

People give the absolute worst advice when you are suffering. They just say the worst things and it never helps. You get sick and everyone gives bad medical advice. Or people you love die and everything just gives you cliches. If you were going through a hard time, and I told you to read Revelation you might think it is just another kind of terrible advice. And yet, this book was addressed and intended to be read by those who were suffering.

The churches in Rome that first read the book of Revelation were suffering. They lived under Roman rule. They lived in a country that executed our God and Savior Jesus Christ. They lived under immense pressure to worship idols, to make sacrifices to false gods, and to worship the emperor. And many who did not suffered and were persecuted. Christianity was not outlawed in the empire. But any Christians who resisted the empire suffered and were crushed. They needed help. They needed wisdom. They do not need platitudes or cliches, or empty reminders. And so, God gives a word to these suffering churches. And the churches and those experiencing tribulation need to hear it.

So, the book of Revelation is not just focused on the future and what will happen. It was not written to the intellectually curious or to those who are eschatologically minded. It was written to the suffering. Let's turn to Revelation 1:9-20 and see what Revelation offers the suffering.

### **I. The suffering need to read Revelation (v. 9-11).**

This is the first thing we need to see.

God wrote this book because this is what the church's needed.

And early in the letter, God identifies that this letter was meant to help the suffering churches.

Verse 9, **"I, John, your brother and partner in the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance that are in Jesus"**

Look at how John describes himself.

He does not call himself an apostle or "the disciple Jesus loved."

He just calls himself their brother and partner.

Then John identifies Christians by three markers.

**"Tribulation, kingdom, and patient endurance"**

Part of being a Christian.

Part of being a follower of God is experiencing these three things.

It takes all three of these together.

There is no being in the kingdom without tribulation.

And here he isn't thinking about the idea of a 7 year tribulation.

He just means the normal suffering that comes from following Jesus.

And being in the kingdom.

We talked about this when I went through all the scriptures I showed you how the kingdom of God is really a theme throughout the whole Bible.

The kingdom of God is the way that John is talking about being a Christian

And so the way that we are members of the kingdom of God is through the patient endurance of tribulation and suffering.

Another way to translate patient endurance would be perseverance.

Being a Christian is not just praying a pray and then getting baptized.

You then need to persevere in that faith even in the mist of suffering.

That you continue following Jesus all the rest of your days even though some days will be good and some days will be bad.

You don't quit, you get back up.

All of these things are in Jesus.

We suffer in Jesus.

We are part of the kingdom of God in Jesus.

We persevere and we endure in faith in Jesus.

These things do not happen through our own efforts. These things do not happen by ourselves they happen in Christ, who has saved us by his blood.

And we are partners in the kingdom of God.

Being a part of the kingdom of God is an active thing.

In our world, citizenship is mostly passive.

If your parents are citizens, then you are one.

If you're born on the land of the kingdom in the place of the kingdom, even if your family is not a citizen then because you get to be born here in the kingdom, you are a part of the kingdom.

That's not how it works in the kingdom of God.

There is nobody who is just a citizen of the kingdom because their parents were Christians because they were born in a Christian place.

You've got to be an active participant and part taker of the kingdom of God.

You actually gotta be following Jesus yourself.

You don't gain citizenship from taking tests and interviews.

You don't do lots of work to make it happen.

You have to put your faith in Jesus and then you follow Jesus.

But there are no "just citizens" in the kingdom of God.

We don't just profess faith and do nothing.

To be a citizen in God's kingdom means you do kingdom work.

**"John, was on the island called Patmos on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus."**

John was not on a tropical island having a vacation.

This was not a stop on a cruise for him.

He is on that island in exile.

He is imprisoned there and cannot leave.

And he is suffering because of Jesus.

**"on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus"**

That means he is suffering because he is a Christian.

Because he has followed Jesus.

Because he has been preaching the gospel and the word of God.

And for that he is suffering.

This is why he can call himself a partner in their tribulation and suffering.

John does not escape suffering because he is an apostle.

Sometimes we can have the attitude that bad things only happen to other people.

Only other people die suddenly or get cancer when they are young.

Tragedy strikes others and we are shocked when it comes to us.

But John reminds us that he too is suffering.

It comes for all of us.

It is just part of being in the kingdom of God.

He writes not as someone who has never suffered.

He writes these words of encouragement from the midst of his own suffering.

And God's Word comes to John in the middle of his suffering.

Verse 10, **"I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet"**

John on a Sunday has an unbelievable experience.

He is **"in the spirit."**

We don't know exactly what that means but it is something prophetic

Somehow, he is being transported and having a vision.

Maybe he is having a spiritual dream.

We don't know exactly what it is, but the Holy Spirit is guiding him and in that moment he hears something.

He hears a loud voice crying out.

There's only a few times in the New Testament that voice is cry out in this way.

Anytime this particular word is used it's always incredibly significant.

The demons cry out in a loud voice when Jesus casts them out.

It's used when Jesus cries out with a loud voice on the cross as He dies.

When the earthquake splits the earth and the curtain in the holy of holies is torn.

Jesus also cries out with a loud voice when He calls fourth Lazarus, who was dead, but it's called back to life.

So that same voice now calls out to John like a trumpet.

It's not a trumpet because that's the only instrument John can think of. It is a trumpet because that's also the sound that is appeared when God has spoken previously in the Bible.

We just were going through Exodus on Wednesday nights and they went to Mount Sinai and they saw God and heard His voice. It came out like the sound of the trumpet.

It is the same sound.

Verse 11, **"saying, "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."**

And so that voice tells him write everything you see in a book and send it to these churches.

The book of Revelation particularly was meant to go to these churches. This is something that we can forget when we talk about the book of revelation.

We often can split the book and we can talk about it like well. There's seven letters to the churches and then there's all the other stuff.

And so we can split it when we talk about it that way.

And that's fine because it's helpful for us to get our minds around how this book works.

But it can also be misleading.

Because it does not just the seven letters that are intended to go to those churches it's the whole book.

This entire book is meant to go to all of those churches, and there's a particular section of the book where they are named and given specific instructions.

But this whole book is to them. Not just the smaller sections.

And we know that the book was not just written to them, but ultimately is for all believers since the time the John wrote it to now.

Because that's how all of the books in the New Testament have been many of them are particular churches, but it is not just for them even though there is a particular message.

There is also part of the book of revelation that needs to go to all of the churches.

God is not saying these are the only seven churches that need to read this book so if you're at a different church, don't worry it's not for you No, instead, these churches are representative of the entire church.

You can see this because seven especially in the book of Revelation is a number of fullness, and there was a lot of symbolic meaning wrapped up in that letter. We will see it over and over and again in the book.

There will be seven bowls and seven trumpets and seven seals.

The Holy Spirit will be described as the sevenfold spirit.

There are seven beatitudes.

The seven days of creation

The 144,000 is a derivative of the number seven.

When Jesus tells us disciples they're to forgive and they ask how much and he says  $70 \times 7$  meaning all the forgiveness, the fullness of forgiveness.

And so when He says seven churches, its all the churches.

And with all the churches need to read this book.

They need it not to know what's gonna happen tomorrow.

But so that they can hear God speak to their situation right now in the midst of persecution and suffering, and so that we can know what God says to us.

Again I want you to see that this book was written to the church.

It was written especially to these churches who were experiencing persecution and suffering.

And what they needed was the Word of God.

They needed to be reminded of what is true.

So, as we continue to study and read the book.

As we work through Revelation, we need to remind that this is for suffering Christians.

Picture the church in places they are being persecuted.

Places like India where Christians are beaten and imprisoned.

Places like North Korea, Russia, and the middle east.

Countries where they do not have religious freedom.

China, where pastors have to give their sermons to the government to be approved.

It is to churches like these that Revelation is written.

Because this is the book and the message they need to hear.

And it is one we need as well.

It is not just about the future to answer our questions.

It is for us here and now when we face suffering.

## **II. The suffering need to see Jesus (v. 12-16).**

This is really true of all of us.

Well, we need more than anything is a vision of Jesus.

We need to look to Jesus and we need to look at Jesus.

Because when you see Jesus, and when you behold, Jesus, it changes everything.

When we can see Jesus, He transforms us

And this is what happens to John. He sees Jesus.

Verse 12, **"Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking to me, and on turning I saw seven golden lamp stands,"**

He turns to see who it is that speaking and he immediately see seven gold lampstands.

We'll find out later that each of these lamps is symbolic of the seven churches the Christ is speaking towards.

Verse 13, **"and in the midst of the lamp stands one like a son of man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash around his chest."**

And here among the churches, there is the son of man.

This is obviously Jesus.

The son of man is Jesus's favorite phrase to describe Himself.  
The son of man is the phrase that is used in the book of Daniel to describe the Messiah, who is bringing the eternal kingdom that will never end.

And John sees him, he first notices what he's wearing.  
And it seems like he's wearing some kind of priestly garments.  
Which would make sense because we know in the temple, and in the tabernacle, there would be the lamp stands that would be burning the prayers of the people of God.  
And the priest would be responsible for tending to those, and keeping the fire burning so that their prayers could rise to God.  
So the image that we seem to get here is that Jesus is attending to, and hearing and listening to the prayers of His church.

Verse 14, **"The hairs on his head were white, like white wool, like snow. His eyes were like a flame of fire,"**

He says Jesus is hair is white like wool and snow and his eyes like fire.  
Jesus is hair is described this way he describes the hair of the ancient of days and the son of man in Daniel 7.  
He is described as having hair that is white as wool  
And his clothing is called white as snow.  
So that same imagery is being used again here to show Jesus in the fullness of His glory.

It is not meant to just give us a description so we can close our eyes.  
Or so we can try to picture what Jesus looked like.  
John is signaling to us and telling us that he saw Jesus in all His glory.  
He is telling us that he beheld Jesus.

And the eyes of Jesus are like a flame and a fire.  
There's an angel in Daniel 10 who visits Daniel and it says that his eyes are like fire.



Some of this may or may not be poetic, but I think it is describing Jesus as He is.

You can see something when you look into someone's eyes.

Some people you can look into their eyes and see kindness and gentleness.

Others you look into their eyes and see wrath and evil.

Or maybe you see wisdom.

If you got to look in the eyes of Jesus, you would see something incredible.

You would see the eyes that could burn into your soul.

You would see the eyes of fire.

Verse 15, **"his feet were like burnished bronze, refined in a furnace, and his voice was like the roar of many waters."**

Bronze feet are not what we would normally think of.

It's hard to know exactly what he means.

Angel that visits Daniel in Daniel 10 is described as having feet and arms that are also bronze.

Ezekiel 17 describes the feet of the four living creatures that stand before the throne is having feet that are bronze.

Part of it is revealing Jesus's divinity and part of it I think is to His purity

But what strikes me the most is the way His voice is described.

His voice is like the roar of many waters.

His voice is as powerful as a waterfall.

I want you to picture the Niagara Falls and picture just standing close or near the bottom and what it sounds like.

The rumbling of the water and how it overwhelms everything else.

It is a sound that drowns out all other noise.

That is what the sound of God's voice is.

Sometimes we pray, and we say we wish that Jesus would speak to us and be clear maybe even audibly talk to us.

If He decided to speak to us and use His normal voice. It would be like the roar of many waters and oceans.

Verse 16, **"In his right hand he held seven stars,"**

In His right hand, which is the dominant hand in scripture and the hand of power, He holds the stars.

And we find out later in verse 20 that these are the angels of the churches.

This is communicating that Jesus holds the churches.

He is the one who is control

Even if things feel out of control, and even if they are overwhelmed and worried, Jesus has them, and Jesus has us in His hand.

**"from his mouth came a sharp two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining in full strength."**

And in His mouth is a sword.

This is used repeatedly to describe the word of God, which is sharper than any two edged sword.

We will see you later in Revelation that God's judgment and destruction can come with just a word from His mouth.

It is showing that when Jesus pronounces something, particularly if He pronounces the sword of judgment and execution it comes.

He only needs to give the word and that is enough.

And His face is shining.

The face of Moses shown because he got to look at God.

But here Jesus's face shines even brighter and in the full strength because He sees God and is God.

And just as none of us can look right at the sun, None of us can look right at Jesus because His glory is too overwhelming and it is too incredible.

What do we do with all of this?

This is a lot of poetic, Old Testament descriptions, saying which Jesus looked like.

John didn't give us these descriptions just so that we can do word searches in our concordance.

John didn't give us the description just so we can go to Daniel and Ezekiel and see what these images symbolize and what's the significance of all of these things

Those are good things to ask and I've talked about some of that.

But the point of this is that John needed to behold Jesus.

And the point for us is that we need to behold, to look at Jesus.

Imagine I told you I had seen the most beautiful piece of art in the world.

And that just looking at it and beholding it would change your life.

Then I told you we need to read some art textbooks so we can understand beauty.

Maybe we will take some art classes to learn color theory and appreciate the craft.

Then we will watch youtube videos and read biographies discussing the painting in detail.

That might all be nice.

But the most important thing first would be that we just stand in front of this thing be quiet and just look at it.

That we would behold it.

Some of us are far more interested in studying Jesus than we are in beholding Jesus.

Some of us would rather talk about Jesus than just look at Jesus and be quiet.

Some of us would rather debate Jesus than look at Jesus.

The most important thing that we could ever do in our lives is to behold Jesus and to look at Him.

John's description of Jesus should make us close our eyes and worship.

That should be the first thing we do.

Just listen when you see Jesus, it changes everything.

That's what these churches need to do. They need to see Jesus.

And I think that's what we need to do in our own lives.

Especially when things get overwhelming and when things get hard, we just need to take a deep breath and look to Jesus and behold Jesus.

None of us are gonna get regularly caught up in the spirit like John in the Lord's day and get to see a vision of Jesus in this way.

There are a lot of ways that God and His grace has given us that we can behold Jesus.

What a way that you get to behold Jesus is that every person you see and every person you come into contact with is made in the image of God. And so when you see other people, and when you talk to other people and you behold them and listen to them, you are getting a glimpse of Jesus.

You can behold Jesus when you read the scriptures and the word of God. All of the Bible and every passage in every book and every page is ultimately about Jesus.

And so when you read any of it, you are getting a chance to behold and gaze at Jesus.

You get to see Jesus when the body of Christ gathers together for corporate worship in the church.

When believers gathered together on Sunday morning to worship the risen, Savior Jesus we don't just get to be hold Jesus together as we worship and as we pray, you get to see Jesus as you look around the room and see his body together.

You get to behold Jesus when we come to the table of the Lord's supper. When we as the body of Christ come to the table of Christ to eat and fellowship with Christ while we meditate on Christ, thinking of what Christ has done, we will be holding Jesus

We behold Jesus in the cup as we drink of his blood and as we think about the forgiveness of sins.

We behold Jesus as we eat of the bread and we think, and we see his body broken for us on the cross.

We behold Jesus, as we watch believers, get baptized and buried in their sins and raised to walk in the newness of life. We see Jesus and his work.

We all have plenty of opportunities every single day of our lives to behold Jesus.

And when you behold, Jesus, it changes everything.

Don't settle for other things.

Don't just study and talk about Jesus.

Go and behold Him.

And we need to behold Him whether we are suffering or not.

There is nothing in your life that a little beholding of Jesus cannot cure.

Because beholding Him changes everything.

### **III. The suffering need to not fear (v. 17-20)**

The primary way things change for John, is he is no longer afraid.

And I don't think that this is just John not being afraid that Jesus will kill him.

What it is is knowing and getting to see Jesus removes all of our fears about anything else in this life.

Verse 17, **"When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead."**

This is always the right response to the revelation of God.

Anytime someone sees God in His glory, they fall at their feet.

And here, John falls as though dead.

It is not just worship.

It is a falling that acknowledges God has the right to kill him.

He is a sinner.

He should not be able to behold God in all of this glory.

Many of us would wonder what God would do if we stood before Him.

How could He accept us when we have failed so much?

When we have such sin in our past.

And when we stood before His full glory we would realize even more how in trouble we are and how holy He is.

And yet,

**"He laid his right hand on me, saying, "Fear not, I am the first and the last"**

The same right hand that holds the stars.

The same right hand that holds the world in His hands.

That right hand touches John.

A gentle touch.

John is afraid God may call down the lightening, but instead the hand that raised the dead.

The hand that passed out the bread and the wine.

That hand touches John and tells him not to fear.

Did Jesus do this because John was so holy?

Was it because of John's incredible obedience and faithfulness?

Or was it only because of the grace of Jesus?

Those who trust in Christ, Those who follow Jesus.

They have nothing to fear.

Not because of their faith or works, but because of the grace of Jesus.

Verse 18, **"And the living one, I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades."**

Jesus says that he is the living one.

He died, but he is alive again and he will be alive forever more.

There are people that Jesus brought back to life, but they died.

Lazarus died again and was buried again.

Their widows who saw their sons come back to life, and those sons died again.

Jesus died, came out of the tomb, and he never died again.

He did not disappear up into the mountains to die by Himself somewhere.

Jesus ascended into heaven in front of 500+ witnesses alive and He still now is alive.

He has all of the power of death.

He holds the keys of death.

It's the symbolic language meaning the death has no power over Jesus.  
The grave has no power over Jesus.  
Hell has no power over Jesus.  
He holds the keys.

This is not just good news for Jesus.  
Jesus gets to control who does and who doesn't come out of the place of the dead.  
And our hope is that all who believe in you put their faith in Jesus Christ will be resurrected and come back to life.  
Jesus will use His keys to set us free.  
What do we have to fear of Jesus holds the keys?  
What is there to be afraid of if God is in control?  
We have nothing to fear.

Verse 19, **"Write therefore the things that you have seen, those that are and those that are to take place after this."**

and this Jesus who holds all of the keys, tells us and tell John to write and tell them the things.

And the language he uses is here I think is meant to encompass all of it.

John asked to tell them the things that have happened the things that are happening and things that will happen.

Because Jesus holds the keys, we don't have to worry about what has happened in the past

Because Jesus holds the keys, we don't have to worry about what is happening right now.

Because Jesus holds the keys, we do not need to worry about what will happen tomorrow because we know who holds tomorrow and he holds our hand.

Verse 20, **"As for the mystery of the seven stars that you saw in my right hand, and the seven golden lamp stands, the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lamp stands are the seven churches."**

Jesus tells and interprets some of what vision means at least the part we need to understand.

Lamp stand stand for the seven churches, and the stars are the angels of those churches.

There's some debate about what the angels mean exactly.

We will talk about that next week.

But the primary point is that these churches have nothing to fear because Jesus has them and Jesus is watching over them.

And so this week, as you go through, you find yourself being afraid being afraid of something you see on the news being afraid of a situation that you're in the middle of or whatever it is it causes you to fear.

Read the word of God, read the book of revelation take a moment to behold Jesus and fear not.

Because of Jesus we have no need to be afraid.

Again we need to not be too distracted from the visions.

We can talk about and debate who the angels actually are.

But the primary part we have to keep in mind, is that we are not to fear.

The churches are not to fear.

You do not have to fear.

Because Jesus is alive.

And He holds all the keys.

We have nothing to fear in this life.

I do not know what you are facing.

I do not know what you will have to face.

All of us will have hard days ahead.

We will have to face seemingly meaningless days.

We will have to face relationships not going the way we want.

We will have to face the loss of our loved ones.

And one day all of us will have to face our own deaths.

But no matter what you will face ahead.

You do not have to fear.



Because Jesus holds the keys.  
We will look ahead to Revelation and see some wild things.  
There will be some things that may even be scary.  
But there is nothing to fear.

And one day all of us will stand before Jesus and see Him like this.  
And we may be afraid.  
Because we will realize the weight of our sins.  
We will see the depth of our depravity.  
We will see the reality of our need.  
We will know we deserve hell and punishment forever.  
But we do not need to fear.  
Because Jesus Christ took the punishment we deserved on the cross.  
He suffered in our place.  
He took our sin so that we could take His righteousness.  
And it is ours.  
All we have to do is admit how much we need it.  
To acknowledge we can never earn His grace.  
To profess faith in the Christ.  
And then repent of our sin and follow Him with our lives.  
Spending the rest of our days beholding the God who holds the keys.

#### CONCLUSION:

This morning we have seen the suffering need to read Revelation, to behold Jesus, and need not fear.  
If you are suffering this morning, do these things.  
If you are not suffering yet, you will be someday.  
Maybe sooner than you think.  
Just come and behold Christ and find there is nothing to fear.