



Sermon Series Notes

“My Fingerprint and the Will of God” (Revelation 1)

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1:1 The writer: John the apostle was the brother of James, and their dad’s name was Zebedee. They both left their father and the family fishing business to become full time followers of Jesus Christ. Jesus early on dubbed them the “sons of thunder,” which tells us they both had pretty hot tempers (Mark 3:17; John 9:54). But over time both men became more like Jesus, and John became known as “The disciple whom Jesus loved.” John’s brother was beheaded by Herod Agrippa I in 44 A.D. (Acts 12:1-2). At the cross Jesus gave John the responsibility of caring for his mother, Mary (John 19:25-27). Historians tell us that in time John moved to Ephesus, taking Mary with him and caring for her until her death. Paul the apostle, with the help of Priscilla & Aquilla, planted the church at Ephesus (Acts/date?). In A.D. 67 Paul was beheaded in Rome under the rule of Nero. After Paul’s death, Timothy remained in Ephesus to pastor the church (1 Tim.1:3). At age 80 Timothy was attacked & killed by a pagan mob on the streets of Ephesus. No doubt John attended his funeral. By the time John wrote the book of Revelation, he was the last survivor of the 12 apostles, and had himself provided oversight to the churches of Asia Minor for almost 30 years. As a result, his voice carried more weight than anyone else in the region, as well as the entire Christian world. Believers all over the Roman were suffering persecution, and facing great temptation in a very pagan culture. John’s letter brought encouragement, and to some needed rebuke as well.

1:4 Isaiah 11:2 The Spirit of the LORD will rest on him – the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of power, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord.

1:5 The preeminent one from among the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. For John to write this took genuine faith because of the situation he finds himself in at this time. More about that in a minute.

1:8 The Eternal One

1:9 The word for suffering here is “thlipsis, and is used to describe events that make one feel trapped, pinned to the wall, unable to move or negotiate a way out of your circumstance. But because John knew the kingdom he had become a part of through his faith in Jesus Christ was one he would dwell in soon, he had patient endurance through the trials he faced.

The word that describes how John ended up on the isle of Patmos is “ginomai,” and it conveys a sense of shock or surprise, something that happens unexpectedly or that catches on off guard. It’s like John was saying “In a way I could have never expected, predicted, or anticipated, I came to find myself on the island of Patmos.”

Patmos is located 24 miles off the coast of modern day Turkey (ancient Asia Minor), and is approx. 60 miles from the ancient city of Ephesus. It is 10 miles long & 6 miles wide. In the day John wrote this book, Patmos was a prison where the Roman government sent its most dangerous political offenders-murderers, thieves, rapists, insurrectionists, etc. Patmos was the “Alcatraz” of the first century. John was sent there by the emperor Domitian, his crime being faith in Jesus Christ and proclaiming that faith openly and publicly.

Early church leaders such as Irenaeus, Eusebius, & Jerome wrote that John was banished from Ephesus when Domitian was in his fourteenth year as ruler. This would mean John arrived on Patmos in A.D. 95. He was in his nineties!

One day the elderly apostle John was at his home in Ephesus, somewhere around the year 93 A.D. Roman soldiers suddenly appeared and arrested him, chained and shackled him, and put him on a ship that carried him to Rome where he would stand trial before the emperor. Domitian had declared himself "Perpetual Censor." That gave him the legal right to set the moral code for the empire. It also gave him the right to censor or eliminate any part of society he deemed offensive or unnecessary, and any person or group that stood opposed to his ideals. Not long after declaring himself "Perpetual Censor," he also declared himself "lord" & "god." Other emperors were deified after death, but Domitian wanted to receive worship while he lived. He constructed temples in his honor and created a priesthood to help people worship him. As John stood before him, Domitian ordered that John burn incense in worship or be killed. John refused, and Domitian was enraged. He ordered that John be thrown into a vat of boiling oil. God performed a miracle and John climbed out of the oil unharmed. Domitian was terrified, and ordered John banished forever to Patmos.

1:10-11 The Lord's day is the translation of a Greek word that was used primarily to describe the "Emperor's Day." The first day of each month was a day when the ruling Roman emperor was especially honored. This means that Jesus chose to reveal himself to John on the very day that the entire Roman Empire was celebrating the supposed deity of Domitian. So while the whole world was worshipping a fraudulent and evil ruler, the King of kings and Lord of Lords stepped into the forsaken place where John was exiled and revealed Himself in all His glory.

John is told to write what he sees and send it to the seven churches. Other churches existed in Asia Minor in this day, such as Colossae, Derbe, Hierapolis, Iconium, Lystra, etc. So why did he choose these particular seven? Because the cities they were in were of the largest in the region, therefore the congregations were the largest, and therefore had the greatest influence on other churches in Asia Minor. They were also the oldest churches in the province, and were therefore expected to be examples to the church at large. The problems addressed in these seven churches are common problems faced by other local congregations of the day, but also potential problems for churches throughout the entire church age.

1:12 Seven **golden** lampstands. In verse 20 we are told these lampstands are the seven churches. They are golden because, in God's eyes, his people are valuable, precious & pure.

- Hebrews 10:14...by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy.

1:13a "son of man" was a Messianic title John was very familiar with. It comes from Daniel 7:13, where Messiah is seen coming with the clouds of heaven at the end of the age. He approaches the Ancient of Days and was given authority, glory and sovereign power. All peoples, nations, and men of every language worshipped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.

By the way, not long after Domitian banished John to Patmos, he was murdered a close associate.

Reference "A Light in Darkness," p.23; From Augustus Caesar who was reigning when Christ was born in Bethlehem, until Constantine, there were 57 Roman emperors. That covers a little more than 300 years of human history. When Jesus comes to reign, he will reign forever!

1:13b Priestly robe

- Hebrews 2:16-17 For surely it is not angels he helps, but Abraham's descendants. For this reason he had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God...

- Hebrews 4:15 For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are – yet was without sin.
- Hebrews 7:24-25...because Jesus lives forever, he has a permanent priesthood. Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them.

1:13c It was customary for kings in the ancient world to wear large belts fashioned of gold and positioned high up on their chests. This allowed the king's royal robe to flow more freely. A belt made of pure gold would only be worn by a king with immense wealth, power, and authority.

1:14a Daniel 7:9 As I looked thrones were set in place, and the Ancient of Days took his seat. His clothing was as white as snow; the hair of his head was white like wool...

Purity, holiness, without spot or wrinkle or any other blemish.

Repeatedly God told Israel that whenever they offered a lamb for the Passover sacrifice, it was to be without blemish.

I Peter 1:18-19 For you know it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.

Eph.5:27...to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish...

1:14b Eyes like blazing fire - Penetrating scrutiny

- Hebrews 4:13 Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.
- He not only sees us when we sin, he sees us when we suffer.

1:15a Feet like bronze glowing in a furnace – Divine judge

- II Thess.1:4-10

1:15b Voice was like the sound of rushing waters

- Psalm 29:3ff The voice of the Lord is over the waters; the God of glory thunders...the voice of the Lord is powerful; the voice of the lord is majestic. The voice of the Lord breaks the cedars; the Lord breaks in pieces the cedars of Lebanon...the voice of the lord strikes with flashes of lightning. The voice of the lord shakes the desert...the voice of the Lord shakes the oaks and strips the forests bare. And in his temple all cry, "Glory!"

1:16a Verse 20 will tell us that the seven stars are the messengers, or pastors of the seven churches.

1:16b Romans had many types of swords, but none were as feared as the "rhomphaia." Its two-edged blade was so razor sharp that it could cut through most armor.

1:17a John had seen & heard Jesus many times in his life, but never before like this. Even the Mt. of Transfiguration experience pales in comparison. This appearance of Jesus is so awesome and overwhelming that John falls to his feet as though dead.

1:17b-18 The First and the Last is similar to the Alpha and Omega. Christ was assuring John that everything in the world was under His control, that nothing had taken Him by surprise.

The word for "behold" is packed with explosive feelings of shock and wonder. It could also be translated "Wow-imagine that!" or "Isn't it amazing!"

Jesus holds the keys to death and the grave. This would have been especially encouraging to John. He has been through many trials, and as a seasoned saint now in his nineties is having to endure perhaps his most severe trial yet, imprisoned on the Alcatraz of the ancient world.

The Greek tense for Jesus telling John to not be afraid conveys redundancy, implying that Jesus repeatedly said to John "Don't be afraid."

LESSONS

I totally intended to move through chapter one and then teach mainly on the message to the church at Ephesus from the first part of chapter two. But the Lord led me differently. The title God gave me for this message is "My Fingerprint & the Will of God."

I was especially fascinated in this particular study to learn about two Greek words used in verse 9. The first was the word "thlipsis."

- Thlipsis: Trapped, pinned to the wall, unable to move or negotiate a way out of your circumstance.

The second word was the Greek word John used to describe how he found himself on the island of Patmos (v.9).

- "Ginomai," conveys a sense of shock or surprise, something that happens unexpectedly or that catches one off guard. It's like John was saying "In a way I could have never expected, predicted, or anticipated, I came to find myself on the island of Patmos."

When John applies these two words to his situation on the island of Patmos, it tells us that he was shocked to find himself in this situation, and would have loved to negotiate a way out if possible, unless of course it went against God's will. That helps me greatly to see John's humanity. He was just like us. Ah, but while he is just like us, God's will for his life had his personal finger print alone. See John 21:18-24a.

There is a general will of God for all believers

- I Thess.5:18 Give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.
- I Thess.4:3 It is God's will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality.
- I Peter 2:15 For it is God's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish men.
- Matthew 28:19-20

There is a personal will of God that has my fingerprint alone

- John 21:18-24a
- John's brother James was beheaded; John the Baptist died in jail, while Peter was miraculously released (Acts 12);

May be challenging to accept

- "In a way I could have never expected, predicted, or anticipated, I came to find myself on the island of Patmos."
- Trapped, pinned to the wall, unable to move or negotiate a way out of your circumstance.
- It may be perplexing
- II Cor.4:8-9 We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed.

Can create doubts about God

- John the Baptist (Luke 7:18-19)
- Psalm 73:1-4, 12-16; Jer.12:1

May be painful

- Paul's thorn in the flesh – II Cor.12:7...a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to **torment** me. Same word used as in Matt.26:67 for them striking Jesus with their fists, which is literally what the word means.

Can involve miraculous healing and/or deliverance

Can involve miraculous healing and/or deliverance, then later suffering and/or death.

- Peter was delivered from prison in Acts 12 but would one day die as a martyr.

Usually not revealed in advance

- John 21 Jesus told Peter he would one day die a martyr's death, but only said when you are "old." He did not reveal anything to John about his future and how he would die. Peter thought it was Jesus' will for John to remain alive until the second coming.

Faith & patient endurance are mandatory in order to please the Lord

- I John, your brother and companion in the suffering and kingdom and **patient endurance** that are ours in Jesus...

No matter what circumstances we find ourselves in, God says:

- Hebrews 13:5-6...Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you. So we say with confidence, The Lord is my helper...
- Read Romans 8:28-37, then have everyone read below
- Romans 8:38-39 For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.
- Mark 6:45-51; Jesus seeing the disciples in the storm, walking out to them, would have passed by; If we are going to survive the storms of this life, we must learn to live by faith.

Requirement to find and remain in the will of God: Rom.12:1-2

INVITATION

- After Domitian's death, John was granted amnesty and returned to Ephesus. He delivered the messages to the seven churches, as well as the complete book of the Revelation. His mission now completed, John the apostle died shortly thereafter. That was God's will for John. What about God's will for you?
- Some of us may be doing great in life right now. But we do not know what God may have for us down the road; Things can change in a way we never expected, predicted, or anticipated. May the Lord help us to accept it, and have patient endurance through it.
- Some of us are in that place in life similar to Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. Jesus asked the Father if there was any other way, yet not my will, yours be done. We'd like to be healed of the cancer, we'd like to by-pass whatever cross is in front of us. Are we willing to pray, yet not my will, yours be done?

