

WORDS FROM PATMOS (REV. 1:9-11)

Dave didn't know what to do. He had reached the age of retirement, but he certainly didn't have the resources to fish or play golf all day. He certainly couldn't live on his social security check. You see, Dave had dropped out of school in 7th grade and run away from home. His mother had just remarried and his new step-father beat up on him so Dave hadn't felt safe. Throughout his lifetime, Dave had worked at a variety of jobs. He was a hard worker. Dave had worked as a salesman, on the railroad, even on a steamboat. But he hadn't stayed at any of these jobs long enough to build up a pension. So here he was on his 65th birthday with no place to go and nothing to do. Dave made a strategic decision that day, a decision that would not only affect his life, but each of our lives as well. You see, one hobby that Dave had honed throughout his lifetime was cooking. After Dave's father died when he was quite young, Dave was given the job of cooking dinner for the family because his mother had to work outside the home to support her children. Dave felt very much at home in the kitchen and had continued to cook throughout his life. And he had developed some pretty tasty recipes. Everyone said that his chicken was his best meal. So Dave took his first social security check – all \$105 of it – and he decided to buy some chicken, cook it and sell it. And the rest, as they say, is history. For Harland David Sanders became a household name using the honorary title of Kentucky Colonel that he had received some years earlier. Colonel Sanders and his Kentucky Fried Chicken has become part of our American culture.

Retirement years can be some of the most productive years in a person's life. And people carefully plan for their retirement years so they can make the most out of them. But sometimes, a person's retirement doesn't take the exact course that has been planned for it. Sometimes a person is thrown some real curve balls as retirement is approaching.

Imagine with me that you have just achieved that great goal to which workers aspire- retirement. You have worked hard for many, many years, and you have looked forward with keen anticipation to the time when you would completely control your schedule, when you would be able to do all of those things which

you had dreamed of doing, when your time would be taken up solely with your own interests. And now that time has come, and you are excited about the possibilities that your retirement years present to you.

And then, very unexpectedly, the police show up at your door. They arrest you on a trumped up charge for an undeserved reason. And before you know it, you are in court, framed by these false accusations. The case goes very quickly in this courtroom scene that resembles a kangaroo court. And almost before you realize what is happening, the verdict comes down. As you are standing before the judge, he says, "The prisoner will be banished to spend the remainder of his life alone on the island of Alcatraz."

Suddenly all of your hopes and aspirations have been dashed against the rocks. You are not going to spend your remaining years of your life in the comforting arms of your family members- you will probably never see your family again. You are not going to enjoy the freedom of time that you worked for in retirement- you are going to spend the last years of your life as a prisoner. You are not going to enjoy the liberty to pursue you own interests- you are going to conclude your life of work with the hardest years yet of work, laboring just for survival in exile.

How would you respond to this situation? Now none of us can perfectly imagine our response because we don't really know how we would respond unless it happened to us. But we can each imagine the possibility of anger, bitterness, self-pity, despair, depression, and hopelessness. Why did this happen to me? I didn't deserve this. Why would God allow this to happen to me?

There is a man who can teach us the possibilities of how the grace of God could allow a Christian to respond to such a circumstance. His name was John. He was the apostle of love, the youngest of the apostolic band. He was a man who worked hard all of his life. He grew up laboring as a fisherman on the Sea of Galilee. Then, after Jesus called him to follow, he walked with Jesus during those rigorous years of Christ's ministry. After Christ's death, resurrection and ascension, John labored hard in those early years of the church's infancy. Then he pastored the church in the city of Ephesus for many years. This man worked hard, and we would think that he deserved some rest during those twilight years of his life. He was at least in his 80's when the emperor Domitian banished him to the island of Patmos. And the island of Patmos was

no retirement home- it was a work prison. There were stone quarries there which supplied Rome with stone for building roads and buildings. Imagine a person in his 80's leaving a job that had been more administrative in nature to work in a rock quarry, doing hard labor. How would John respond to such adverse circumstances which came into his life to seemingly complicate his concluding years? Certainly this was not the scenario that John had planned for his retirement.

Now we are not assuming that there might not have been times of questioning or self-pity or even anger and bitterness that John had to deal with in his life. But we do know the resolution that John came to because it is recorded for us in his own writings. The simple fact that we have his words is a miracle in itself- how these writings ever got off the Island of Patmos we will never know. But the Holy Spirit who inspired them also preserved them for our edification. And we would like to look this morning at 3 steps in John's life that allowed him to gain victory even in exile.

Notice them with me as I read again Rev. 1:9-11

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

1. Step number one. John identified himself with the Kingdom of God and accepted his suffering with patience. "I, John, your brother and companion in the suffering and kingdom and patient endurance that are ours in Jesus", he wrote.

There are 2 major words that are translated patience or endurance in the New Testament. Both of these are compound Greek terms. The first one is only used with regards to having patience with people, and it literally means restraining anger towards them. The second one is only used with having patience with regards to circumstances in our lives. That is the word that is used here. It is the term hupomeno. Meno- to remain or abide. Hupo- under. It is the idea of not trying to squirm out from under adverse situations in life but choosing to remain under them realizing that if God is in control, they must have some

purpose in our lives.

That was exactly what John did here during this time in his life. The situation was certainly not what John would have chosen for himself. In fact, it was just about the last conceivable circumstance that John would have desired. But John trusted in the Sovereignty of God enough to believe that God had allowed this situation and that God would bring glory to himself thru it. So John identified with God's program and was willing to accept this suffering with patient endurance, he was willing to remain under this adverse imprisonment. And this is most important to note because this choice that John made allowed him to take the next step.

2. That step was to focus his eyes on the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. Note what John said, "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.**"

Note what John did not say, "I, John, am having to endure this terrible injustice of imprisonment and hard labor because of the travesty of having been framed and exiled unjustly to this God-forsaken rock in the middle of the sea."

Now this last statement was true, and John could have said it with complete honesty and accuracy. But the statement that John made showed where his focus was. If John would not have accepted his exile and imprisonment as within the sovereign will of God, his focus would have been upon himself, and his own adverse circumstances. He would have told us all about the cramped living conditions, the lousy food and the intolerable labor under the heat of the Mediterranean sun.

But John had accepted his suffering in faith believing that God was able to work out an eternal purpose for his own glory out of it, and this allowed John's focus to move from his own miserable conditions in self-pity, as justified as that would have been, to focus upon the eternal purposes of God- the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. So John was not under the delusion that he was exiled on Patmos because of a streak of bad luck- he knew that God had some purpose in mind for even this most unwelcome conclusion to his life. And accepting his suffering with patience identifying himself with the kingdom of Christ allowed John

to focus his eyes upon the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.

3. This led John to the third step. He now was prepared to perform the great ministry that God had chosen for him to do- the ministry that we are going to study in part during these next Sunday Mornings starting on July 18th after our missionaries, the Cumings, come to share an update of their ministry on July 11th. "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. **On the Lord's Day I was in the Spirit, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet, which said, 'write on a scroll what you see and send it to the 7 churches: to Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea.'**"

God had a purpose for John being on that island of Patmos. John had been very active in service for the Lord. Especially since all of the other Apostles who had walked with our Lord had now passed on to glory, John was in great demand by the people of God. He was the only original Apostle left on earth. He was called upon often for counsel and advice, and so his time was in great demand. But God had another ministry for John to complete- a ministry that would prove to be the most beneficial to the church in the long run. God wanted John to write down his experiences and wisdom in a lasting form that could be preserved to be passed down from generation to generation. God knew that John would never have the time to do this if he were left pastoring the church in Ephesus with all of the other Christians from various parts of the world continually demanding his attention. So God allowed John to be exiled to a place where he would have great solitude. And there John would have the time to write a gospel giving a unique account of the life of Jesus Christ, 3 epistles that would clearly set forth the tests of new life in Christ and give the basics of Christian doctrine, and the most comprehensive prophetic account of the future that we have today.

We are going to focus our attention on the 7 churches of Rev. 2 and 3 during these Summer weeks starting on July 18th. This is a critical passage for study during any time because of its universal nature. The 7 churches to which John wrote were real, living churches during his day. They were all different- they had unique personalities as any church does. But John, in his vast knowledge of the universal church in his day

and under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, chose these specific churches because they were representative in nature. These churches represented the strengths and weaknesses of all of the churches in John's day, and the basic nature of the church has not changed in the almost 2 millennia since John wrote his words, so the 7 churches that John addressed also represent churches of Jesus Christ that is alive and thriving or struggling today. Now we must be careful that we don't try to read too much into Rev. 2 and 3. There have been some who have tried to assert that John is giving a summary of the history of the church, that each church represents a period in church history. When I taught church history, I examined this passage in this light for it would have made an inspired outline for a church history course. But the 7 churches of Rev. 2 and 3 just do not fit in completely with the periods of church history, and it would have been contradictory for John to give on the one hand 7 lengthy periods of church history and then go on to speak of the imminent return of Jesus Christ ending his apocalypse with the words of Jesus, "Behold, I come quickly." And so we don't want to try to make these letters say more than they do.

But it is clear from the divergent nature of these churches that were all functioning in John's day, that these churches were different and they were chosen by John because of their representative nature. And one can look at any period in the history of the church, and he can find an Ephesian church or a Laodicean church or any one in between. In every age, the devil's tactics have been basically the same. And as we look around the world today, we see the same pressures harassing various church bodies. Within the past century, behind the hostile walls of intolerant regimes, more Christians have been physically persecuted for the cause of Christ than during any other time of church history including the several centuries of Roman persecution. In other areas of the world, the church faces the spiritual and intellectual warfare of insidious theological errors. Always, the moral struggle remains in the church of Christ. And so John speaks to us today as he did to those in his own time. The pattern is similar in each of John's segments- first there is a commendation, then a complaint. The weight of the commendation to complaint varies from church to church. Smyrna is almost complete commendation, Laodicea almost complete complaint. The Philadelphian church is more praised than blamed and the church at Sardis more blamed than praised.

While the letters to Ephesus, Pergamum, and Thyatira are fairly evenly balanced between approval and disapproval. But with each letter there is a lesson to be learned for any church in any age.

But we can also learn a great deal from the life of John as well as from his writings. John realized that each day that God gave to him meant that God's purpose was not yet completed in his life. Now perhaps this message was more dramatic in John's life for he was the last Apostle to live- all the others had been martyred by the time John died. In fact, John outlived most of the other apostles by 30 years. And perhaps this message was reconfirmed to John when the emperor Domitian sentenced him to be scalded to death in a boiling caldron of oil. Yet when John was put into the oil, he was supernaturally spared- and that was when he was banished to the island of Patmos to finish the work God had for him to do. So God's message to John that he had a purpose for his life was very real to him, and John knew that when he woke up in the morning breathing, that meant that he had not yet completed his service for God. But even though God has not confirmed that message in our lives in as dramatic a fashion, the fact remains that there is no such thing as retirement in the kingdom of God. Yes most of us will come to the day when we are officially classified as being "retired" from the vocation that occupied the majority of our time during our younger years. But that doesn't mean that God considers us to be retired in his program. Retirement is not a word found in the Bible. When a Christian wakes up in the morning with another day of life, that is God's message to him that his purpose on this earth is not yet completed. And if we accept this truth as John did, then we will also be in a position as he was to focus our attentions on God's word and the testimony of Jesus. We will not be as apt to focus our attention on our own selves, our sufferings, our careers, our prosperity, our lives. And as we focus our attentions as Christians where they should be, then we will be prepared to do what God has for us to do just as John was.

John could have wallowed on the Island of Patmos in self-pity. He could have turned his eyes inward to his own sufferings, working in his 80's in a rock quarry during the heat of the day. But if he would have done that, today, we would not have 19% of the New Testament. Whether you look at it by number of books 5 out of 27, or by chapters 50 out of 260, John wrote 19% of the N.T. And without his writings we

wouldn't have the gospel of John that has probably been instrumental in leading more people to Christ than any other single book in the Bible, we wouldn't have his precious epistles that are perhaps the most simple doctrinal statement that we have in the New Testament, and we wouldn't have the book of Revelation that alone warns us of the horrors of the tribulation and reveals to us God's program for the future.

And do you know the most remarkable anecdote about this whole matter? Whereas John was exiled to Patmos for life, we know he didn't die there. We don't know the details, but somehow after his purpose was completed he was released, and he went back to his loved ones, and tradition tells us that he died in the city of Ephesus surrounded by the people that he knew and loved.

God takes care of his people. We need to take care that we are being faithful in the stewardship that he has given to each of us.