

(The Lord and His Church) 2. Encouragement in Tribulation

by Zac Poonen

The sermon emphasizes the importance of perseverance and encouragement in the face of tribulation, and encourages believers to keep themselves in the Spirit and to be sensitive to God's guidance and direction.

Scripture: Jeremiah 12:5, Matthew 23:8, Mark 10:30, John 16:33, Acts 14:22, 2 Corinthians 1:4, Colossians 3:2, Revelation 1:9, Revelation 2:10

Topics: "Tribulation", "Spiritual Growth"

Description

Zac Poonen preaches on the life of John, emphasizing his humility as he referred to himself simply as 'your brother'. John, despite his age and experience, did not exalt himself with titles but recognized all believers as brothers under the leadership of Christ. John's mention of being a 'fellow-partaker in the tribulation which is in Jesus' highlights the reality that every disciple should expect trials and tribulations while following Christ, as exemplified by John's own experience on the island of Patmos. Poonen challenges believers to embrace tribulations as a means of spiritual growth and preparation for the future, emphasizing the importance of perseverance and enduring in faith amidst trials. He also stresses the significance of being 'in the Spirit' like John, tuning our minds to hear God's voice amidst the distractions and voices of the world.

Transcript

"I, John, your brother and fellow-partaker in the tribulation and kingdom and perseverance which are in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos, because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like the sound of a trumpet." (Revelation 1:9, 10).

John Your Brother

Here we read John calling himself "your brother". John was at that time the only living apostle of the twelve whom Jesus had chosen. He was about 95 years old when the Lord gave him this revelation on the island of Patmos. He had walked with God for about 65 years by then. But he was still a brother.

He wasn't Pope John or Reverend John. He was not even Pastor John! He was just an ordinary brother. Jesus had taught His disciples to avoid all titles and to refer to themselves always as only brothers

(Matthew 23:8-11). And the apostles obeyed Him literally, unlike many today.

We have only one Head and one Leader - even Christ. All the rest of us are brothers, whatever our ministry or our experience in the church may be.

The Tribulation Which is in Jesus

John also refers to himself as a "fellow-partaker in the tribulation which is in Jesus". Every wholehearted disciple of Jesus should be prepared to partake in the "tribulation which is in Jesus", as long as he is in this world.

John did not get this unveiling while living in comfort. He received it, while experiencing tribulation at Patmos, because he had been faithful to "the word of God and the testimony of Jesus" (verse 9). He had to experience tribulation himself in order to be able to write about the saints experiencing the great tribulation from the Antichrist in the last days. God takes us through trials and tribulations first before giving us a ministry to others who are facing tribulation.

Paul said,

"God encourages us in all our affliction so that we may be able to encourage those who are in any affliction with the (same) encouragement with which we ourselves are encouraged by God" (2 Corinthians 1:4 - AMP).

It is not surprising therefore that the doctrine that Jesus would come secretly and take (rapture) His church out of the world, before the great tribulation, arose for the first time in a country (England) where Christians were living in comfort, and at a time (mid-19th century) when they were not facing any persecution for their faith at all. Today this doctrine continues to be proclaimed and believed by Christians who live in ease and comfort, in countries where there is no persecution against Christians at all.

Since the prayers of most Christians are basically of this order: "Lord make my life more comfortable on earth", it is not surprising that they have gladly accepted this teaching of a pre-tribulation rapture of the church. Thus Satan has succeeded in lulling multitudes of Christians with a false comfort, so that they will be unprepared for the great tribulation when it does come upon them.

The words of Jesus are clear:

"In the world YOU HAVE TRIBULATION. But take courage; I have overcome the world" (John 16:33).

He never promised that we would escape tribulation - whether small tribulations or the great one. But He did say that we could overcome even as He overcame. He is far more interested in making us overcomers than in saving us out of tribulation, because He is far more interested in our character than in our comfort.

Neither did Jesus ever say that escaping the great tribulation was a reward for faithfulness, as some teach. On the contrary, He said that those who forsook everything to follow Him would have even more tribulations than others who didn't follow Him (Mark 10:30).

When He prayed to His Father for His disciples, He said, "I do not ask Thee to take them out of the world, but to keep them from the evil." (John 17:15). He did NOT want His disciples to be raptured out of the world at that time, just because they were going to face tribulation.

In the 3rd-century when Christians were being thrown to the lions in the Roman amphitheatres and being burnt at the stake in different parts of the Roman empire, the Lord did not rescue them from such tribulations. The God Who shut the lions' mouths and took away the power of the fiery furnace in Daniel's day, did NOT do such miracles for these disciples of Jesus - for these were new-covenant Christians who were going to glorify God through death. Like Jesus their Master, they neither asked for, nor expected twelve legions of angels to come and protect them from their enemies.

From heaven, God watched the Bride of His Son being torn to pieces by lions and being burnt to ashes; and He was glorified in their testimony - for they had "followed the Lamb, wherever He went", even unto a violent physical death (Revelation 14:4). The only word that the Lord spoke to them was, "Be faithful until death and I will give you a crown of life." (Revelation 2:10).

Even today, when the disciples of Jesus are being tortured and persecuted for His Name in many lands, the Lord does not take them away from the earth. And He will not rapture us to heaven before the great tribulation either. He will do something far better. He will make us overcomers in the midst of the great tribulation.

Jesus is far more interested in saving us from evil than in saving us from tribulation. He permits us to go through tribulation because He knows that that is the only way that we can become spiritually strong.

Such a message is strange teaching indeed to a comfort-loving Christendom that has been coddled in their pews every Sunday for years by ear-tickling preachers. But this is the message that the apostles preached to the early churches.

"They (the apostles Paul and Barnabas) strengthened the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, saying, 'Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.'" (Acts 14:22).

The little trials that we face at home and at work now, are but a preparation for the greater ones that will come in the days to come. That is why it is essential that we are faithful now. For God says,

"If you have run with footmen and they have tired you out, then how can you compete with horses?" (Jeremiah 12:5).

John speaks here about being a "fellow-partaker in the tribulation and kingdom and perseverance which are in Jesus" (verse 9). We have to enter into fellowship with Jesus in tribulation first, before we can share His throne with Him in His kingdom.

Perseverance is a great virtue that is emphasised throughout the New Testament. Jesus Himself said "They will deliver you to tribulationbut the one who endures to the end shall be saved" (Matthew 24:13).

Being "In the Spirit"

John received this revelation on the Lord's day (verse 10). The first day of the week was called "the Lord's day" because that was the day that Jesus rose from the dead, having conquered sin, Satan, death and the grave.

The early disciples met together on the first day of every week, to build one another up and to break bread (Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 16:2). They had no special days in the year. They had no "Good Friday" or "Easter" or "Christmas". They had been freed from keeping days and seasons etc., for they had come

under the new covenant (Colossians 2:16, 17).

John was "in the Spirit" and that's why he heard the voice of the Lord. We can hear that voice too - if we are in the Spirit. It all depends on where our mind is set. If our mind is set on the things of earth, then the voices that we hear will be concerning earthly things.

We know, for example, that there are many voices in the radio-waves in the air around us. The voice that we pick up will depend on the frequency that our radio-set is tuned to. You can hear God's Word over radio or you can hear Satan's rock-music over it. The choice is yours.

It is just the same with our mind. If we are in the Spirit - that is if we are filled with the Spirit and our mind is set on the things that are above (Colossians 3:2) - we will be able to hear the Lord's voice.

But there are other voices in the air that are clamouring for our attention too. There are voices that would like to tell you how to make more money, how to get your share of the family property, how to settle scores with that person who cheated you and how to defend yourself against those who are spreading false stories about you etc., etc. Satan's radio stations are broadcasting lies, bitterness and anxieties etc., 24 hours of every day. All you have to do is tune in, and you can pick up what you like!!

When believers complain that God doesn't speak to them, it is not because God does not speak. He is speaking all the time. But their minds are tuned in to this world and its interests. I am convinced that there is much that the Spirit has spoken in the past that was meant for us, but which we never "picked up", because we were not in the Spirit.

You can sit in a meeting of the church and hear absolutely nothing that the Spirit is saying, even though you may understand everything that the preacher said. Someone sitting next to you who is "in the Spirit" may however hear the Lord's voice just like John did. John heard the Lord's voice so clearly that he says it was as loud as a trumpet! That's how loudly God speaks! But those who are deaf won't hear even the blast of a trumpet.

Let me exhort and challenge every one of you to keep yourself in the Spirit every day - especially in these the last days of this age. Keep yourself sensitive to sin and walk in humility before the face of God, so that your ears can be open to hear what the Lord has to say to you.

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