

'John Your Brother - the Author and His Message'

by Charles Alexander

Charles Alexander's sermon explores the profound significance of John the Apostle as a beloved figure in the Church, emphasizing his unique relationship with Christ and his prophetic role in conveying the Gospel message.

Scripture: John 1:14, John 6:63, John 21:22, Revelation 1:9, Revelation 1:11

Topics: "Johns Gospel", "Church History"

Description

Charles D. Alexander delves into the spiritual exposition of John's Gospel, emphasizing the significance of knowing the author and his message. John, the beloved apostle, uniquely reveals the soul of Christ, focusing on His majesty to inspire reverence in the hearts of believers. Despite being misunderstood, John's writings, especially the Book of Revelation, hold great relevance for the Church throughout history, portraying his special relationship with the Church and his prophetic insights into its future trials and triumphs.

Transcript

THE SPIRITUAL EXPOSITION OF JOHN'S GOSPEL (PART ONE)

JOHN - YOUR BROTHER

KNOWING THE AUTHOR AND HIS MESSAGE

By Charles D. Alexander

"I John, who also am your brother and companion in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was in the isle that is called Patmos for the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ."

The Beloved Apostle

"As all of them (the writers of the four gospels) had the same object in view, to point out Christ, the three former exhibit his body, if we may be permitted to use the expression, but John exhibits His soul".

John Calvin

"In accordance with the statement in John 21 with regard to the object of the whole gospel, namely that it was written that its readers might believe that Jesus is the Christ, and believing might have life through His name, the attention is chiefly directed to the majesty of the Person of Jesus, with the design of awakening a deep feeling of reverence for the same in the hearts of the readers, that thus they may approach the narrative following with the consciousness that here they must put off their shoes from off their feet, for the place whereon they stand is holy ground."

Ernst Wilhelm Hengstenberg.

The significance of John - the first of the apostles and the last of the apostles - to the Church in all ages, has not been generally recognised and because of this, his prophetic writings (the Book of the Revelation) have been generally misunderstood, especially in our day when the majority of the evangelical world suppose the Book to have been written neither for the Church, nor even for the times of the Church, and to have little or no relevance to the last 2000 years.

Yet John's special relationship to the Church is noticed again and again in his writings. To him was granted a peculiar intimacy with the Saviour, unaccountable apart from its deliberate design to single out this devoted man as the one to whom was specially given the future care of the Church in the long ages of her troubles at the hands of a bitterly hostile world.

There is a special purpose attached to the two sons of Zebedee, James and John, whom the Lord surnamed Boanerges, "the sons of thunder". James was the first of the apostles to be martyred at the cruel hands of a worldly tyrant. On the other hand, his brother John long outlived all the select band of the apostles and, in extreme old age, probably at least 96 years old, heard the thunders and saw the lightning's from the throne of God, which indicated the loosing of the divine wrath against the worldly powers which oppose the Gospel of Christ.

John's character did not change after the Lord addressed him (and his brother James) as Boanerges. The so-called "apostle of love" is in fact the apostle of judgment. The two brothers between them span the entire apostolic testimony, from the time that the one sealed that testimony in blood, till the time, 40 years on (or more), when the other, the sole survivor of the apostolic company, bequeathed to the Church of Christ that five-fold legacy of comfort, warning and promise, which we know as the Gospel of John, the three, epistles, and the majestic Book of the Revelation.

"We are able"

We believe a prophetic foreshadowing of this is seen in an episode to which the commentators have done little justice. When the mother of Zebedee's children came to the Lord with a most remarkable request that her two sons should sit, one at the right hand and the other at the left hand of Christ in His Kingdom, we are to perceive in this far more than a mother's pride in her admirable sons and an almost pathetic desire for their future distinction in Messiah's long expected kingdom (which she, and everyone else at that time, expected to be literally and visibly set up at Jerusalem).

That her two sons were party to the request is clear from Matthew's account in his 20th chapter (verses 20 - 28). They thought themselves able for the office.

The answer of the Lord is enigmatic, as are so many of His sayings. He does not outright refuse the request, nor reproach the mother and her two remarkable sons. We believe divine providence brought

about the episode for its inward and prophetic meaning, as well as for its practical application concerning humble submission and mutual servitude by which alone His Kingdom should, or could, be ruled: "Whosoever will be great among you, let him be your servant."

But let us note how the Lord declares, "Ye know not what ye ask. Are ye able to drink of the cup that I shall drink of, and to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?"

Knowing not that He spoke of the baptism of cruel death at the hands of implacable foes animated by the spirit of the Evil One, the young men reply, "We are able".

Alas for the sermonisers! Nothing here of ignorant boasting on the part of ambitious men. The spirit of prophecy moves throughout in the sacred narrative. The young men spoke the truth though they knew not the truth of which they spoke. They would indeed (says Christ) drink of His cup of suffering and pain; they would in fact be baptized with His baptism of cruel death. But the distinction of position in His Kingdom was not in His gift, but would be bestowed by the Father on those for whom it had been prepared from the beginning.

Now it may well be that the request of the mother and the bold candidature of the young men for the places of distinction were, in fact, fulfilled in the event - but not as they expected, nor yet in any such sense as so many teachers since then have supposed. The Kingdom of Christ comes not with observation. It is neither here nor there as a location. It has no capital city. Jerusalem is above and not on earth. It is an invisible Kingdom existing only in the regenerate hearts of the redeemed. Its throne has neither a right side nor a left side any more than the Almighty and Sovereign Father has a right hand or a left when He says to the Son: "Sit at my right hand till I make thy foes thy footstool". Right and left in the Kingdom of Christ are to be symbolically understood as places of authority and rule through the preaching of the Word.

In the same spiritual sense we are to understand that other saying of our Lord,

"Verily I say unto you, that ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of Man shall sit on the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (Matt. 19:28).

"The regeneration" is the invisible Kingdom of Christ established through the preaching of the gospel. The twelve tribes of Israel are the spiritual tribes of the spiritual Israel - the Church of the firstborn, written in heaven, who have come, in the gospel, to "the heavenly Jerusalem" (Heb. 12:22). The twelve thrones represent the authority of the apostles, to whom it was given to be the inspired means of communicating that Word of the truth of the gospel by which ever afterwards the people of Christ, the true "Israel of God", would live and be ruled.

The spiritual nature of the promised Kingdom of Messiah was not at that time understood by the apostles, but their ignorance was overruled by Christ to bring forth a prophetic utterance, which later on would be of the greatest significance to the Church. James and John, the Sons of Thunder, were (with Peter), specially set aside to be leaders among the apostles. They alone were permitted to be with the Lord on the Mount of Transfiguration to see a prevision of that glory which was later to be embodied in John's vision in the Book of the Revelation. The same three were the only apostles permitted to be near the Lord during the agony in the Garden (that the awful and mysterious conquest of human nature at the supreme moment in the history of Creation and of Redemption, might be witnessed and recorded).

Who is on the right hand of Christ in His Kingdom. Which of the three - or rather of the two? Was it James, the first of the apostles to tread the way of martyrdom? (Acts 12: 2) - Oh! fell deed! Thou monster Herod. The first of this world to fall in blood upon the holy apostles of the Lamb; and what appalling fate so shortly fell upon thee!

(Acts 12: 21-23).

So shall fall in shameful ignominy the giant persecutors of the Kingdom of Christ. "Boast not yourselves in mischief ye mighty men - the goodness and the justice of God endureth continually."

Was thy throne of martyrdom, O James, on the right or the left hand of thy dear and glorious Lord? Or was that principal place reserved for thy fiery brother John, who through the grace of Christ should defy death till his task also was complete - till in seraphic vision, on one glorious Lord's Day, he should see and record in one calendar day of 24 hours what should fill up 20 centuries of history of the Church's travail and trial and triumph?

We await the answer still but are sure that Zebedee's wife did not ask in vain; nor in vain did the two glorious brothers declare their readiness to be baptized with the same baptism as their Lord.

Spare your criticisms of these gallant and noble hearts, O ye surface commentators and ingenious orators. Men like these, the world seldom saw the like of, and how happy we, if with the same readiness and cheerfulness, made "able" by the grace of Him who knows how to strengthen in the most frightful hour, we face the last King of Terrors with the same fortitude and unconquerable faith:

JOHN - BOANERGES

Are the features of John the apostle already becoming clearer to us as we pursue our inquiry into his holy significance?

Consider how much was given to this man and said of him and to him by Christ, as He invested him with those jewels of grace and providence which marked him out as the Boanerges who was to defend the Church and go before her in her conflicts in the Spirit and Power of his Lord for the next 2,000 years.

We have said that John (with Andrew) was the first of the apostles to meet with and to follow Christ. This appears from the first chapter of the Gospel which he was destined to write. He is the unnamed disciple who was with John the Baptist and Andrew on that never to be forgotten day when the Saviour of Men (newly returned from His temptation in the wilderness), passed by, deliberately to compel the encounter which ensued. "Behold, the Lamb of God", proclaimed the Forerunner, and by that same divine compulsion which ever after was the condition and meaning of his life, John, with Andrew his dear companion, (disciples both of them already of John the Baptist) followed the Saviour (John 1:35-37).

THE GREAT INCOGNITO

Then began that purposeful incognito with which John the apostle shrouds his identity - an incognito which he observes in all his writings with the exception of the Revelation when for reasons which will presently appear, he withdraws the curtain and reveals himself. Through all his other writings we look in vain for his name.

That incognito was part of his message, for John never acts for himself. He is always our "brother and companion in tribulation and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ". He sees and hears on behalf of Christ's people that they, through him, may receive and enjoy the comfort of the Divine Word in all their tribulation.

His incognito is no useless act of personal modesty, but the exercise of a prophetic prerogative on behalf of Christ's people for whom alone he acts.

It is because men have been too obtuse to see this, that the legend of another John arose, a certain "John the Presbyter", who was invented quite early in the Christian Church to fill the vacancy. This imaginary person has been adopted only too readily by the rationalists as a congenial excuse for impugning the authority of the Fourth Gospel. We can well imagine that Satan would have a very special spite against the writings of John seeing that they bear so heavily against his kingdom and power.

But who can believe that a fraud composed the Seventeenth of John?

Nor is it through the rationalists alone that Satan has tried to render harmless the terrible weapon which God forged in John for his exposure and ruin. Our evangelical brethren in these latter days have accepted too readily a theory which destroys the Book of Revelation by placing it beyond the consolation of the Church.

We do not intend to spend overmuch time on these aberrations, lest we fall into the error of those who, in training young men for the ministry, engage their attention too much in negations instead of putting into their hands the weapons of that Word which alone can destroy Satan's power.

Surely, only by the device of an incognito could John suitably refer to himself as "the disciple whom Jesus loved". This mysterious designation does not and cannot mean that the Saviour had or has a greater or less degree of love to His individual children, any more than His peculiar love for Lazarus and the family of Bethany denotes variation in that eternal love which He bears to all His redeemed.

His love for John was a prophetic love, which had to do with John's special relation to the Church. John was peculiarly designated "our brother and companion in tribulation" because of the special message he was raised up to give to the Church in the five writings which came from his pen - the Gospel, the three epistles, and the Revelation.

His (John's) was the last voice to echo across the abyss of 2,000 years to the present day. There is a special sense in which the beloved apostle is with us still. He never dies. "If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee?" (John 21:22). A saying arose in consequence of these mysterious words that John would not die. But John teaches us that the meaning of Christ's words is otherwise.

"Jesus said not, He shall not die, but"

History elucidates the meaning. John is with the Church in a prophetic sense in all her tribulations. On her behalf he was a prisoner in the isle of Patmos. On her behalf he received the Revelation which is the chart of the Church's journey through time. On her behalf he weeps in chapter five of Revelation, till the answer to the Church's sufferings is made clear. On her behalf he "ate the little book" of divine testimony (sweet in the mouth but bitter in the bowels) denoting an immense period of time to elapse from his day, during which the Church would testify of Christ and suffer the bitterness of the world's opposition and hatred (Rev. 10: 10-11).

His days were prolonged till the time came for his special mission to be accomplished in his five writings. This task could not be undertaken till the situation arose which required a light not previously given concerning the length of the journey to be made by the people of God through blood and travail till Christ should come.

Far down the ages now;

Her journey well-nigh done.

THE BREAD OF LIFE

Only under the shelter of that same incognito could John modestly refer to himself as the one who lay on Jesus' bosom at the Last Supper. It was the Church as represented in John, whose head lay (and always lies) in the comfort and love of that bosom where beats the heart of the Eternal, filled with compassion, mercy and truth. Only once, mark you - only once, did John lay his head in the bosom of Christ. This he did not habitually, but once only - at the Last Supper. And why? Because there the symbols of the Eternal Covenant of Grace lay on the table, and Christ consecrated Himself in the presence of His disciples to the sacrifice He was about to make in the terms of that Covenant for the redemption of His people.

John does not describe the ordinance of the bread and wine in his gospel - the only gospel to omit that part of the record (Hear, O ye wise!) - for he had already recorded in his sixth chapter what is omitted from all the other gospels, namely the great discourse on the Bread of Life, and the words which gave so great offence to the Jewish literalists: "My flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He that eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood dwelleth in me and I in him."

We pause not to expose the contrary error of that Church which confuses substance and spirit together and turns one into the other by the magic of priestcraft. It is enough that we have spiritual understanding of the gospel mystery, and know what Christ meant when He said, "It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing. The words that I speak unto you they are spirit, and they are life" (John 6:63).

By omitting the record of the Last Ordinance John draws attention to the entirely spiritual nature of salvation in accordance with the discourse of Our Lord after the breaking of the loaves among the five thousand (John 6).

John laid his head in the bosom of Christ during that Supper because he was destined to be the beloved representative throughout all time, of that Church, that Bride of Christ, which lay in covenant promise in that Eternal Bosom, close to that Eternal Heart, from all eternity. He was in this, as in so many ways, our brother, and companion in tribulation and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ.

JOHN AT THE CROSS

One other event - one of the most solemn and enigmatic of all - remains for us to elucidate in our quest for understanding of the special mission of John to the Church.

It lies in the Crucifixion scene so intimately described by John. He was the only one of the apostles to be near the Lord at the end. From John it is that we know all that happened in Pilate's judgment hall and have the full record of that wonderful dialogue between the Son of Man and the Roman Governor, that dialogue which showed the poor Roman to be nearer the Kingdom of God than any of them. Only John records the dreadful apprehension of Pilate when the Jews told him, "He ought to die because he made himself the

Son of God". In great fear the Governor returned to the Judgment Hall with the question, "Whence art thou?" and later he refused to alter what he had written on the accusation nailed to the Cross - "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews". For Pilate knew that in some sense it was true.

John was the only one of the twelve (now the eleven) who was actually at the Cross, at the side of the Saviour in His last sufferings and saw and heard all, from whom the other disciples received the certain word of what took place there.

He records the third Word from the Cross - that Word which intimately concerned himself and his future identification with the Church's future well-being: "Woman, behold thy son!" "Behold thy mother". Thus was Mary committed into John's loving care, and from that hour "that disciple took her into his own home" (John 19:26-27). Who can doubt that there was far more in the Saviour's commission to John than just provision for a poor widow's temporal welfare? There was that in it, of course, but more far more - beside. For in this commission the Lord indicated how the Church was committed to apostolic care - and in particular, into the prophetic care of John through the long ages of her journey through the wilderness of her trial and privation.

That spurious religion should have falsified the status of the Virgin Mother is no reason why a true devotional exegesis should fear to put the record straight. Let antichrist declare falsely that Mary is "the Mother of the Church" and we will expose the lie and show that Mary's part in the history of Christ's birth and growth to manhood is now ended. She ceased to have any significance as His mother. He tenderly discharges her from any further part in the story by appointing John to be her son, to whom henceforth she must look for shelter and provision. On the contrary, John is that apostle into whose prophetic charge the Church is specially committed, in her helplessness and her affliction, as Mary was now so committed into his temporal care.

It is John who tells us he saw the lance pierce the sacred side of the Redeemer, and the double flow of water and blood which leaped from the veins as the sharp blade withdrew:

"And he who saw it bear record, and his record is true: and he knoweth that he saith true, that ye might believe" (John 19:34-37).

It is John who discerns at once the significance of Zechariah's words, "They shall look on him whom they pierced" (Zech. 12:10), and so settles for all time the question of prophetic interpretation, by giving to us, the Church, the word of Zechariah, which the Jewish rabbis, followed slavishly by many evangelical expositors and theorists, doggedly assert is not for the Church at all. For John is the apostle of the Church, not of the Jew. To his word the church, in the form of the widowed mother, was committed at the cross. Because of the Church he suffered at Patmos, and all his writings are for the Church and about the Church and for the Church's guidance and consolation in her 2,000 years of Great Tribulation. "I John, your brother and companion in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ"

Brethren, how blind we evangelicals have been for generations past. Is it not time someone wrote a new exposition of John, different from all the rest? And as there seems no-one else coming forward to do it, O Lord, help us to fill this gap and supply this need before we die, that thy Church may share the riches of that consolation which thou didst ordain through John, our brother in trial and patience. And may thy Church be again richly endowed in advance of the times to come, for O Lord, we know not the days through which we are passing and how many of us may yet be called upon, like our fathers,- to seal our testimony in blood and write the Covenant afresh with the ink which flows through our veins.

How strange, O Lord, that for so long thy Church should have been misled by prophetic theorising into believing that almost the whole of thy great Book of the Revelation should relate only to a mere seven years of history at the very end of the ages, while there should be silence in heaven, not just for the half hour mentioned in that very Book (Chap. 8:1) but for two thousand years during which thy Church should be harried, slain and tormented by the active hate of this world! How strange, that the Irvingite fanaticism of 150 years ago, with its fantasy of Secret Raptures and great tribulations, arising from the frenzies of its false claims to inspiration, should have conditioned thought in the evangelical body so as to destroy in large measure the meaning of the prophetic Word. How strange, blessed Saviour, that it should now flourish in a variety of deviations mutually exclusive of each other, their only unanimity being that thy servant John did not write these things for the Church (though he says he does) but for a fragment of time irrelevant to the history of the Church?

It is time, O Lord for thee to work, for men have made void thy Law. Arise O Lord! Pluck thy hand, even thy right hand from thy bosom, and stretch it out for the deliverance of thy people; let the Word of God return to its strength and the bride of Christ once more appear,

TERRIBLE AS AN ARMY WITH BANNERS,

(Song of Songs, 6:10).

JOHN'S TWOFOLD TASK AT PATMOS

It is not our purpose, of course, at this time to venture upon a full examination of the wonders of the Book of Revelation, but to touch only upon one or two of its salient features in so far as they have important bearing upon the Gospel of John which is just now the subject of our special study.

For all the writings of John are a unity and must be considered together if we would make good work of our expository task.

The starting point of all John's writings is the first general persecution of the Church which arose in the reign of the Emperor Domitian.

It was about that time too that worldly wisdom (the adulterous spouse of worldly power) arose to poison the springs of pure doctrine in the Church.

The Book of the Revelation was the answer to the one:

the Gospel and the Epistles were the answer to the other.

To both errors John opposes the same remedy of truth -namely, the Supremacy, the Sovereignty, the Eternal Nature and the Uncreated Wisdom of Christ, the Word (LOGOS) of the Father, the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last.

Let this be said, and thundered along with the lightnings of our great brother Boanerges, in such a time as this into which the Church of Christ is surely entering. Only the presentation of Christ in all His glory, grace, and truth, will be sufficient defence against that persecuting power which threatens to crush, and against that pernicious and blasphemous error which aims to poison from within, the people and the Church of the Lamb.

For such times as these the writings of John were never more relevant.

THE MAN WHO SAT FOR THE PICTURE OF THE BEAST

The Emperor, Domitian, who died in the year 96 A.D., gradually assumed himself divine honours and eventually proclaimed himself "Dominus et Deus" (Lord and God). He proceeded to punish, as those guilty of high treason, all who refused to pay him divine honours. The refusal of Christians to accord to him this supreme blasphemy led directly to the FIRST GENERAL PERSECUTION OF THE CHURCH.

It was in the course of this persecution that the aged John was arrested in Asia Minor (where he exercised the pastoral care over the "Seven Churches of Asia") and cast into the isle of Patmos off the coast of Asia Minor. There, according to report, he was compelled to work in the ore mines, and there certainly he saw in one glorious day those visions which comprise the Book of the Revelation - the Book of the Church's consolation in the face of all worldly and anti-Christian power.

To Patmos, therefore, my brethren, if we would understand John and his writings!

Hengstenberg writes:

"The Revelation was written in the midst of persecutions, during which not only executions, but also banishments took place. This is clear from ch.13:10, 'He that leadeth into captivity shall go into captivity; he that killeth with the sword must be killed with the sword. Here is the patience and faith of the saints.' "

"Domitian, above almost every other, was a fit representative of the terrible bloody beast, full of the names of blasphemy, and of the horrible woman drunk with the blood of saints and of the witnesses of Jesus - comp. chs. 13 and 17. What Pliny says of Domitian not infrequently reminds one of the Revelation, and suggests the thought, that

TO THE AUTHOR OF THE REVELATION, DOMITIAN SAT FOR THE PICTURE OF THE BEAST.

"He (Pliny) describes him as the 'most savage monster' that sometimes gulped the blood of relatives, sometimes employed himself in slaughtering the most distinguished citizens, before whose gates fear and terror watched. He was himself of frightful aspect, pride on his forehead, fury in his eye, constantly seeking darkness and secrecy, and never coming out of his solitude except to make solitude ... He was a man of great bodily strength, and despised the pleasures which music yields, and which tend to soften the mind; he found his enjoyment in the pains and lamentations of others."

The saints were learning to cry, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?" (Rev. 6:10).

This cry was to be heard only too frequently throughout the history of the Church: to John it was given to bestow the supreme consolation. Truly he could say in the opening of the Revelation, "Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand" (ch. 1:3).

THE KINGDOM OF PATIENCE

The understanding of verse 9 of Rev. 1 is crucial to the understanding of all the writings of John because it discloses the peculiar status of John, prophetically, in relation to the Church of all ages. Here are the words:

"I John, who also am your brother, and companion in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was in the isle that is called Patmos, for the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ."

John's position in Patmos symbolised the outward state of the Church, oppressed and suffering, at the mercy (as touching the body) of the worldly, heathen power. The Kingdom of Christ is shown to be a Kingdom of Patience. The people of God endure the oppression and hatred of Satan and of the world for one reason only - because they have the Word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ. They are not promised deliverance from the conflict in this life, but they wait in patience and faith for the return of their Lord. "We wait," says Paul, "for the adoption to wit the redemption of our body.... in this (body) we groan, not for that we would be unclothed but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life" (Romans 8:23; 2 Cor. 5: 4).

They who look for deliverance from the oppression of the world in some future millennium evidently do not know their Paul, or their John.

In all his writings, therefore, John is the Church's brother and companion in tribulation: Because of us he moves incognito through his Gospel and his epistles, refusing to identify himself (though we know well who he is) and only coming out into the open in Revelation because there his identity so merged in his sufferings and ours that it is fitting he should disclose his name, to give us a tangible and historic basis for our consolation.

For us he went in that great fifth chapter till he saw coming forth that Blessed One bearing still the marks of our redemption in His glorious body - coming forth to receive the Book of our consolation and victory over the world, from the hand of Omnipotence.

"Weep not, behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah the root of David hath prevailed to open the Book and to break the seven seals thereof."

For us too, he ate the blessed Book of the Church's testimony after having foreseen the disasters which would ruin the earlier phases of the kingdom of Satan. Sweet is that book to the taste, for it is the testimony of Christ, but bitter in the bowels, because it brings the people of Christ into trouble through the hatred of the world against which they testify. The downfall of one tyranny would not mean the end of the Church's

story - it never does.

"Thou must prophesy again before many peoples and nations, and tongues and kings." (Rev. 10:11)

Yet there are those who maintain with the utmost vehemence that John's prophetic book is not the Church at all but principally for a revived Judaism at the end of time. But John was commanded to write his book for the Seven Churches and to send it to them - churches which represent mystically the Sevenfold Church of Christ in all ages.

Satan must indeed have a peculiar dread of the writings of John that he should endeavour thus to take them away from the consolation of the people of God throughout the long ages of their suffering, and allege that it all belongs to a generation yet to come and the events of the great last book of the Bible will be over and done with in 1260 DAYS. What strange delusion is this, which has for too long clouded the vision of evangelical teachers and destroyed the Book of Revelation just as surely by making it irrelevant and meaningless, as the destructive Bible criticism does to many another part by denying its inspiration!

We understand our Book of Revelation as we understand our Gospel of John - both are for us and for our spiritual consolation and must be spiritually received.

As our brother and companion John was sitting there in his sea girt prison, medicating upon the appalling evils rushing upon the Church and threatening to carry everything away in one great hurricane of Satanic power and spite, he suddenly found himself "in the spirit" - that is, in a state of prophetic ecstasy, lifted up above and beyond (as Ezekiel of old) the events of time, to behold history from the inside, and to see, for the Church's consolation, the Divine strategy for the overcoming of the devil and all his works.

A great voice breaks in upon his soliloquy:

"I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last" (Rev- 1:11).

That voice was the voice of Christ. All the time, in the invisibility of His eternal and omnipotent reign Christ was there with His servant and with His suffering Church.

The inspired John was in the Spirit that day that he might see and hear on behalf of the people of God and be for them eyes and ears and understanding, to interpret to them the glorious fact that the only ruler of the ages is Christ, the first and the last. Who then is Domitian, and what is Rome, and what shall the end be of all who oppose the Son of God?

We were there, brethren, in the person of our beloved apostle, and that consoling, invigorating, reassuring Word is with us now in all our distresses and afflictions, our cares and near-despairs, holding before us that same all-glorious Lord who appeared then to John like unto the Son of Man, clothed with a garment down to the foot (all His work ended) girt about with a golden girdle, His eyes as a flame of fire, His voice like the sound of many waters, His countenance as the sun shining in its strength.

2,000 YEARS OF HISTORY

The apocalyptic unveiling which follows in this glorious Book sets down the inner history (as distinct from mere outward events) of the Church's warfare for the next 2,000 years, beginning at Patmos with Domitian's persecution. That first great collision with the power of this world contained within itself the germ of all other conflicts through which the Church must pass.

Two thousand years of the Church's story have since been etched in suffering and written in blood, and unless God had shed some light upon the mystery of it all, something would have been missing from the testimony of Christ's grace. The Book of Revelation was written that the Church might have her marching orders, be raised above the temporal nature of her sufferings, and given a view of history behind history, the providential machinery of the divine sovereignty in God's preservation of His Word and work. Evil would be tolerated, the bodies of God's servants given over at times to the will of Satan, colossal powers would be loosed upon the flock of God, evils more subtle and more dangerous than any outward persecution would arise in the form of deceptions, frauds, imitations, false doctrines, to beguile the unwary. Through it all the Church would be preserved and the all-wise strategy of God for the containing and final destruction of evil would be worked out and the mystery of faith brought into the fullest exercise. Christ's witnesses would love not their lives unto the death for the sake of His thrice-blessed Name. The Kingdom of God would remain. Satan's Kingdom would destroy itself in the hour of its fancied triumph.

The Book of Ecclesiastes is the prelude to the Book of Revelation. It deals with the mystery of the Church's sufferings in the Old Testament and affords help to faith as it discloses the inner meaning of

tribulation.

The writings of the apostle John are peculiarly designed for the comfort of the Church in her long and bitter conflict with the powers of evil. In himself first, the Beloved Apostle experienced the world's oppressive power that in the consolation granted to him, might be shown where the Church's strength and comfort lie.

How completely God seems to surrender His people into the hands of the wicked with no human hope of deliverance! It was while bearing his heavy cross of tribulation (not for himself only but for the comfort of all who should thereafter suffer the trial of their faith) that John received not only the glorious visions of the Book of Revelation, but (as we believe) his commission to write the Gospel which we know as the Gospel of John.

They who move through the Gospel of John move through a holy temple with the hush of the sanctuary upon their souls. If they would do, more than merely tarry at the gate to admire the gilt and the architecture of the ancient facade, their hearts must be prepared by suffering, by wrestling with their sinful nature, animated at last by that earnest longing for immortality of which Paul spoke so strangely,

THE SPIRIT MAKETH INTERCESSION FOR US WITH GROANINGS THAT CANNOT BE UTTERED.

John is the best preparation for John. Let us linger with him awhile in Patmos, for it was there that his Gospel was conceived and brought to birth in the travail of faith's trial and triumph.

There is an affinity between John and the great Old Testament prophets who went before him. As John was at Patmos, so was Elisha at Dothan (2 Kings 5) and Jacob at Mahanaim (Gen. 32:2). Surrounded by the vast host of the ungodly Elisha was undismayed for he was a man with his eyes open, and he saw what his poor servant could not see at first - the entire landscape round about filled with horses and chariots of fire. Or in the case of Jacob, menaced by the advance of his bloodthirsty brother Esau with his cohort of 400 violent men sworn to his destruction; he who was that night destined to grapple with deity and feel the Eternal in the grip of his very fingers, was met by the angels of God in two all-conquering hosts symbolic of the puissance of that Church which King Solomon later saw in his Song of Songs -

"What will ye see in the Shulamite? As it were the company of two armies (margin, Mahanaim)" Song of Sol. 6:13.

David in the wilderness; Ezekiel in exile at the Chebar river; Daniel in Babylon - these all represented the people of God in their trials and exiles, that we might see through their eyes, hear through their ears, and feel through their consolations, that same comfort which belongs to us in our oppressions and desolations.

Back then to John in Patmos. The New Testament Church was there with him - our timeless John, our brother and companion in tribulation and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ; our John who was expected not to die and yet who died, but lives on by the words and the vision which Christ gave unto him; lives to minister to his beloved Seven Churches the same comfort wherewith he was comforted by Christ.

We expect the indulgence of our readers therefore, in spending so much of our time in this introductory study, not on the Gospel but on the Revelation, because the one is essential to the understanding of the other, and we shall the better read the Gospel, with understanding and with gratitude, when we have been prepared, by prior acquaintance with the greatness of that Person who declares as with the voice of a trumpet,

I AM ALPHA AND OMEGA, THE FIRST AND THE LAST (Rev. 1:10)

For the Alpha and Omega, the First and the Last, are terms which explain John's special descriptive title in his Gospel of the person and nature of the glorious Redeemer - THE WORD OF GOD.

We shall see more. Because we have learned from the Revelation how our true consolation lies in contemplating the ineffable glory of Christ, we return to our Gospel of John and from the very outset are prepared (and that with a sublime eagerness not imparted by many commentaries that we know about), to be lifted out of this world and above its vanities and its weariness, by the apprehension of the Presence and Glory of Christ, in every conceivable sense.

We shall find ourselves looking at the world and its trials, and the burdens of this life, through the eyes of John as he passes through it all as our brother and companion in tribulation. We shall find how our tears were anticipated by his, and the bitterness into which the testimony of Jesus brings us, more than matched by the sweetness of its taste.

And if some of our more scholastic friends complain that this is not scientific; this is not theology; this is but sermon and experience; we reply, so much the worse for your theology and your exegetical science; it is you who have destroyed theology, crippled the ministry and destroyed the effectiveness of the pulpit.

If some Bible College lecturer should be reading these lines, or some seminary theologian, his desk surrounded by the mouldering tomes of a theology only too much to his liking, we would humbly counsel him to beware lest he be brought to account some day for accepting the wages of poor scholars who are laudably ambitious for the ministry, but who leave the classroom day by day drier than when they went in, without one struggling "Hallelujah" in their souls because the desk has not spoken well of Christ nor inspired their praise of Him.

This was not the theology of John who, when, he saw Christ, fell at His feet as one dead. The average seminary oration might produce a yawn; it is scarcely designed to raise a rhapsody.

In the Book of the Revelation Christ walks in the midst of His people in His eternal glory. In the Gospel He walks in the concealment of that glory, veiled in flesh, yet apprehended by faith:

"And we beheld His glory; The glory as of the only Begotten

of the Father full of grace and truth." John 1:14.

In Revelation He proclaims:

"I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last."

In the Gospel He says to those whose eyes faith has opened -

"I that speak unto thee am he".

The strength and comfort which it is the design of John's Gospel to confer upon the Church in the long ages of her travail, in "the Kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ", lie in the full disclosure there made of Christ in the glory and majesty of His Person, His absolute deity, His right and prerogative to confer all the blessings of heaven upon His people, His ability to preserve and deliver them in all tribulation and bring them at the last to those mansions of bliss which He has gone to prepare for them.

Hence He is revealed supremely in the writings of John as the Only Begotten Son, the Eternal Word and Wisdom by which all things were made and FOR WHOM all creatures have their being. He is shown to be the sovereign Lord of death and life, the arbiter of all time, the master of all circumstance; the fulfillment of all expectation, the hope of the human race, the fountain of all grace and truth, the Word which was already there at the beginning, which dwelt with God before the beginning, and was in fact God.

He is the only and true light which comes into the world; He is the life without which there is no life.

If the disciple whom Jesus loved, to whom was imparted an intimacy with the Saviour beyond the common measure - if one so privileged was struck down as though dead when he saw only a symbolic vision of the Risen Lord, what must it be to be there and to behold, not just that outward symbolic majesty of the Eternal Son (which was all John saw) but that Glorious Person Himself in all the splendour of beauty and grace which belongs to Him as the chosen one of the Father and the Darling of heaven?

Even now, when we see but through a glass darkly, what does it mean to know by faith that as He was with John so He is with His Church to the end of time, and with every individual one of us who believe in Him? Let the wild beasts of hell and of history roar. Let earth's proudest and strongest rage and blaspheme. What can they do against Him who holds all Creation in the hollow of His hand, and to whom His saints are as the apple of His eye.

This is John's message; this is that John who survived the first century until the time came when under the weight and oppression of this world's power it was given to him to see on our behalf and to hear and feel and know, that by the Word of grace through him, he might be our brother and companion.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/charles-alexander/john-your-brother-the-author-and-his-message/>

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