

Study Two -- Revelation 1:9-20

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.

Notice John uses no title. He wasn't the Apostle John, Prophet John, Bishop John or Archbishop John. He was simply John, a brother and companion. Any revelation doesn't flow through who the man or woman delivering the revelation, but comes from the One who reveals. The focus is or should be on Jesus, not on Jesus' messengers.

What is John a companion to? Three things: suffering, the kingdom and patient endurance in Jesus. These aren't the three most attractive "selling points" of a relationship with Jesus.

The Bible has much to say about suffering, and Jesus left an example that we are expected follow: an example of patient suffering.

ASSIGNMENT: Are you suffering? Have you been trying to avoid the suffering that is part of your development and discipleship? Perhaps it would be good this week to read Peters first epistle. It has much to say about suffering and how to handle it. As you read, write down what you "see."

Suffering and the kingdom are connected somehow in this verse. When we suffer, we tend to rely on God more and all out for His help.

When Paul and Barnabas revisited a church they had planted, they "encouraged" them with the words found in Acts 14:21-22: "They preached the good news in that city and won a large number of disciples. Then they returned to Lystra, Iconium and Antioch, strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to remain true to the faith. 'We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God,' they said."

John was in exile on this little island because of two things: the word of God and testimony of Jesus. Those two things will get you into the kind of trouble that brings suffering and requires patient endurance to come through.

What does it mean to be "in Jesus?" Colossians 3:3 states, "For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God." Think of that: Your life is hidden in Christ. That means for something to get to you, it must get through Him first. That will change your whole perspective on suffering and tribulation. Jesus has pre-approved it!

10 On the Lord's Day I was in the Spirit, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet,

John was "in the Spirit." It is of note that he saw more clearly what was taking place in the seven churches than those who were physically present there. When you are in the Spirit, you can see things more clearly than with your natural eyes. Ask God to help you today see your life or some other situation "in the Spirit."

God is a great communicator. He gets His message across with a loud voice. But Elisha heard a still, small voice. What a difference Jesus makes! Through Jesus, God speaks to mankind loud and clear. When His voice isn't heard, it's because people ignore it or something is speaking more loudly.

Our goal is to get in the Spirit so we can hear this voice as loudly as John did. There is no doubt that John received a clear revelation that was from God. It was loud.

11 which said: "Write on a scroll what you see and send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea."

John was ordered to write down what he *saw*. Yet he *heard* a loud voice like a trumpet. How did he receive the revelation: by hearing or seeing? When you hear the voice of God, it brings vision so that you see as well. But you see with the eyes of your heart, not with natural eyes.

It is important to write down what you see. We are back to the issue of journaling again. You need some system to record what the Lord is revealing to you. Then you need to share it with someone, just like John did. A faithful witness passes on what he or she sees and hears.

Once you write things down, it helps to have a distribution network that can read and benefit from what you have written. With email today, it isn't hard to send something all over the world for little expense.

There were seven churches and the number seven is the number of completion and perfection. Therefore, the message of Revelation was for the entire church at that time and for the Church in the years to come.

There were no denominations in that day, only city churches. There is a move to reestablish this situation in the modern church. I think that movement is doomed to failure. Denominations are here to stay and the variety they offer is a good thing, not the evil that some consider it to be. How

in the world could they be a city church in a city that has millions of people? I don't think it is possible, nor will I work to help make it happen.

12 I turned around to see the voice that was speaking to me. And when I turned I saw seven golden lampstands,

Why was the voice behind John? Why not speak to him face to face? This made John turn to see the voice; when we hear the voice of God, we must still be in active mode. This was a simple action that showed John was attentive and interested. You receive revelation by faith, and faith always requires some action (see James 2:17). **What can you do with your faith this week?**

John did not see what he thought he would see when he turned. Instead of seeing who was speaking to him, he saw seven gold lampstands. That is why it is important to be ready to act when God speaks. Your action will help you see more than what you hear.

The lampstands were gold. Gold is a metal that is durable and strong. It is the metal of kings. But it must go through a process to become like that. The Church, represented by the lampstands, is golden, symbolizing it belongs to the King and has been purified and processed to be pure and valuable.

To a great extent, suffering is what purifies the "gold" in us.

13 and among the lampstands was someone "like a son of man," dressed in a robe reaching down to his feet and with a golden sash around his chest.

Jesus is walking among the churches. This is reminiscent of God walking in the garden in Genesis 3. If you are in church leadership, it is good to remember that you serve as an undershepherd. It's not your church; it belongs to God. You serve not at your own pleasure, but at God's pleasure.

Notice that the "son of man" was dressed in the normal dress of the day. He didn't have on a business suit. God relates to man according to the culture of the day, including the language, dress, and customs. God makes Himself relevant in the context of each generation.

Yet each generation can try to force all others to see God as they saw Him, using their cultural and generational music, customs, or language. That would be a mistake.

A lampstand is something that holds candles, which give off light. The church is to hold the candle of Christ and allow His light to illuminate the world around. The lampstand doesn't own the candles, it just holds the candles. The church doesn't own Christ; it simply "contains" Him for the world to see.

14 His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and his eyes were like blazing fire.

This is poetic language. The apostle John would have recognized Jesus the man, for he certainly spent enough time with Him. But this Jesus was different. Jesus never changes, but how you perceive Him can change. One time He can be warm and intimate; another time, He can be scary and unfamiliar. There are many facets to God and no one comprehends them all.

That is a significant truth, for we often take our perspective of the revealed Christ and try to put that forth as the only perspective there is. There is more to Christ than what I see and know. That is why I need you and your perspective if I am to see and know the whole Christ.

15 His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of rushing waters.

If you turn around and behold the sight of this Christ, it will definitely get your attention! I am sure John was describing Jesus as best he could, with analogies and metaphors that were most descriptive for him. Jesus allows Himself to be interpreted according to our experiences and vocabulary.

In spite of this poetic description, Jesus was and is a man, just like you and me, except that he was and is without sin. It is hard to imagine that our flesh sits at the right hand of God! Someone who understands us, even though He is exalted on high, is talking to God the Father about us. Praise the Lord!

16 In his right hand he held seven stars, and out of his mouth came a sharp double-edged sword. His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance.

There is the number seven again. What do stars represent? They mostly come out at night, so they are light in the midst of darkness. Around Jesus it is never completely dark at any time. Thank you, Lord.

God used a star to guide the wise men to find the baby Jesus, so stars can also be a source of guidance.

I often want a word from the Lord, but it is a double-edged. It cuts going in and coming out. A word from God will destroy everything that isn't from God in my life and that can cause pain and tribulation.

17 When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. Then he placed his right hand on me and said: "Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last.

Although John was old and had served the Lord for many years, he was still overcome by the presence of God. We should never get “used to” that presence. It should always inspire awe.

If Jesus didn’t want John to fear, why did He appear in such an overwhelming fashion?

John knew Jesus “in the flesh,” but when he saw Him as the revelator, he fell down as a dead man. When people say, “Lord, I want your presence,” do we really understand that God may not come in a form that is pleasant or intimate?

A pastor once said, “When God says to anyone ‘Fear not,’ it’s generally too late!” Think of all the cases in the Bible when the Lord said, “Fear not.” At that point, something had already happened to make that person fearful!

Saying “Fear not” doesn’t mean there’s the absence of fear, but the need to carry on in the midst of something fearful.

Jesus repeats what was stated in verse 8. He is the beginning, the Alpha, and the end, the Omega. Everything starts and ends with him.

Thus any pursuit that doesn’t start or end with an awareness of Jesus and His will is an exercise in futility.

**18 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.**

If anyone holds the keys, they are in charge. They open and close at will or at least as someone directs them. What gave Jesus this authority? His resurrection! If you have eternal life, then any power that doesn’t is secondary, even irrelevant.

Hades is just the term for the realm of the dead and not for hell.

This is real power: to assign people to their eternal place. Imagine what this meant to the early church under persecution. Jesus had the real power, even though temporal rulers could kill someone in the flesh, they could not kill anyone in the spirit world. Jesus rules supreme there.

If you believe that God raised Jesus from the dead, then your faith is strong! You can believe God for anything.

By Jesus’ own testimony, He was dead. Not like a dead man or in some coma-like state. He was dead. But now also by His own testimony, He is alive forever.

19 "Write, therefore, what you have seen, what is now and what will take place later.

Because Jesus is in charge, He orders John to write down what he knows about the past, present and future.

How is your journal coming? Are you behind in your entries? Don't give up; keep writing!

20 **The mystery of the seven stars that you saw in my right hand and of the seven golden lampstands is this: The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches.**

Scripture often interprets itself. Here we see that the seven stars represent the seven angels of the churches to which the revelation is addressed. Whenever possible, allow the Bible to interpret what it means. Don't do that on your own.

It seems that each of these churches had an angel assigned to it. What this angel is, we can only speculate. We cannot assume that they were guardian angels, nor can we assume that this referred to the church leaders, for the word angel there can be translated messenger.

We must establish now that there is much about Revelation we don't understand and never will. Best not to try and force an interpretation where there isn't one that is clear or convincing.

The backdrop of Revelation is a church under pressure from persecution. What we have seen thus far is another spirit realm where Jesus rules supreme, having conquered death. There is no mention of the existing governments; they have no place in the spiritual focus of this church.

Jesus main concern isn't politics, commerce, economics or even individuals. His concern is His church and its condition, which for the most part wasn't very good. That is still Jesus' concern today.

ASSIGNMENT: We must always work at and grow in our knowledge of God. To that end, why not choose a spiritual book, video or audio cassette that has some spiritual perspective and read it this month? Let God speak to you through something that talks about Him. Let this reading or listening supplement your Bible reading.