

Christ's Message to the Seven Churches

Christ's Messenger on Patmos

Revelation 1:9-11

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Christ's Messenger on Patmos

Scripture

At the end of August, I started a series of messages that I have titled, "Christ's Message to the Seven Churches." It is based on the first three chapters of the Book of Revelation.

These chapters deal with Christ's message to seven churches that were located in Asia (which is in modern western Turkey). These churches existed in a time of growing cultural opposition, religious intolerance, and doctrinal error. And each church received a message from Christ to remain steadfast and faithful. And while the original messages were directed to the seven churches, Christ's priorities for his Church apply to all churches in all times.

Previously, we looked at the prologue of Christ's revelation, and Christ's greeting to his churches. Today I would like to look at Christ's messenger on Patmos.

Let's read about Christ's messenger on Patmos in Revelation 1:9-11:

⁹I, 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. ¹⁰I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet ¹¹saying, "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." (Revelation 1:9-11)

Introduction

Christians today are facing increasing opposition from the

culture. For example, the sexual and gender revolution that has taken place just in the last decade is astonishing. Albert Mohler said in a recent blog, “Christians in America now face a moment of judgment at the hands of a secular culture that grows more intensely adversarial with each passing day. Churches, institutions, and individuals committed to the Christian church’s historic sexual ethic, held consistently over two millennia, now find themselves faced with a stark choice – join the sexual revolution or face the consequences.”¹ That lends credibility to the comment that was made to a group of pastors at a lunch meeting several years ago by the President of Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia, Dr. Peter Lillback, when he said of pastors who would refuse to bow to the culture, “I fully expect to preach the gospel from prison because of my commitment to historic Christianity.”

Persecution against Christians broke out just a few years after the crucifixion, death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. On the day of Stephen’s martyrdom, we read in Acts 8:1, “And Saul approved of his execution. And there arose on that day a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles.” As the gospel spread over the decades, opposition against Christianity grew throughout the Roman Empire. By the early second century, Pliny, the Roman governor of Bithynia, said that Christianity was a “depraved and extravagant superstition” and that “the contagion of this superstition has spread not only in the cities, but in the villages and rural districts as well.”²

John MacArthur notes that Christians were hated for a number of reasons:

Politically, the Romans viewed them as disloyal because

¹ See <http://www.albertmohler.com/2016/08/30/response-david-gushee/>.

² Henry Bettenson, ed., *Documents of the Christian Church* (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), 4.

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they refused to acknowledge Caesar as the supreme authority. That disloyalty was confirmed in the eyes of the Roman officials by Christians' refusal to offer the obligatory sacrifices of worship to the emperor. Also, many of their meetings were held privately at night, causing the Roman officials to accuse them of hatching antigovernment plots.

Religiously, Christians were denounced as atheists because they rejected the Roman pantheon of gods and because they worshiped an invisible God, not an idol. Wild rumors, based on misunderstandings of Christian beliefs and practices, falsely accused them of cannibalism, incest, and other sexual perversions.

Socially, Christians, most of whom were from the lower classes of society (cf. 1 Cor. 1:26), were despised by the Roman aristocracy. The Christian teaching that all people are equal (Gal. 3:28; Col. 3:11) threatened to undermine the hierarchical structure of Roman society and topple the elite from their privileged status. It also heightened the Roman aristocracy's fear of a slave rebellion. Christians did not openly oppose slavery, but the perception was that they undermined it by teaching that master and slave were equal in Christ (cf. Philem.). Finally, Christians declined to participate in the worldly amusements that were so much a part of pagan society, avoiding festivals, the theater, and other pagan events.

Economically, Christians were seen as a threat by the numerous priests, craftsmen, and merchants who profited from idol worship. The resulting hostility, first seen in the riot at Ephesus (Acts 19:23ff.), deepened as Christianity became more widespread. . . . Pliny complained that the pagan temples had been deserted, and that those who sold sacrificial animals found few buyers.³

It was in this context that Christ gave his message to the seven churches in Asia through his messenger on Patmos.

Lesson

³ John F. MacArthur Jr., *Revelation 1–11*, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1999), 38–39.

The analysis of Christ's messenger on Patmos as set forth in Revelation 1:9-11 shows us how he received the message.

Let's use the following outline:

1. The Receiver of the Message (1:9)
2. The Reception of the Message (1:10-11)

I. The Receiver of the Message (1:9)

First, let's look at the receiver of the message.

I want us to notice his identity and his circumstances.

A. *His Identity (1:9a-b)*

First, let's see the identity of the receiver of the message.

Verse 9 begins with the words, **"I, John."** This is now the third time that he named himself in the Book of Revelation, the previous instances being in verses 1 and 4. Some commentators believe that this **John** was the Elder John rather than the Apostle **John**. However, no credible evidence exists for that view.

From the earliest time the identity of the author was considered to be the Apostle **John**. The reason he did not identify himself as the Apostle **John** is because he was well-known to the seven churches in Asia, and also because he had been the pastor of the church in Ephesus.

So, rather than identify himself as an apostle, he did identify with his readers in two ways.

1. He Was Their Brother (1:9a)

First, he was their brother.

He said in verse 9a, **"I, John, your brother."**

John MacArthur said, "John was an apostle, a member of the

inner circle of the twelve along with Peter and James, and the human author of a gospel and three epistles. Yet he humbly identified himself simply as **your brother**. He did not write as one impressed with his authority as an apostle, commanding, exhorting, or defining doctrine, but as an eyewitness to the revelation of Jesus Christ that begins to unfold with this vision.”⁴

2. He Was Their Partner (1:9b)

And second, he was their partner.

He said in verse 9b, “I, John, your brother **and partner**. . . .” John was not only their brother spiritually, but he was also their **partner**. That is, as other Bible versions translate it, he was their “co-sharer” (*Lexham English Bible*), “companion” (*New International Version*), and “fellow partaker” (*New American Standard Bible*) in three specific ways.

He was their partner **“in the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance”** (1:9b). Because Christians were members of Christ’s kingdom, he was sharing with them the increasing and growing persecution against them, which they were enduring with patience. And all of this was because they were **“in Jesus.”** That is, to be united to Christ meant to suffer with him in his kingdom, and to patiently endure it because of faith in him.

B. His Circumstances (1:9c-d)

And second, let’s see the circumstances of the receiver of the message.

1. He Was on Patmos (1:9c)

First, he was on Patmos.

⁴ John F. MacArthur Jr., *Revelation 1–11*, 40.

John went on to say that he **“was on the island called Patmos”** (1:9c). Commentator Grant Osborne says that “Ancient writers (e.g., Tacitus, Pliny) tell us that Patmos, a volcanic and rocky island, was one of three among the Sporades chain in the Aegean Sea. It was about ten miles long and six wide and was located thirty-seven miles southwest of Miletus, a harbor city near Ephesus.”⁵ Ephesus was, of course, the first of the seven churches to which the message of Christ was sent.

The question is: *Why was John on Patmos?*

2. He Was Being Punished (1:9d)

And second, he was being punished.

As opposition grew against Christianity, Christian leaders were punished by being sent to penal colonies, such as Patmos. And the reason John was banished to Patmos was, as he said in verse 9d, **“on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.”** John was banished to Patmos because he preached the word of God and because he bore testimony to Jesus Christ.

Osborne noted:

Life there was not too harsh, as indicated by its decent-size population and two gymnasia as well as a temple of Artemis. Thus John would have lived a fairly normal life as an exile on that island. . . . John was not in house arrest or in a dungeon. He had the freedom of the island, which contained at least one small town on it. Banishment meant that one was restricted to a particular locale, but exiles could take as many possessions as they wished to their new home (see Aune 1997: 79–80).⁶

John was carrying out what Christ had commissioned him to do, that is, proclaim the gospel, and because of his obedience he

⁵ Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002), 81.

⁶ Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, 81–82.

was punished by being banished to the island called Patmos.

Someone once asked, "If you were ever accused of being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict you?" Just suppose for a moment that the government suddenly decided that all Christians were to be arrested because of their activity of sharing the good news of the gospel. Would your family, your neighbors, your friends, your colleagues, and so on, be surprised that you were arrested? Or, worse, would you even be arrested?

II. The Reception of the Message (1:10-11)

Second, notice the reception of the message.

There are three things I want us to notice about the reception of the message.

A. *John Was in the Spirit (1:10a)*

First, John was in the Spirit.

John said in verse 10a, "**I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day.**" The expression "**in the Spirit**" occurs three other times in the Book of Revelation (in 4:2; 17:3; 21:10). The expression refers to the Holy Spirit enabling a vision and/or experience that was beyond the bounds of normal human apprehension. John MacArthur said, "Under the Holy Spirit's control, John was transported to a plane of experience and perception beyond that of the human senses. In that state, God supernaturally revealed things to him. Ezekiel (Ezekiel 2:2; 3:12, 14), Peter (Acts 10:9ff.), and Paul (Acts 22:17–21; 2 Corinthians 12:1ff.) had similar experiences."⁷

The expression "**on the Lord's day**" is found only here in the New Testament. This is not the same expression as "the day of the Lord" in the Old Testament. That expression referred to a

⁷ John F. MacArthur Jr., *Revelation 1–11*, 41.

future day of judgment. **“On the Lord’s day”** referred to Sunday, the day on which the Lord Jesus Christ rose from the dead. It is interesting to note how the expression came into existence. George R. Beasley-Murray writes:

The expression “the Lord’s Day” was probably modelled on the comparable *Sebaste*, i.e. “Caesar’s Day,” which in turn imitated the action of the Egyptian Ptolomy Euergetes, who named the 25th day of each month “the king’s day” in honor of his coronation on the 25th day of Dios. It is thought that Caesar’s day was observed weekly in certain areas. Evidently an unknown Christian claimed the title “the Lord’s Day” to celebrate the day when Jesus, God’s own appointed Lord of this world, rose from death to share the throne of God.⁸

So, on a Sunday, while on the island called Patmos, the Apostle John, by the enabling power of the Holy Spirit, experienced a vision of the Lord Jesus Christ.

B. John Heard a Voice (1:10b)

Second, John heard a voice.

John then said in verse 10b, **“. . . and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet.”** From verses 12-13 and 17-18 we learn that the **loud voice** belonged to the Lord Jesus Christ.

In the Book of Revelation, a **loud voice** indicates that something important is about to be revealed (cf. 5:2, 12; 6:10; 7:2; 8:13; 10:3; 11:12, 15; 12:10; 14:2, 15, 18; 16:1, 17; 21:3). Moreover, the voice, like that of a trumpet, was a reminder to the recipients of the message of God’s Law being given to his people at Mount Sinai. Something incredibly important was about to be delivered to God’s people, and they were to pay attention to it, and a trumpet

⁸ George R. Beasley-Murray, “Revelation,” in *New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition*, ed. D. A. Carson et al., 4th ed. (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994), 1426.

was used to call their attention to it: “On the morning of the third day there were thunders and lightnings and a thick cloud on the mountain and *a very loud trumpet blast*, so that all the people in the camp trembled” (Exodus 19:16).

C. *John Received Two Commands (1:11)*

And third, John received two commands.

1. He Had to Write What He Saw (1:11a)

First, he had to write what he saw.

Jesus said to John in verse 11a, **“Write what you see in a book.”** Interestingly, this is the first of twelve such commands in the Book of Revelation. In addition to this command, there is a similar command to each of the seven churches (2:1, 8, 12, 18; 3:1, 7, 14), and four more commands in the rest of the book (10:4; 14:13; 19:9; 21:5).

2. He Had to Send It to Seven Churches (1:11b)

And second, he had to send it to seven churches.

Jesus said to John in verse 11b, **“. . . 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.”** We shall say more about these cities when we study the message to each church in that city. There were other churches in Asia, such as those in Colossae, Troas, Magnesia, and Tralles. Nevertheless, it seems that these churches were chosen because, as Osborne noted, “These seven cities formed a natural center of communication for the rest of the province, since they were in order of sequence on an inner circular route through the

territory.”⁹ Moreover, “They also represented the problems of the other churches in the area. . . . As we will see, each town had its own particular set of problems but also served as examples for the other churches.”¹⁰

The reason for messages to seven churches rather than six or eleven churches is because, as commentator Steve Gregg said, “the number may here have been limited to seven because of the symbolic value of that number. Seven, being the number of completeness, could suggest that the message to the seven churches is applicable to the total church throughout the world.”¹¹

Conclusion

Therefore, having analyzed Christ's messenger on Patmos as set forth in Revelation 1:9-11, we should recognize that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

The Bible has a number of examples of those who have served God faithfully and yet have experienced great difficulty.

Joseph was extremely ill-treated by his brothers. After his father died, his brothers came to him and again asked his forgiveness. Joseph said to them in Genesis 50:20, “As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today.”

The Apostle John was faithful in his service to Christ. He was an apostle, author, and pastor of the church at Ephesus. And yet because of his faithful and obedience to Christ, he was banished to the island called Patmos. What seemed a difficulty at the time, God used for good. John wrote the Book of Revelation that has concluded God's written word to his people.

⁹ Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, 85.

¹⁰ Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, 85.

¹¹ Steve Gregg, *Revelation, Four Views: A Parallel Commentary* (Nashville, TN: T. Nelson Publishers, 1997), Re 1:9–11.

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Dear fellow Christian, continue to serve Christ faithfully, even when difficulties or trials come into your life. Amen.

Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ
and membership in his church family,
develop them to Christlike maturity,
equip them for their ministry in the church
and life mission in the world,
in order to magnify God's name.*

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PRAYER:

Our Father, thank you for Christ's messenger on Patmos.

He was banished there because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ. He was faithful in his service to Christ, and yet experienced the trial and difficulty of exile. Nevertheless, what was meant for evil against him, you meant for God, because Christ's message to the seven churches was revealed to him, and we benefit and learn from those messages even today.

So, help each one of us to remain faithful and committed to Christ, serving him no matter what the cost.

And for all of this I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

BENEDICTION:

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and always. Amen.

CHARGE:

Now, brothers and sisters, go and serve God wholeheartedly!