveiled As He Lights Us Up As His Temple

(v10-20)

Let me shed a little light on the Jewish Temple and its furnishings.

After washing their hands and feet at a laver, the priests could enter the Holy Place, which was the first room in the Temple. There were three pieces of furniture in the Holy Place: the menorah, the table of showbread and the golden altar of incense. The menorah, also called the "candlestick" or "golden lampstand," stood at the left side of the Holy Place. It was hammered out of one piece of pure gold.

The lampstand had a central branch from which three branches extended from each side, forming a total of seven branches. Seven lamps holding olive oil and wicks stood on top of the branches. Each branch looked like that of an almond tree, containing buds, blossoms and flowers.

The priests were instructed to keep the lamps burning continuously:

“The Lord said to Moses, ‘Command the Israelites to bring you clear oil of pressed olives for the light so that the lamps may be kept burning continually. Outside the curtain of the Testimony in the Tent of Meeting, Aaron is to tend the lamps before the Lord from evening till morning, continually’” (Leviticus 24:1-3).

I'm giving you this background because in just a moment we are going to see Jesus presented as if He were a priest tending the lampstand, only there are seven lampstands, and they represent the seven churches John is told to write to.

Rev 1:10 I was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day, and I heard behind me a loud voice, as of a trumpet,

Is "the Lord's Day" a reference to Sunday? Or is it signifying the Day of the Lord, the day of God's judgment upon the earth that is prophesied in the Old Testament?

Either John was having an exceptional Sunday "in the Spirit..." Or he was transported forward in time by the Holy Spirit to see the events of the Day of the Lord.

It's hard to see why John would make such a big deal out of the fact it was Sunday. Besides, Sunday was never referred to as the Lord's Day in the Bible, and not in church history until much later.

Considering that this book records the events of the Day of the Lord in minute detail, and that John probably received these visions over a longer period of time than just one day, I say he was transported by the Spirit to witness the events he described.

He "heard behind [him] a loud voice, as of a trumpet..." It wasn't a trumpet; it was a loud voice.

Trumpets were commonly used by the Jews. Often they were sounded to gather the people of God.

Describing Jesus' voice like a trumpet in conjunction with the mention of the seven churches in the next verse simply but powerfully means that He was gathering the churches to hear something very special.

Rev 1:11 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."

Once again we're told that Jesus is God's entire alphabet, and every word He wants to say to mankind.

He was the "first," in that He created all things. He is the "last," in that He will bring all things to their prophesied conclusions.

John was to write one book to these seven churches. Even though there are individual letters to each of these churches, everything in the book is for all of them. And it's for all of us.

Rev 1:12 Then I turned to see the voice that spoke with me. And having turned I saw seven golden lampstands,

Maybe it's just me, but I'm stunned by something in this verse. It's something John *doesn't* see - not at first.

What do we expect John to see the minute he turns around? We expect him to see Jesus, the source of the voice he just heard.

He doesn't see Jesus - not first. He sees the lampstands, *then* he sees Jesus.

Even though in verse sixteen we're told "His countenance was like the sun shining in its strength," John had seen the lampstands first.

What is the significance of seeing the lampstands first? As we will see, the lampstands are the churches on the earth.

It is a strong reminder that Jesus is seen - He is unveiled to the world - as He lights-up His church.

Rev 1:13 and in the midst of the seven lampstands One like the Son of Man, clothed with a garment down to the feet and girded about the chest with a golden band.

Jesus appears in His ministry as our Great High Priest continually tending to the lampstands. Each of the seven churches, and every other church, can count on Him to keep them lit up.

Rev 1:14 His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and His eyes like a flame of fire;

Rev 1:15 His feet were like fine brass, as if refined in a furnace, and His voice as the sound of many waters;

Rev 1:16 He had in His right hand seven stars, out of His mouth went a sharp two-edged sword, and His countenance was like the sun shining in its strength.

Each of the ways Jesus is described is borrowed from the Old Testament books of Daniel and Ezekiel and Isaiah. Always remember that this book is filled with the Old Testament.

I was going comment about each descriptor, but I think doing so would only limit our appreciation.

Here is what I mean. John sees Jesus in His role as our Great High Priest, protecting us, and providing for us, even in the midst of our tribulations.

Since Jesus is everything God wants to say, from A-Z, and since He, being the first, will oversee everything until He, as the last, brings His will to pass, then I only need to look at Him.

So, for example, let's just take His white-as-wool hair.

- White hair can signify wisdom - the wisdom of the aged. He is eternal, so no one is as aged as Jesus. If I need wisdom, it's to be found in Him.
- But His hair is also "white as snow," signifying that though my sins be as scarlet, He can and does nevertheless forgive them.
- His white-as-wool, snow-like hair, is also, obviously, very beautiful. There are times His sheer beauty will encourage me as I recall that He makes all things beautiful in His time.

So, really, each attribute of the risen Jesus has almost limitless significance.

We should say a word about the "sharp two-edged sword" described as coming "out of His mouth." It's borrowed from Isaiah 49:2, where we read,

Isa 49:2 And He has made My mouth like a sharp sword; In the shadow of His hand He has hidden Me, And made Me a polished shaft; In His quiver He has hidden Me."

It's from a passage promising that Israel's Messiah would bring Israel back into relationship with the God they had forsaken.

Jesus will, in fact, restore Israel - the physical descendants of Abraham - to their God through the events of the Tribulation that is described in this book.

The mouth-sword also anticipates Jesus' Second Coming to the earth, and His rule over it, because we read in Revelation 19:15,

Rev 19:15 Now out of His mouth goes a sharp sword, that with it He should strike the nations. And He Himself will rule them with a rod of iron. He Himself treads the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God.

Although they were suffering, and many would suffer unto death, one day Jesus would be coming back to establish His kingdom.

Suffer now; reign later. Mean time, shine forth, because God is not willing that any should perish, but that all come to repentance.

Rev 1:17 And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as dead. But He laid His right hand on me, saying to me, "Do not be afraid; I am the First and the Last.

Should we fall down "as dead?" Maybe; but if you're going to use John as your example, he was alone at the time, banished from fellowship with other believers. And the Lord immediately raised him up.

Jesus alleviates John's fears by once again reminding him that He is "the First and the Last." It's as if Jesus were saying, "Remember who I am, and you'll see, **I got this!**"

I mostly feel as though Jesus *doesn't* 'got this' when it comes to the troubles I experience. That's only because we haven't come to their end; or to **the** end. He will have His way at the "last."

Rev 1:18 I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore. Amen. And I have the keys of Hades and of Death.

"Lives" means *lived continuously*. It's another statement of His eternal existence.

Although eternal as God, Jesus was "dead." It means that He *became dead* as a man in His incarnation. But He rose from the dead and, as the God-man, He is alive forevermore.

Our two biggest problems were Death followed by Hades.

- Death is portrayed as a relentless power that all of us are subject to.
- Hades is (technically) the temporary abode of the human soul immediately after physical death.

When Jesus died He descended into Hades. *Hades is not Hell!* Hades is described in Luke chapter sixteen as a temporary abode for souls divided into two compartments.

- One compartment is a place of suffering and torment for nonbelievers.

- The other compartment was called Paradise. It was a blissful waiting area for believers.

When Jesus said to the thief on the cross, "Today you will be with Me in Paradise," He was talking about being in the Paradise compartment of Hades.

Jesus descended there to take all the believers to Heaven. Now when a believer dies he does not go to Paradise. He goes immediately to Heaven.

The souls of nonbelievers still go to Hades to await a final resurrection and then to be cast alive into Hell – which in the Revelation will be described as a lake burning with fire.

Jesus has the "keys" of Hades and of Death. He has the authority over them. Death may take you before the rapture but you need not fear it because you go to be with the Lord in Heaven and not to Hades - and *never* to Hell.

Now, pay close attention to verse nineteen:

[Rev 1:19](#) Write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after this.

This gets the valuable verse award. This is Jesus Christ's own commentary on the Revelation. He gives us the outline for studying, and understanding, the book.

The Revelation of Jesus Christ is not an impossibly difficult, closed book that no one can really understand. It is one of the few books, in fact, that gives you its own outline.

"Write the things which you have seen." What John had seen was the vision of the risen Lord walking in the midst of the seven candlesticks with seven stars in His right hand. Chapter one is the record of the things John had seen.

Chapters two and three will contain the second division, "the things which are." The seven churches, representing the entire church age, are the things which are.

Then from chapters four through the end of the book we read about "the things which will take place after this." We'll see the church resurrected and raptured into Heaven; the seven years of the Great Tribulation; the Battle of Armageddon; the second coming of Jesus; the one-thousand year reign of Jesus on the earth (called the Millennium); the final judgment of Satan, the fallen angels, and nonbelieving humanity; the destruction of this universe; the creation of a new universe; and we'll get a glimpse at our lives in eternity with God.

Rev 1:20 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 which you saw are the seven churches.

A "mystery," in the Bible, is something previously concealed that is now revealed.

The "seven stars are the angels of the seven churches." We have a decision to make. The word "angels" means *messengers*. But are these seven messengers *supernatural* beings or *human* beings?

The majority of commentators identify these angels as human beings, *not* supernatural angels. I agree.

Just the fact that John is the one who gives the Revelation to these messengers to deliver to the churches tells me they are humans, not angels. Angels are God's messengers - not ours.

It makes the most sense to me that the messengers are, in fact, the pastors of the churches.

Your body is the temple of God on the earth today - the temple of the Holy Spirit. But so is the church, the body of Jesus Christ, His temple on the earth.

In the earthly Temple, the Jewish priest would refill the bowl of the lampstand with oil, and trim the wicks.

As far as the oil, Jesus has promised His church the unending flow of His Holy Spirit.

A wick needs to be kept trimmed in order for the lamp to burn its brightest.

Is there a hint in this that in our tribulations Jesus is trimming us, to light-up the darkness?

Jesus is our Great High Priest. We are His lampstands on the earth. He wants to light us up to unveil Him, to reveal Him, to sinners - even to those who, in their own way, want to boil or banish us.

