

As I mentioned last week, Revelation is a book written for suffering Christians to comfort them in the midst of their trials. And it's only fitting, then, for John to begin this first main part of the book talking about his own suffering as a Christian. He says in verse 9: "I, 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." Patmos, now, was a little island, about ten miles long and about five miles wide, roughly fifty miles southwest of the city of Ephesus. It was a very isolated island, a very rocky island, and not many people lived there, just like today. But John was not on this island by his own choice. He had been sent there, away from the city of Ephesus. Because John had been living and preaching and teaching in the city of Ephesus, but the governor of that region decided that he didn't like the Christians in that area. He decided that they were a problem, that they needed to be dealt with. And so he decided to make an example of John. Get rid of the leader, and the rest of the body will fall in line! That certainly must've been what he thought. And so he banished John from the city of Ephesus to live on the island of Patmos. John, therefore, is not only struggling with the reality of being so isolated, of being so far away from civilization. John is also struggling with the disgrace of having been driven out of the city like a troublemaker. These are the things that he was suffering as he wrote the book of Revelation.

So this is why John says, then, that he is a brother and a partner to the tribulation that the Christians were experiencing at that time. John was not far off, clueless about what was actually happening. He's not just telling them what to do without having any skin in the game. John knows exactly what they're going through. John's going through it himself. He's suffering with them, writing this book in a kind of prison. And so if he had been sent into exile, we can only imagine what the other Christians were suffering along with them. A government which was trying to drive them out of the area or get rid of them. I'm sure they had neighbors who were trying to turn them in to get them into trouble. And that's to say nothing of the great pressure which they felt to just go along with the crowd, to just stop being different. Stop being weird. Stop being a Christian, so that you won't cause so much trouble. These Christians, then, needed something to hold on to. They needed some kind of strength to help them get through these things. But where were they going to find it? Where could they go? How could they stand firm through all the trials that they must face?

But in this situation, then, one Sunday on the island of Patmos, John received a great vision, the vision of this whole book. We are told in verse 10: "I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet." Now remember, the book of Revelation is a symbolic book. Everything that it says here is meant to teach us something. That's the purpose of all of these pictures. So for John to describe this voice like a trumpet means that it is the voice of God. It is the divine voice come down from heaven. In the Old Testament, for example, when God appeared to Moses on Mount Sinai, we are told that Israel heard the sound of a great trumpet. Exodus chapter 19 says: "As the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder, Moses spoke, and God answered him in thunder." So the same is true also here. This voice which is speaking to him, sounding like a trumpet, is God's voice, commanding him to write down everything that he sees in the vision ahead.

But now John turns around to see who's talking with him, and on turning around he sees seven golden lampstands. We're told at the end of this chapter that these seven lampstands represent the seven churches: one for Ephesus, one for Smyrna, and so forth. So that's why they are there.

They are a picture of the churches to which he is writing. But seven, as we remember, is a perfect number. It is a complete number. So the fact that there are seven lampstands shows that it's not just these seven churches in Asia Minor. It's the whole church, including you and me, everyone who believes in God. They are depicted here as lampstands before our Lord Jesus Christ. And this is the first thing that John sees.

Now, we might wonder: why would he talk about this first? Think about everything that he's seeing right now. He's literally seeing Jesus in all of his glory. You'd think that he would talk about Jesus first and maybe get to the lampstands later. It almost seems like John is missing the point by talking about these lampstands first. But he's not missing the point, Christians. In fact, he's making a very serious point here. Whenever we want to see Jesus, whenever we want to be with him, we don't go looking for him somewhere out in the world, somewhere just generally out in the creation. We go to where he has promised to be: with his Church, with the people of God, his body. That's where we will find him. Jesus himself says, Luke chapter 10: "The one who hears you hears me, and the one who rejects you rejects me, and the one who rejects me rejects him who sent me." Jesus is so closely connected to his Church that whenever his Church speaks they are hearing him at the same time.

But Jesus is not only with his Church. He is also among his Church. We're told in verse 13: "In the midst of the lampstands one like a son of man." Jesus is walking among his Church. He is not far off somewhere, unconcerned about what's happening to us. He is not far off, totally oblivious to what is happening to his Church on earth. Jesus is here. Jesus is walking among his people. Jesus is suffering right there along with them. He knows what we're going through, Christians. He's with us every step of the way. And what a great comfort it is for suffering Christians to know that our Lord Jesus Christ is with us and among us always!

But John continues with his vision, verse 13: "One like a Son of Man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash around his chest." Jesus, in other words, is dressed like the high priest. Because in the Old Testament, the high priest also wore a robe that went all the way down to his feet, just like Jesus. And this sash around his chest shows his high rank. It shows how exalted he is, how far up. Because a common man wore his sash around his waist like a belt. It was a lot easier to tuck in your tunic that way whenever you needed to work. But an aristocrat, somebody who is important, wore up around his chest to show how important he was. So for Jesus to have his belt, essentially, around his chest shows that he is indeed the high priest, the highest of priests. And that is also a great comfort for us, to know that Jesus is our high priest, the one who prays for us to the Father. Hebrews chapter 4 says: "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need." What a great comfort it is, Christians, for those who are suffering to know that we have a high priest who knows exactly what we're going through, because he went through it himself. And he prays for us to the Father at all times, helping us in every time of need.

John continues with his description of Jesus, starting in verse 14: "The hairs of his head were white, like white wool, like snow. His eyes were like a flame of fire, his feet were like burnished bronze, refined in a furnace, and his voice was like the roar of many waters. In his right hand he held seven stars, from his mouth came a sharp two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun

shining in full strength." This picture, Christians, is also meant as a comfort to us, because it says something about who Jesus is.

These signs show us, for example, that he is, in fact, God. His hair is white, not just because that's its color, but because it shows that he is God, that he is one with the Father. We know this because in the book of Daniel, Daniel sees a vision of God in heaven. And this is what he says, Daniel chapter 7: "As I looked, thrones were placed, and the Ancient of Days took his seat; his clothing was white as snow, and the hair of his head like pure wool; his throne was fiery flames; its wheels were burning fire." So his white hair, then, shows that he is God. And the same is also true of his face shining like the sun, shining with the glory that belongs only to God. And his voice like the roar of many waters also shows that he is God. Just like it being described as a trumpet, this shows that he is divine. Ezekiel chapter 43 says: "Behold, the glory of the God of Israel was coming from the east. And the sound of his coming was like the sound of many waters, and the earth shone with his glory." All of these details, then, Christians, show us that this is not just an ordinary man. The one who helps us is not just a man, but he is more than a man, because he is God, the Almighty Lord himself. And what a comfort it is to know that God is on our side through all of our troubles!

But Jesus not only comes to bring help to his people. He also comes to bring them justice, to give judgment against those who oppress them. This is why his eyes are described as being like fire: eyes that see everything, eyes that judge all things. If you remember back in Daniel which I just read, the throne of God is described as being on fire. And that throne was a throne of judgment. It's the same thing. And the sword coming out of his mouth also shows this judgment. It shows that he is the judge. Isaiah 11 says: "With righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; and he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked." We see here, then, a picture of Jesus as the one who judges all things, as the one who will bring justice to his people.

And he is a righteous judge, pure and holy in all of his ways. This is why his feet are described as being like bronze refined in a furnace, like bronze which is still hot from coming out of the fire. Because this idea of feet is often used in the Bible to describe how somebody lives. Proverbs chapter 4 says: "Ponder the path of your feet; then all your ways will be sure. Do not swerve to the right or to the left; turn your foot away from evil." And metal which is heated in a furnace is a picture of purity. It's like all the impurities have been burned away. Psalm 12 says: "The words of the Lord are pure words, like silver refined in a furnace on the ground, purified seven times." So our Lord, Christians, is the judge who is righteous and holy and pure, and he brings a judgment which is righteous and holy and pure, because he gives justice to his people. What a great comfort it is for suffering Christians to know that this judge who judges all things is on our side!

But there's one more detail in this picture that gives us great comfort, and that is the seven stars in his right hand. We are told at the end of this chapter that the seven stars represent the seven angels of the churches. And these seven stars, these seven angels are so closely connected to these churches that when God speaks to the angels he's actually speaking to that church. We'll see that very clearly as we go forward into Revelation 2 and 3. But what that means, then, is that these stars are another picture of God's Church, of the care and concern that he has for them. Because they are in his right hand, and God's right hand is a hand of power. It is a hand of

strength, a hand of safety, a hand of salvation. We're told in Isaiah 41: "Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand." For those stars, then, to be in his right hand, Christians, means that he cares for them, that he's concerned for them, that they are safe no matter what may be attacking them in the world. What a great comfort it is to know that Jesus so cares about us that he holds us in his mighty hand!

But just in case we were unclear about all of this, in case we still didn't understand what was happening here, Jesus makes it perfectly clear. He says, beginning in verse 17: "Fear not, I am the first and the last, and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades." Jesus is the First and the Last, the one who controls all things. Why should we be afraid of what may happen when all of our ways are under his control? Jesus is the Living One, the one whom not even death could hold in the grave. Why should we fear what men can do to us when Jesus is alive forevermore? Jesus is the one who holds the keys of Death and Hades, the one who has command even over the power of death. Why should we worry about what may happen in the world around us? Because even if we die, Christians, Jesus is still the Lord.

And that is the purpose of everything that John sees here in this part of Revelation: to give us comfort, to give us courage, to give us hope. Our God knows what we are going through. Our God will deliver us from our enemies. Our God holds us in his hand. Our God walks among us even in our suffering, even in our troubles. Our God is with us forever! So don't be afraid about what may happen in the world, Christians. Don't worry about a world which seems to be spiraling out of control. Jesus is alive forevermore! And he will lead us through all of these things to his victory which will never come to an end. When we see this picture of Jesus, we can rejoice and take comfort, because it shows us that our God is with us. And if God is with us, who can be against us?

Let us pray. Lord Jesus Christ, the First and the Last and the Living One, be with us through every trouble, and strengthen us to stand firm even when the world fights against us, so that we may follow after you without wavering; for you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.