

REVELATION 1:9-20

What's the wildest piece of mail you've ever received?

We've LONG been conditioned to question whether mail is even REAL anymore. (see: The Nigerian Prince scam) So now imagine you open your mailbox or inbox Monday morning and there's a letter from Jesus. How quickly do you SPAM the email or trash the letter?

And yet here in Revelation there are 7 churches in 7 cities set to get a letter with the words of Jesus himself. AFTER his death and resurrection, a messenger shows up to each of these seven churches and says, "you've got mail... from Jesus."

THE RECIPIENT

I, John, am your brother and your partner in suffering and in God's Kingdom and in the patient endurance to which Jesus calls us. I was exiled to the island of Patmos for preaching the word of God and for my testimony about Jesus.

I'm not sure anyone in HISTORY could fill a biography quite like John.

He met Jesus as a young man, in his teens or twenties. He became one of Jesus' twelve disciples, and we see in the Gospels that he was one of the three that Jesus held a close kinship with and took almost anywhere. So he witnessed as much of the healings, miracles, exorcisms as anyone. He was one of the three disciples to witness the Transfiguration.

He was one of the three disciples who Jesus took with him into the Garden of Gethsemane.

He was the only disciple who was there as Jesus died on the cross.

He was there with Peter at the empty tomb when it was discovered he had risen.

He was there when Jesus ascended to Heaven.

He went on to write not only his Gospel account of all of the above, but also 1, 2, and 3 John as well as Revelation.

And as he lived into old age he saw all the other disciples murdered, martyred, and killed.

According to church history John himself was nearly a martyr, as officials *tried* to kill him in boiling oil, but he didn't die.

So... simple and plain... this guy has been through a lot. Highs and lows. Peaks and valleys.

And now he's exiled on the rocky, rough, and rugged terrain of Patmos - the equivalent of Rome's Alcatraz- well into his old age, many putting him between 90 and 100. Here he's living out the end of his life amidst this penal colony that's about a mile wide and 6 miles long.

It's here that Jesus comes to John...

Visions can come in a place of banishment.

Nobody and nothing can banish you from God's presence.

Nobody and nothing can shut the open door to the throne-room of Heaven Jesus opened.

Psalm 23 says his rod and his staff are with us in the valley. It says he prepares a table for us in the presence of our enemies. And he can meet with on our personal and proverbial Patmos.

John was experiencing the truth of **Psalm 139**, that we never want to actually test the veracity of: *I can never get away from your presence! ...if I dwell by the farthest oceans, [exiled on tiny islands] even there your hand will guide me, and your strength will support me.*

No personal Patmos can strip your worship of its power.
The question is if Jesus walked in while you were in your worst circumstances...
Would he find you worshipping? Do you praise even on your worst days?

It's what he finds John doing. Worshipping.

Jesus doesn't show up to provide answers to individual questions for a friend who'd been through so much.

God knows that more often than not we don't need company in our **WOE IS ME**.

We need a reminder of **WHO IS HE**.

When circumstances engulf my vision, I need a fresh picture of who God is and who I am in Him

When I'm at my lowest my hope is *still* built on nothing less than Jesus blood and righteousness.

When I'm at my lowest I need a reminder of who **HE** is.

Jesus shows up in ALL his glory.

John's response? Oh he falls down as if dead. It's a typical response in scripture.

It's why the #1 command in the Bible is what? **FEAR NOT**.

But then Jesus gives John a second command... get up, and let's talk about the church.

Jesus almost immediately redirects his concern and focus to ***the church***.

The same way he replaces **woe is ME** with **who is HE**.

He shifts the focus from a **ME** to a **WE**.

And yet where do we see Jesus walking?

When I turned to see who was speaking to me, I saw seven gold lampstands.

And standing in the middle of the lampstands was someone like the Son of Man.

God tells us simple and plain – **these seven lampstands are the seven churches**.

When we think of symbols and the Jewish people, our minds may go to the star of David,

But historically the star was nowhere near as commonly used or significant as the lampstand, or

menorah. God introducing the age of the Church – where “his people” is neither Jew or Gentile,

black or white, red or blue – but we're all His people under the blood of Christ in the Church.

This passage is so powerful because there is no other place in scripture where it shows this clearly that God is walking and working amidst his church.

And again – the 7 churches these lampstands represent – they are unhealthy. Some atrophied or all but dead. But where is Jesus? Still with the Church.

Even though it's not perfect. Even though it can miss the mark. Even though it's run by humans.

It's the vessel he uses.

Jesus also holds **seven stars**, the seven angels or some translation say seven messengers of the churches. Different commentaries will lean different ways... the carriers of the letter, the pastors of those churches, or guardian angels of those churches. We don't know for sure.

But the seven stars is interesting because for much of human history it was commonly held that there were 7 planets that orbited around the Earth. Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, the Sun, and the Moon. This became the infallible stance with the big thinkers of Greek culture.

It's called the **Geocentric Model**

On surface level it makes sense, because standing on the surface of the earth- the earth doesn't *seem* to move, everything *seems* to be moving around the Earth.

It wasn't until the late 16th century that we moved away from Geocentrism.

We slowly realized and discovered – as much as it seems everything revolves around the Earth- it's moving at 67,000 miles per hour around the sun.

When we're born it seems like the world revolves around us. We're born with a **Meocentric model**. Family is like the school of love where we learn the world is bigger than just us. And that awareness grows as WE grow.

And just as the earth was created and set in orbit around the sun, you were made a new creation upon repentance and set in orbit around Jesus.

Brilliant minds with the best intentions held to a Geocentric model for centuries.

We too can get it twisted. God becomes a priority amidst other priorities. He gets compartmentalized, He gets given an orbit around our life amidst other orbiting pursuits.

But Ephesians 1 topples this “meocentric” perspective with authority.

Ephesians 1:20-23 (MSG)

All this energy issues from Christ: God raised him from death and set him on a throne in deep heaven, in charge of running the universe, everything from galaxies to governments, no name and no power exempt from his rule. And not just for the time being, but forever. He is in charge of it all, has the final word on everything. At the center of all this, Christ rules the church. The church, you see, is not peripheral to the world; the world is peripheral to the church. The church is Christ's body, in which he speaks and acts, by which he fills everything with his presence.

It's in the Church where he speaks and acts, and fills everything with his presence.

Conclusion: I want to be there.

Pluto - so small in mass and far in orbit that it's gone back and forth as a planet or not.

A “plutoid” became a dwarf planet that is further out in space than the planet Neptune.

Pluto, Eris, and Makemake.

If you place yourself far enough from the church and the community of faith that Christ infuses with his presence, you can lose your distinguishing characteristics altogether.

Want to look like Christ? Get to following him. You'll follow him into His church.

Because where is Jesus walking? Among them. In the midst of them.

Do you know where Jesus is? Among the Church. In the midst of the Church.

Jesus is still working and walking through his Church.

Modern thought and Eastern religions would tell you you'll find the spark of the divine inside of you, look inward.

Pantheism would tell you that you'll find God out there in his creation.

But the Bible makes it clear- want to be filled by his presence and encounter him and know him deeper? That will take you into the Church, not away from it.

What would Jesus say about our church?

What would he say about your involvement?

What would he say about his place in your heart?

These letters to these churches in these Seven Cities will serve as a springboard of discussion.

But this prologue shows us one thing for sure in John's life and his writing.

Our future in Christ isn't tribulation free.

But our life in Christ makes us tribulation proof.

We can endure. Because our hope endures.

My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus blood and righteousness.

How do we endure?

The recipe for John who endured so much for 100 years:

We endure IN Christ, WITH his people.

John calls his brothers and sisters PARTNERS in the suffering and persecution they experienced. And he goes on in the same verse to speak of the patient endurance that Jesus gives US. Plural.

I've heard it again and again and again in ministry as people endure suffering:

"I don't know how people get through this without the Church."

We ask where Jesus is in hard times.

Why doesn't he radically appear like he did for people like John?

We've got the Body of Christ available to us always.

Are we availing ourselves to it? Are we showing up?

THIS YEAR...

Decorum is a thing of the past.

Decency between people who don't think the same is fleeting.

Division is the norm.

We have the opportunity to shine all the more bright.

I wonder if Jesus wrote the American church today, would he remind us we're called to not conform to the patterns of the world, but be transformed?

That we aren't called to draw lines in the sand, but step across lines to reach others?

That in Jesus there's no longer Jew or Gentile, white, black, or brown, red or blue, but we're all one in Christ?

Would he remind us that- yes- my call is to the Church, but the Church's call isn't to me?
I AM the Church, and the Church exists to reach the world.
It may not be a Nigerian Prince that needs the money I have.
But there's millions of people in the world that need the HOPE we have.
There's thousands of people you'll pass driving from this church to your home that need the hope YOU have.

What's the purpose of a lampstand?
To provide light.
For those around it.

But the lampstand doesn't produce the light without oil running through it.
We won't be a light without the Holy Spirit.
The fruit of the Spirit flowing from us.
Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness, and self-control.
Those 7 seem pretty countercultural in our news cycles.
We'll be a light when we have more oil of the Holy Spirit flowing through our lampstands.

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If the church is somewhere out there near Pluto in terms of priorities.
May we recognize the truth of Ephesians 1 and respond accordingly.
The church is Christ's body, in which he speaks and acts, by which he fills everything with his presence.

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You've been living a Meocentric life and need to put Jesus in the center and over everything for the first time, let's pray together...