

Foreword, Part I- An Explanation for the Revelation

Call to Worship: Psalm 93

Hymn #5 (supp)- *I Sing the Mighty Power of God*

1st Scripture: Ezekiel 1-2:5

Hymn #79- *Though Troubles Assail Us*

2nd Scripture: Revelation 1:9-20

Hymn #4- *All Praise to God, Who Reigns Above*

Introduction:

Having brought forth a glorious salutation, doxology and declaration, John now moves on to provide his audience with an explanation for the Revelation he was now delivering over to the churches. He informs them of what prompted him to write down and deliver the message that is about to follow.

And as you examine the description of how John received this Revelation, you will find that there is a stark resemblance to how Ezekiel began to receive revelations when he was first called to be a prophet in Ezekiel 1. Both John and Ezekiel describe very vividly the way in which they were approached by God when they were taken up by the Spirit to behold the vision given them by God. Notice some of the similarities between them:

1a) In Ezekiel 1:1-3, we find Ezekiel the priest, standing among the Babylonian captive exiles by the River Chebar, when God opened up the heavens and set His hand upon him.

1b) And here in Revelation 1:9-10, we find John the Apostle, in exile on the island of Patmos. And on the Lord's Day, he was in the Spirit as he was carried into his first vision.

1c) Both Ezekiel (the priest) and John (the apostle) were in exile and undergoing hardship when they were approached by God.

2a) And then, Ezekiel (in verses 4-28b) immediately sees this glorious vision of God riding upon the cherubim with great power, majesty and splendor.

2b) And John, after hearing a loud voice behind him (in verse 12), turns to see where the voice is coming from, only to behold this glorious vision of Christ, described with great power, majesty and splendor.

2c) Both Ezekiel and John begin by beholding an illustrative display of the glory of God.

3a) After seeing the vision of God's glorious splendor, we are told (in verse 28c of Ezekiel 1) that Ezekiel fell on his face, before being commanded and enabled by God to stand on his feet.

3b) And then after seeing the vision of Christ's glorious splendor, we are told (in Revelation 1:17), that John fell at the feet of this exalted Christ as if dead. And then Christ laid His hand on John, reminded him of who He was, enabling him to move on to see the vision.

3c) Both Ezekiel and John fall down on their faces when they behold the glory of God, before being helped up, so that they could receive the messages that they were to deliver.

Conclusive thoughts on this analogy: Clearly, in both instances (and Daniel himself had a similar experience), we find God equipping his prophet for the significant task at hand, by giving him a taste of His glory as a preface to the message. This visual display served as a means of sobering both the messenger and the receivers of the message, so that they might carry the divine seal in both an audible and visible way as they considered the message that was to follow. God has a way of gripping, empowering and humbling people, and while these moving images of His Person are not literal descriptions of God's Personal appearance, in keeping with the apocalyptic nature of Revelation, they reveal *what really is*, in the light of *what seems to be*. In other words, the descriptions here given, tell a story about the Person envisioned.

And this glorious description of Christ revealed to John; a divine glory to be sure, served as a means of describing some of the glorious characteristics of Christ; not His visible characteristics, but His invisible characteristics and deity, to the end that all who hear the message of Revelation would first have their minds and hearts etched with a description of the attributes contained by the divine Author.

Lord willing, we will look more closely at the vision of Christ, which John beheld, next time. For this morning, I want us to simply consider the content of verses 9-11, where John begins to explain how he had received the revelation.

There are three things that we will consider to this end:

- 1) We will consider the blessed way in which John relates to his audience
- 2) We will consider the context within which John received the revelation
- 3) We will consider the introductory comments given to John as he prepares to receive the revelation.

I. The blessed way in which John relates to his audience

John begins to explain how he had received the revelation, by first relating to his audience as one who shares in the same experiences of “life in the Kingdom.” And in doing this, once again, it serves as a reminder that the one chosen to convey this revelation shares in their sufferings and their hopes. Though he was an Apostle, John wanted to identify with his audience so that they would view him as one who understood very well (and firsthand) what their temptations, trials and afflictions felt like. Notice how John effectively does this in verse 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.”

John here identifies with his audience both relationally and experientially. He wants them to know that he is not above them, but rather one of them. He is both their brother and companion. That is, he shares the same family and inheritance, and he travels along with them, down the same difficult road that leads to this inheritance. All who are in Christ will suffer with Christ, and John was no exception. He is their brother and companion *in the tribulation and kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ*.

1) *In the Tribulation of Jesus Christ:* John shared in the same trials and experiences, which his audience had experienced and will experience in Christ. He will soon speak of the suffering, which the church must suffer until Christ returns, but he does so, as one who has himself been cast into exile on the tiny, stony, island called Patmos. It was his testimony in Christ and his faithful witness to the Gospel that placed him there, as an outcast of society and as a leper to the world. John “was on the island that is called Patmos for the word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ.”

2) *In the Kingdom of Christ:* John shares in the same Kingdom, and the sacrificial calling that is associated with that kingdom, as his audience. The Christian’s Kingdom is the Kingdom of Christ, and the Kingdom of Christ is not of *this world*. It is a kingdom that begins by bearing a cross; it is a kingdom that begins by denying oneself and walking the path to Golgotha to be crucified with Christ. It is a kingdom that comes into its fulfillment when Christ returns. It looks beyond the temporal joys of this world. For the eternal joy to come, it endures the cross and despises the shame with Christ, the Head and King of this glorious Kingdom. John was a brother and companion to the churches of this eschatological Kingdom; a kingdom begun in this world but consummating in all of its glory at the return of Christ.

3) *In the patience of Christ:* John shared in the persevering patience that all who are in Christ must have, if they are to make it home to glory. John knew what it meant to wait, and wait and wait and wait upon the Lord, with an open end in view. Though he was an Apostle and a prophet, he was not given all of the details regarding times and “whats and hows and whys” and etc. Like us, he was called to patiently endure suffering and trial; like us, he was called to grow by these very means and to strengthen his faith in Christ, clinging to the same promises that we have been given by means of the revealed Word of God.

In all of these things, John wanted to make sure that his audience...that even we in the year 2011, understand that he, as our brother and companion, knows what it is like to travel the difficult and painful path of the Christian walk. He has been there. He has suffered tribulation. He has looked forward to a Kingdom that is not yet consummated. He has had to develop and maintain the patience required to follow and serve Christ. Like his brother James (in James 5:17), John could say, “Elijah was a man with a nature like ours.” There are no “superhuman” sufferers. The John Calvins and the Charles Spurgeons and the Jonathan Edwards’ of the past;

and the RC Sprouls and the John Pipers and the John MacArthurs of the present, are all men like us. They are our brothers and companions in the tribulation and the kingdom and the patience of Jesus Christ. We cannot say, “Well, they have no idea what it is like because they are so gifted...etc.” No, brethren, they are as frail as you and I, and they are with us in the battle, even as the Apostle John himself was. And furthermore, thanks be unto God that we have a Savior; a High Priest, who can even sympathize with our weaknesses, who was “in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin” (Heb. 4:15).

And so, as we study the Revelation, we must do so as those who are as capable and as responsible as the “Samson of theologians,” to obey the voice of Christ in our faithfulness to the calling that comes with the Kingdom. Let John’s opening statement here, encourage us to know that we are all in this together.

II. The context within which John received the Revelation

Again, we are told that John was on the Island of Patmos in exile, but furthermore, we are also told in verse 10, “I was in the Spirit on the Lord’s Day, and I heard behind me a loud voice, as of a trumpet, saying...”

John was in the Spirit on the “Lord’s Day,” when he had received the Revelation. Though he was banished from the general population, John was celebrating the Lord’s Day; He was meditating upon and worshipping God, when he had received this vision. I find it quite significant that John actually tells us the specific day upon which he had received the Revelation, as if to declare that while he was honoring the Day; while he was especially focused and concentrated on worshipping the Lord on His day, God met with him in this vision.

Upon looking into other texts given in the NT, and upon studying the practices of the early church fathers, we find the Lord’s Day to be the first day of the week, in accordance with the resurrection of Christ. It is the day that the people of God gather together to worship God together as a body, having replaced the Jewish Sabbath, as the new “one day in seven” that is to be kept, in keeping with the Fourth Commandment of God’s Moral Law (*The Ten Commandments*). And on this new Christian Sabbath, we are called especially to celebrate

Christ; in His Person and work, and in light of our union and fellowship with Him and His people. The Lord's Day is the Christian's rest, and it ever points forward to the final rest that will come when Christ returns. In Hebrews 4:9-11, we are told, "There remains therefore a rest for the people of God. For He who has entered His rest has Himself also ceased from His works as God did from His. Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest, lest anyone fall according to the same example of disobedience."

Is it any mere coincidence that John had received the Revelation on this particular Day of the week? Perhaps, we can assume that the very context within which John received the Revelation, was meant to remind them throughout the duration of their sufferings and afflictions, of the fact that our ultimate rest, which is pictured in the Lord's Day, is yet to come. In other words, the very timing of John receiving this vision is an encouraging reminder to both John and his audience of the eternal rest we have coming to us in Christ, of which we have received the first fruits, in our salvation. For, it is only proper that a vision that points to the ultimate consummation of the Kingdom of Christ, bringing about the eternal *unrest* of the damned and the eternal *rest* of the people of God, should be received on the Lord's Day. Consider these words in Revelation 14:9-13:

"Then a third angel followed them, saying with a loud voice, "If anyone worships the beast and his image, and receives his mark on his forehead or on his hand, he himself shall also drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out full strength into the cup of His indignation. He shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment ascends forever and ever; and they have no rest day or night, who worship the beast and his image, and whoever receives the mark of his name." Here is the patience of the saints; here are those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus. Then I heard a voice from heaven saying to me, "Write: 'Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.'" "Yes," says the Spirit, "that they *may rest from their labors, and their works follow them.*

I believe that the Lord would have us understand here, that part of the glorious blessing of celebrating the *whole* of His Day, is that we are refreshed and encouraged by the constant reminder of all we have in Christ, of all we are in Christ, and of all that is to come in Christ.

What was lost at the fall (rest) is regained for the people of God in Christ! And the Lord's Day carries us along through all of our trials, reminding us of this coming end!

And so, brethren, is it any wonder that we should buckle under the pressures of life; that we should faint beneath the trials and hardships that come upon us in this world; that we should find ourselves slowly drifting into the lustful sway of the world, losing sight of the glory of the eternal Gospel, if we are not properly celebrating the Lord's Day? I would venture to say that the great regression of the American church; the loss of zeal and excitement for the glory of Christ that would lead us to take giant risks and to cast ourselves upon the altar of Christ's service, has its roots in our failure to give proper due to honoring the Christian Sabbath; the whole of the Day. If you are simply here on Sunday mornings, and then you go about your regular business for the rest of the day, dare I say that I strongly believe that you are crippling the welfare of your very soul? God met with John in a special way, when he was honoring the Lord's Day. The Holy Spirit of God would have us be reminded specifically, as a preface to this Revelation, that John had received this vision on the Lord's Day.

Let me close out this point by reminding you of the precious, timeless words of Isaiah 58:13&14, brethren:

"If you turn away your foot from the Sabbath, from doing your pleasure on My holy day, and call the Sabbath a delight, The holy day of the Lord honorable, and shall honor Him, not doing your own ways, nor finding your own pleasure, nor speaking your own words, then you shall delight yourself in the Lord; and I will cause you to ride on the high hills of the earth, and feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father. The mouth of the Lord has spoken."

John was "in the Spirit"; he was carried away in the Spirit, as it were, on the Lord's Day!

III. The introductory comments given to John as he prepares to receive the revelation

"I was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day, and I heard behind me a loud voice, as of a trumpet, 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" (Rev. 1:10-11).

Here, we are told that when John hears this loud voice (“as of a trumpet”), he is commanded to write what he sees (in the upcoming Revelation), in a book. And he is to send it to the seven listed churches which are in Asia.

And this loud voice, prefaces this command with a divine seal that is almost identical to the divine seal that had been spoken a few moments earlier as a means of authenticating John’s words concerning the final coming of Christ, where He will return to judge the world (see verses 7-8). “I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last...”

Again, we have here language from the Almighty; a first Person declaration that is meant now to authenticate the content of this entire Revelation...only, this time, it is not God the Father speaking. When John turns to see where the voice is coming from (in verse 12), he is led to behold the glorious, Almighty, reigning Christ! And we are meant to understand by this, that this Christ, who is the Son of God, shares the divine essence, power and authority that belong to God alone. And as such an authority, even as the Father has authenticated the final return of Christ by referring to His own eternal character and Being, Christ now commands and authorizes John to deliver this Revelation (which he is about to see) over to the churches by referring to His own character and Being. And the “loud voice,” which sounded like a trumpet, would have all the more added wait to this divine declaration, reminding John of the voice of God, calling for Moses (in the hearing of the Israelites) to meet him on the mountain, as God was preparing to speak His Ten Commandments in the hearing of the Israelites. Consider these words from Exodus 19:9-19:

“And the Lord said to Moses, “Behold, I come to you in the thick cloud, that the people may hear when I speak with you, and believe you forever.” So Moses told the words of the people to the Lord. Then the Lord said to Moses, “Go to the people and consecrate them today and tomorrow, and let them wash their clothes. And let them be ready for the third day. For on the third day the Lord will come down upon Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people. You shall set bounds for the people all around, saying, ‘Take heed to yourselves that you do not go up to the mountain or touch its base. Whoever touches the mountain shall surely be put to death. Not a hand shall touch him, but he shall surely be stoned or shot with an arrow; whether man or beast, he shall not live.’ When the trumpet sounds long, they shall come near the mountain.” So Moses went down from the mountain to the people and sanctified the people, and they washed their

clothes. And he said to the people, "Be ready for the third day; do not come near your wives."
"Then it came to pass on the third day, in the morning, that there were thunderings and lightnings, and a thick cloud on the mountain; and the sound of the trumpet was very loud, so that all the people who were in the camp trembled. And Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet with God, and they stood at the foot of the mountain. Now Mount Sinai was completely in smoke, because the Lord descended upon it in fire. Its smoke ascended like the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mountain quaked greatly. And when the blast of the trumpet sounded long and became louder and louder, Moses spoke, and God answered him by voice. Then the Lord came down upon Mount Sinai, on the top of the mountain. And the Lord called Moses to the top of the mountain, and Moses went up."

And immediately after the Israelites had received the Ten Commandments, directly spoken from God, we are told in Exodus 20:18, "Now all the people witnessed the thunderings, the lightning flashes, the sound of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking; and when the people saw it, they trembled and stood afar off."

And so, our Lord here spoke with divine authority, and the Revelation of His Character and Person, which we will consider next time (Lord willing), will serve to conclude the affect of this divine authority that is meant to seal the certainty of the Revelation.

Conclusion

And so, brethren, as we near the very doorway of the Revelation, which John received, we come with an understanding that all of God's people (including John the Apostle himself) share in the trials and perseverance of the Kingdom of Christ, that the whole of the Lord's Day (when faithfully observed) is a celebrated rest, which reminds us of the glory and rest to come when Christ returns, and that the certainty of all that is stated in Revelation is authenticated and guaranteed by the Lord Jesus Christ, who is our eternal God, in the Person of the Son!

And this Revelation would be sent by some courier, first to the seven churches in Asia (listed in the order in which each church would receive the Revelation, according to the logical

plan of travel, in proximity to the Island of Patmos—see the map of Asia given), and then to the churches of all times.

The Gospel

AMEN!!!

Benediction: Jude 1:24-25