

Banished But Blessed

Revelation 1:1-20

Introduction:

Last week I told you I felt that God was leading me to preach to you on the seven churches of Revelation:

The apostle John being the last of the disciples would mean Revelation was written in the last decade of the 1st century (A.D. 94-96)

Background & Setting

Revelation begins with John, by now an old man, in exile on the small, barren island of Patmos, located in the Aegean Sea southeast of Ephesus.

**Remember John had once been the pastor of the church at Ephesus.

The Roman Emperor, Domitian, had banished him for preaching the gospel.

Domitian was the Caesar of his day, a ruler who saw himself as deity, as a god (little g).

He would sign his letters as the lord god, Domitian. No wonder he would greatly persecute the early church and those who boldly proclaimed Jesus is the Way, the Truth & the Life.

* The apostle Paul was imprisoned punished & persecuted under the reign of Nero, possibly some 30-40 years earlier.

Theological Themes

The book of Revelation is primarily a book of prophecy; it seems to begin as an epistle or a letter. It addresses seven different churches with seven different problems or challenges. It fore tells things that are to come.

**But I want to mention again it is a Revelation about Jesus Christ.

This book depicts Him as:

“The risen glorified Son of God ministering to the churches”;

“The faithful witness”;

“The firstborn from the dead”,

“The ruler over the kings of the world”;

“The Alpha & Omega the Beginning & the End”;

“The one who is and was and is to come, the Almighty”;

“The one who is holy and true”;

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“The beginning of all creation”;

“The Lion of the Tribe of Judah”;

“The Lamb on the throne”;

“The Messiah who will reign forever”;

“The king of kings & lord of lords”; and

“The bright and morning star”.

In the book of Revelation; the church is warned of sin & exhorted to holiness;

We see vivid pictures of worship;

The ministry of angels;

Eschatology = the doctrine of last days;

The final political setup of the world;

The career and ultimate defeat of the Antichrist;

We see Christ’s 1000 year earthly reign; and the final state of the wicked and the righteous.

Let me share with you an interesting study comparing Genesis to Revelation.

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In Genesis the earth was created; in Revelation it will pass away.

In Genesis was Satan’s first rebellion; Revelation Satan’s last rebellion.

In Genesis the sun, moon & stars were meant for the earth’s government; in Revelation these same heavenly bodies are for the earth’s judgment.

In Genesis the sun was to govern the day; in Revelation there is no need for the sun.

In Genesis darkness was called night; in Revelation there is no night.

In Genesis the entrance of sin; in Revelation the exodus of sin.

In Genesis the curse was pronounced; in Revelation the curse is removed.

In Genesis death entered; in revelation there is no more death.

In Genesis Satan’s doom being pronounced; in Revelation Satan’s doom is executed.

This is a very meaningful Book called Revelation.

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As a matter of fact it says, ***“Blessed is the one who reads this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it, because the time is near.” V. 3***

God is predicting the future!

God sees the final end of all things as well as their beginnings. God is Omniscient!

Much of the prophecy in the Bible has already been fulfilled.

The majority of prophecy unfulfilled relates to the Second Coming of Jesus.

Christ’s Second Coming is one of the most mentioned subjects in the Word of God.

There are 210 chapters in the New Testament and the Second Coming is mentioned 318 times.

This is not counting the times it is mentioned in the Old Testament.

As we delve into these sermons on the seven churches, it is Jesus Christ exhorting us ***“He that has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”*** In preparation for His Second Coming.

I have heard people say that the Book of Revelation is a book they can’t understand, but

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but, quite to the contrary, the Book of Revelation is an open book that every believer given the chance to read and study is capable of understanding.

By the way there is a group of us, approximately 25 altogether who are studying the Book of Revelation every Wednesday night.

It would be great if you could come and join us.

To set the stage for these series of sermons in the next several weeks, I want you to imagine with me for a moment how you would feel if you had just received an unjust sentence —

You will be transported to the Alcatraz of Asia Minor—a desolate island about six miles wide and ten miles long.

You will not be permitted to leave that island.

There you will be thrown in with hardened criminals and even though you are old and physically weak you will be required to labor in the mines and quarries.

Imagine the thoughts that would run through your mind as you stand in the ship with murderers and thieves approaching this island called Patmos just 15 miles west Ephesus.

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You begin to consider questions: How long will you hold up to the harsh treatment there?

Will this rocky island called Patmos be the place where you die?

Why has God allowed this in your life?

You see, now understand with me, this happened in about 95AD to the Apostle John.

He was sent to one of the worst imaginable places—a place where back-breaking work in the mines and deprivation were about all that was offered.

You and I know what awaits John there.

We know by good hindsight the wonderful thing God is about to do.

But John doesn't know.

So before we talk about the glorious Revelation that God is about to give John, it will benefit us to first get a feel for the context in which it came.

I. The CONTEXT of the Revelation

The context in which God works is not always what we might expect or desire.

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Sometimes God works in ways in which we never would have wanted it done.

There is this aged man here who loved God with all his heart, John is the last disciple alive.

And he writes these words in **Revelation 1:9**

“I, John, your brother and companion in the suffering and kingdom and patient endurance that are ours in Jesus, was on the island of Patmos because of the Word of God and the testimony of Jesus.”

That was the context.

The Revelation came to this ***“companion in the suffering and kingdom and patient endurance”***

Let me stop there and exhort you and me again.

So often we want our Christian walk with God to be a walk in the Rose Garden with no trials, no tribulation and no problems.

It has been brought home to me more than ever before that when we live for Jesus, we are going to face all of these, and result is that Jesus makes us more like Him through these times.

But—listen to these words closely—“that is ours in Jesus.”

Now - I really don't know how to put those words in our context because as a rule we do not think of those kind of things as being "***ours in Jesus***".

We think of worldly success and earthly comfort as being "ours in Jesus."

One man said, "I don't think I have ever turned on Christian TV and heard an evangelist say, "Send in your \$100 gift and receive suffering and kingdom and patient endurance—it's ours in Jesus."

That doesn't set well with the average American mindset.

But John identifies himself as a brother and companion in those three things—"***suffering and kingdom and patient endurance***".

I don't know very many Christians who could honestly say what John is saying in Revelation 1:9.

In the Greek one article is attached to

"thlipsei" (suffering),

"basileia" (kingdom) and

"hupomonee" (patient endurance)

tying the three together.

Do you want to walk in kingdom authority as a Christian believer?

It's doubtful that we can do that without some patient endurance as well.

James said this when he said, "***Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that they testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.***" **James 1:2-4**

And sometimes the Christian walk includes unpleasant circumstances and happenings that we would rather now experience.

Sometimes that involves some suffering.

Sometimes we are not spared unjust treatment.

Why do we pause to address the context of John's Revelation?

Because Revelation from God and special visitations from God tend to come in that kind of environment.

Let me reason with you - Most of **Paul's epistles** were written from a dingy prison cell—not from a plush, well-equipped office or from a fancy hotel room.

Stephen's glorious vision of Jesus came while he was being stoned to death.

In 1Kings 17 **Elijah was sent to a starving widow** in Zaraphath rather than a king's palace.

There in a desperate situation the miracles occurred.

Don't we tend to want it both ways.

- We want the power of God and the awesome acts of God.
- We want the Red Sea to part.
- But we don't want Pharaoh's army pursuing us.
- We don't want to be down to our last meal.

None of us would have wanted to be in the place John found himself there on that criminal's island.

But that's where it happened—

Not in a temple somewhere,
Not even in a church—

but on a sin-plagued island full of criminals and undesirables.

There (can you believe it?) the Holy Spirit shows up here.

I know how sensitive this is to some of our listeners this morning. This is hitting where you are.

But I want you to believe that -

There Jesus sent an angel to John with the greatest prophetic Revelation any man has ever received.

I believe the Revelation came to a man who was broken, humble and in pursuit of only one thing—and that was God.

There on that seemingly God-forsaken island God showed up in a very special way.

Why had God allowed such hardship to come into John's life?

Was it because John had not claimed the blessing with the right words of authority?

Was it perhaps that John just didn't have the faith to get the miracle he needed?

We all know that's not the reason.

But can we apply what we see here in John's life to our own?

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Can I get a mindset that is cooperative with God when my life gets uncomfortable?

Instead of me trying to do things that make it worse, can I trust God who knows what He is doing to work out all of my circumstances?

Do I have any other prayer than God get me out of here?

It looked like the devil was having his way, shutting John off from his ministry and friends.

It looked like evil had won the day.

But in reality God never lost control of the situation.

In fact, God was working all things together after the council of His will.

God had a man totally to Himself, totally dependent upon Him, totally free from all worldly distraction and attraction.

Folks, God has spoken to me so many times when I had to slip away from being in front of the TV in the evenings and go be alone with Him.

Has that happened to you lately?

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John was even isolated from good things like his pastoral ministry—**shut up with God in a secret place that John would have never chosen.**

I read this story this week:

Illustration: Distractions

We can become distracted and look away from the goal of becoming like Christ.

If you saw the movie Chariots of Fire, then maybe you remember the great runner Abraham.

He had won so many races.

His coach held up such high discipline.

But he finally lost one of the races because he looked to the side.

Just as he was about to finish the race he looked to see where the competitor was.

His coach said to him, that look cost you the race. He was not single minded on the finish and the prize that lay ahead.

That is similar to what the Apostle Paul is calling our attention to.

He is calling us to be single minded toward the goal of becoming like Christ. Yes there are many things that are good. But there is only one thing

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that is really best. Those are the things that count for eternity. We make our lives more like Jesus.

God had John ready to receive what He wanted to give Him.

“I, John, your brother and companion in the suffering and kingdom and patient endurance that are ours in Jesus, was on the island of Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus”. How did John wind up here? “Because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus”

Listen to me believer friend, that’s what the devil wants stopped—**the Word of God and the testimony of Jesus.**

That’s where the battle is engaged.

That’s why this church and any other church that preaches the Word and preaches Jesus gets opposed.

That’s why you get opposed when you share your testimony at work or with a friend.

But I wonder—if John would have been on this island if he had backed down on those issues.

I wonder what John would have received had he just decided to be a little more cooperative with the

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“powers that be” and try to not rock the boat too much there in the Roman Empire.

Perhaps the enemy would have backed off as well.

Perhaps John would have been able to live more comfortable and avoid all that hardship.

Perhaps John would have never received this Revelation!

I am sometimes alarmed at what I may be missing because of limited dedication to the Lord.

The interesting thing about missing out is that we usually don’t even know it happened.

In the coming year who will God use to reach lost souls?

Will I be a part of that? Will you be a part of it?

Who will receive fresh anointing and authority in the Holy Spirit?

Will I? Will you?

Who will be in the right place at the right time to make a real difference?

I think that will depend on who will give themselves to God—who will give Him the maximum instead of

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the minimum—who will pray—who will say with complete sincerity, “Here am I, Lord, send me.”

I don’t want the legacy of my life to be “what might have been”.

I want to make the right choices that result in me being exactly where God wants me to be. Don’t you?

II. The CONNECTION for the Revelation.

Rev 1:10 “On the Lord’s Day I was in the Spirit, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet...”

I think it not only shocked John, but it also surprised him—I don’t think he knew it was coming.

But John was in a position to hear that voice—**“I was in the Spirit on the Lord’s Day.”**

That’s a good place to be isn’t it?

But - In the Spirit, in a place like Patmos?

It’s not the condition of the environment around us that determines that.

It’s found in the condition of our hearts!

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How do you think John got in the Spirit on that particular day?

I don’t think it happened as a result of him dwelling on how bad the circumstances were in his life.

I don’t think it happened by him pleading with God to get him out of there—though that would have certainly been understandable. Would you agree?

I think it happened much like Paul and Silas’ experience in the jail at Philippi.

I think John may have been dwelling on the goodness of God and the promises of God.

I think he may have been rejoicing that his name is written in heaven.

I think John found a way to get happy in God right there in the most miserable place on earth.

And God started to talk.

It was loud.

It was awesome.

It sounded forth like a trumpet blast.

I suspect no one else heard it because their hearts were in no condition to hear God’s voice.

When God is speaking can I hear His voice?

I can if my ear is turned towards heaven.

But if the world has my attention, if my heart is set on other things even a heavenly trumpet blast I will not hear.

“He that has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”

I want to focus just a moment on the first two words in Revelation 1:12.

For this also was an important response. ***“I turned.”***

Have you turned at the voice of God in your life recently?

Has He spoken and **your response was to turn—**

Turn from all distractions and ambitions toward Him—

Turn from the direction you were intending to go to the direction where He is?

Had John never turned, he would have never seen, nor would he have heard.

I personally think it's interesting that the voice and vision were behind John and not in front of him.

Certainly God knew which direction John was facing.

Why not make it easy on John?

Why not just get right in his face and speak?

Has God's voice ever come from behind you?

Let me ask you - Are you insisting that it be on your terms or will you turn and do it on His terms?

I'm glad John turned because when he did he saw something marvelous.

III. The CONTENT of the Revelation to John.

He saw **Seven golden lampstands.**

We are told in **verse 20** that those **seven lampstands represent the seven churches.**

In this case the lamp is not the light but the light shines through it.

The oil on fire is the light. Oil is the representation of the Holy Spirit in the church.

But the oil on fire is in the lampstand.

God has chosen to shine His light through His churches.

It is a terrible judgment on a church when that light is withdrawn.

For a lampstand has only one purpose and that is to carry the light. And folks, that's all we're about!

May the Holy Spirit fire of God burn in our hearts and may we let that light shine to the world around us.

Seven is the biblical number of completeness in the Word of God.

Although the **seven churches named in verse 11 were real local churches they were also in this Revelation representative of all churches throughout the church age.**

And in the midst of those seven lamp stands—in the midst of His church stands Jesus.

John sees Him as one ***“like a son of man”*** retaining His humanity but in a glorified state.

It is no small matter that the eternal God—the Creator of heaven and earth—the divine Son of God—would so identify with you and me that He would not only temporarily take upon Himself the form of man so that He might redeem us **but that He would choose to retain that identity forever and ever.**

Blessed be the name of the Lord!

John sees Him dressed in priestly, royal robes.

For He is not only King of Kings but He is also our great High Priest.

Now follow this description with me in **verse 14** ***“His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow...”***

Two things are communicated there about Jesus—

His holiness and His dignity.

“He is the Ancient of Days who was and is and is to come.”

Proverbs 16:31 says ***“Gray hair is a crown of splendor; it is attained by a righteous life.”***

In our culture we dye gray hair to try to look younger.

But in that culture, gray hair was a badge of honor and symbolic of wisdom.

We have seen Jesus in the gospel during His time of humiliation.

We saw Him beaten and mocked and crucified.

We saw Him meekly yield His life at Calvary for our salvation.

He loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood John says in

verse 14. But now we see Him in His power and authority. "And His eyes were like a blazing fire."

Verse 15 "His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace..."

He is not walking among His church as the meek and lowly Jesus.

He is walking in the midst of His church as the Judge of all the earth.

And the Apostle Peter says, 14 "If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. 15 If you suffer, it should not be as a murderer of thief or any other kind of criminal, or even as a meddler. 16 However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name. For it is time for Judgment to begin in the house of God; and if it begins with us, what will the outcome be for those who do not obey the gospel of God?" I Peter 4

Later in this Revelation horrific judgments fall upon the ungodly world—judgments like this world has never seen before. This is what we are studying about on Wednesday night right now.

1 Thessalonians 5:3 "For when they say, "Peace and safety!" then sudden destruction comes upon them..." (NKJV)

A Christ-rejecting world is not going to slowly get better and better.

Maybe the world will think so. Maybe the world news will give this kind of hope, but it's already in God's prophetic time table.

The Nations may think its technology and diplomacy has done the trick.

But "when they say, "Peace and safety!" then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labor pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape." NKJV

But before all that Jesus walks among His own Church as the Righteous Judge. ***"And His eyes were like blazing fire..." penetrating and discerning all. "His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace..."***

John, a Jewish believer, one of the original disciples is seeing Jesus as the judge of His people.

Do you see Jesus as your judge this morning?

Most people don't want to think of Him that way.

But all judgment of all humanity rests in Him.

Someday and I believe soon, we shall all stand before the Judgment Seat of Christ.

That has to be a part of our understanding of who Jesus is and our relationship to Him.

The book of Revelation was primarily given as a source of comfort and encouragement to the Christian.

But there is also this element of warning.

Each and every one of us will give an account of themselves to God.

Every decision we make should be made with that understanding.

How is this going to hold up on the day of my final review before the Lord?

Will it prove to be wood, hay and stubble?

Or will it pass the refiners fire as precious gold?

I believe with everything in me that the Church today must experience a new relationship – a revival of the Old Time Religion that will bring us back to where we can say that “All is Well with My Soul.”

”...and his voice was like the sound of rushing waters.”

John is describing the authority of His words.

John follows up with three more key descriptions.

Verse 16 “In his right had he held seven stars and out of his mouth came a sharp double-edged sword.”

That two-edged sword is symbolic of the power of His words.

In Revelation 19 when we see Jesus confronting His enemies out of His mouth comes this sharp sword with which He will strike down the nations (verse 15).

He does not have to wrestle with His adversaries.

The glory of His countenance consumes them.

Zech 14:12 “...Their flesh shall dissolve while they stand on their feet, their eyes shall dissolve in their sockets, and their tongues shall dissolve in their mouths.” (NKJV)

I hope you are catching the awe of John's experience.

This is no helpless babe lying in a manger.

This is the Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End.

The Almighty Son of God, the Lamb that is now the Lion of Judah!

That's why we need this book—so that we can see Him as He is right now.

“His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance.” Verse 16

How does this holy, chosen apostle John respond to all this?

Look at his response in ***Revelation 1:17 “When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead.”***

That is the typical response when people truly encounter the Lord of Lords and King of Kings.

I have had people tell me how they were caught up into heaven and chatted with God and sat on His lap.

I have had enough experiences with God to know that is utter nonsense.

There is an awe about God here that is beyond description.

It's not so much a fear that He's “gonna get ya” so to speak.

In fact, there is the assurance of His love, grace, mercy and favor.

But to come into His presence in any way close to what John experienced is to fall at His feet speechless.

I guess that's why we use the altar here for people to come and kneel before an Almighty God to talk to Him about their spiritual relationship with Him.

On judgment day nobody will stand before God and contest the verdict.

Every mouth will be stopped and every knee will bow.

I close with verse 7 where it reads, ***“Look, He is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him; and all the people's of the earth will mourn because of Him. So shall it be! Amen.”***

Show the clip at this time:

I close with the words of Jesus to His beloved disciple as John lay at His feet,

Verse 17 "...Then he placed his right hand on me (do you see His tenderness in that?) and said, "Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive forever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades."

In other words, your future is safely in His eternal hands.

Invitation