

# Patmos

Revelation 1:9 – “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.”

*Patmos*: g3963. Πάτμος Patmos; of uncertain derivation; Patmus, an islet in the Mediterranean: Patmos.AV (1) - Patmos 1; Patmos = "my killing"; a rugged and bare island in the Aegean Sea.

A very powerful and instructive theme emerges from the story of John being on Patmos. Here are some of the key and important parts of this story:

- John had risen to a place of prominent leadership and influence in the early church.
- John’s influence upon the church had clearly produced a situation that could not be ignored.
- The Roman Emperor in the days of John’s rising prominence was Titus Flavius Domitian, who reigned from 81 AD until 96 AD.
- Domitian perceived the threat that the church and its early leaders posed, and he ordered that extreme persecution be exacted on the church and its leaders.
- John, being one of the most prominent leaders at the time, was a target of this persecution.
- Domitian ordered John to quit preaching Christ, but John continued unfazed.
- Domitian then ordered that John be executed in a very unusual way. He ordered that John be boiled to death in oil.
- John was plunged into a pot of boiling oil yet was miraculously unharmed.
- It was then that Domitian ordered that John be banished in exile to the Isle of Patmos.

Patmos means “my killing.” Domitian means “tamed.” So, when Domitian could not stop John, when he could not tame John, and then when he could not kill John, Domitian had him exiled to Patmos. However, what Domitian never could have anticipated was that all of his sanctions and adverse actions against John were driving John deeper and deeper into the very center of the will of God. Domitian ultimately sent John to “my killing,” but he never realized that his actions would perfectly position John in the place where John would end up doing perhaps his most important work. For it was there on Patmos (my killing) where John encountered Jesus and received “The Revelation of Jesus Christ.

I am reminded of what Paul said about those who, while under the influence of a demonic scheme, sentenced Jesus to death on the cross. About those things, Paul said in 1 Corinthians 2:8, “Which none of the princes of this world knew: for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.” We should also say that if Domitian had known he was sending John into the depths of his eternal destiny and in that place a biblical keystone would be given to John, it is likely Domitian would have never exiled John to Patmos.

What do we think John was thinking all throughout this series of events in his life? Do we think that John was jumping for joy? Is there any possibility that John was miffed about the string of circumstances that he was experiencing? I think it is more than possible that these unpleasant circumstances were grievous to John. And, apart from John (a) knowing by revelation what God was doing in the circumstances, (b) making the decision to bring every one of his thoughts into captivity and under the obedience of God, or (c) drawing upon an unwavering, unmovable faith in God, we know that John would have struggled his way through these difficult and challenging times.

**“...until she learns to sing there.”**

I remember many years ago having a number of conversations with a sister in the Lord over the course of a year or so. We were together with this sister and her husband. She worked in the health care profession for a particular hospital. During our first visit with this couple, the sister shared about the extreme difficulties she was encountering in her job situation. The report seemed long and very detailed. She ended the story by saying that she had been asking the Father, “How long do I have to stay in this situation?” I realized that I was not moved in any way to speak to the question “How long?” or attempt to provide an answer for her. Some time later we were visiting with this same couple, and the sister repeated the story, with some updates. She ended the time by saying that she had continued to ask the Father, “How long?” Again, I did not have any impression that the Lord was giving me the answer to her question “How long?” During a third visit with this same couple, there was a repeat of the same scenario—the whole story was told again with its standard ending “How long?” This time I clearly heard the Holy Spirit say, “Tell her until she learns how to sing there.”

I knew that this was a reference to the story presented in Acts 16:19-40. This passage tells the story of Paul and Silas being arrested, beaten publicly, and imprisoned, because they were preaching the gospel and demonstrating the power of Jesus Christ. When Paul and Silas were in prison, at midnight they “prayed and sang praises to God.” When they did, there was a great earthquake that broke up the foundation of the prison causing all of the prison doors to swing open and all of the prisoners’ shackles to fall off. This story is classic, and it shows the unswerving allegiance and faith in God that Paul and Silas had. They PRAYED and they SANG PRAISES! They were not saying “How long?” They prayed and sang praises but not in the hope that by doing so their plight would change. They prayed and sang praises, because God is worthy of our prayer and our praise.

John was banished to Patmos not knowing that it would be there that Jesus would come and meet with him. It was there that John was given The Revelation. It was there that John encountered the Lord in a way that he never had encountered Him before. It was there that John was invited to enter the realm of heaven. John saw and heard things that he would write down that would provide instruction and encouragement to the sons of God for all of the ages. We, as the church of the Lord Jesus Christ, owe a debt to John, and we also owe a debt to Domitian. We can thank Domitian for helping arrange the circumstance in which John was perfectly positioned to have, perhaps, the most significant encounter with Jesus in his entire life. Thank you, Domitian! We are forever grateful.

### **In hunger and thirst often, in fastings often**

At times it seems that the people of God are still tethered to the natural—the earthly. We oftentimes insist on and put a high premium on creature comforts. In fact, there is a “catch-all” body of doctrine that is pervasive and encourages a human and earthly view of ourselves. To have this view hinders our ability to clearly hear and understand what God is doing in our circumstances. I have personally labeled that body of doctrine as the “God is good” doctrine. It is in this “God is good” collective that many doctrines are housed. Some, if not many, discount the whole counsel of Scripture and rest almost entirely on a number of proof texts. Let me also say here, parenthetically, that I am certain that every one of us is hindered from a full and clear understanding of truth as a result of our favorite doctrinal positions—many of which are half-baked and not well thought out. I am not saying that we are wrong altogether. What I am saying is that without a doubt most of us are wrong in part. By “wrong,” I mean not totally accurate in terms of the doctrine that we hold to.

In 2 Corinthians 11:22-28, Paul shares some of his personal “*curriculum vitae*” (CV), which literally means “course of [one’s] life—his résumé. Perhaps it is helpful for us to review the entire text. It reads,

Are they Hebrews? so am I. Are they Israelites? so am I. Are they the seed of Abraham? so am I. Are they ministers of Christ? (I speak as a fool) I am more; in labours more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft. Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I

beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep; In journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness. Beside those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches.

This is quite a comprehensive list of experiences. I am sure that it is one that makes many believers uncomfortable, because: (a) they may not have a doctrinal cubby hole that these experiences fit into; (b) they do not want to consider that the experiences that Paul had may potentially be in store for them at some point. To tie this into my earlier comments, the experiences that Paul reports to us do not neatly fit into the body of doctrine known as “God is good.” Many base their argument that because God is good, He would never allow me to ... (you can fill in the blank). I would simply ask you to consider that many of our brothers and sisters in the world are suffering in the same ways that Paul suffered. If you are not, rejoice, but do not believe that you will never find yourself in a similar place of suffering.

I want to point out a particular portion from the 2 Corinthians passage above. In verse 27, Paul says that he was “in hunger and thirst” and “in fastings” often. Here we have a clear reference to food and drink in two distinctly different contexts. One is an involuntary context, while the other is voluntary. Fasting is voluntary, whereas being hungry and thirsty are most likely involuntary. Paul is boasting (2 Corinthians 11:16) that he had experienced both. He had experienced hunger and thirst, because there was nothing to eat or drink—which is involuntary. He had, on occasion, also experienced hunger and thirst, because he was in a season of fasting—which is voluntary.

I have had believers in my life that I knew that I could not take into certain ministry situations. In fact, one sister asked me if she could go with me on a particular third-world nation ministry trip. I said to her, “No.” Why would I have denied anyone who wanted the opportunity to go and share the gospel with those in such great need? Easy answer. This was a sister who routinely became disturbed in our indoor, climate-controlled gatherings if the temperature in the room was a few degrees on the warm side. I knew the conditions that we were going into: sleeping in rooms night after night with no climate control at all; daytime temperatures in the 90’s with extremely high humidity; taking a “shower” by dipping cold water out of a barrel and pouring it over yourself; or, if there was a shower with running water, there was no hot water heater. I remember being in a town with dirt streets and having nothing to eat but a ball of home-made cheese, a container of Pringles, and a liter of Coke—and these provisions were split between myself and one other. I am making the point here that Western believers oftentimes cannot be trusted to run errands for the Lord, because they are far too spoiled and pampered. Many would easily fit into the category of being “Five Star Missionaries.” That was actually what was said about a particular American who was going into one of the third-world countries that I work in. The national leaders referred to him as a “Five Star Missionary.” That was not a compliment.

Hunger and thirst versus fasting. Paul was familiar with these conditions, but Paul was a faithful servant and messenger of Jesus Christ. Paul often suffered simply because he was following the leading of the Lord and doing His will. So, is your “God is good” doctrine big enough for Paul? Is your doctrine regarding suffering adequate enough for Paul and his experiences to fit into? Or, do you require God to serve you and provide for you in certain ways? And, on the days that He does not do that, is He still good? John’s experience on Patmos might possibly fail the litmus test of much of the doctrine that believers hold to as truth.

### **Hiding or Showing?**

There is a clear juxtaposition in Elijah’s experience with God found in 1 Kings, chapters 17 and 18. The distinction that I am referring to in these two texts is “hiding” and “showing.” In 1 Kings 17:1-3, God says for Elijah to tell

Ahab that there would be no rain nor dew until he (Elijah) said so. Then the Lord tells Elijah to “go hide” himself. In 1 Kings 18:2, the Lord tells Elijah to “go show” himself to Ahab. According to 1 Kings 18:1, it was “in the third year.” In James 5:17 and also in Luke 4:25, the New Testament specifies that the timeframe was three and a half years. For three and a half years Elijah was “in hiding.” So, here we see two entirely different contexts—hide yourself and show yourself. Which is better? It is a silly question, right?

This part of the story of Elijah is not about hiding or showing. It is about obedience. The answer to the question, “Which is better, hiding or showing?” is this: neither is better; both are appropriate, but obedience is the object—the gold standard. It is also critical for us to say and to understand that in obedience, hiding and showing are exactly the same. Neither is better or more important.

I am laboring here to make a salient point. The soul of man prefers certain contexts and through the agency of human emotions, associates value to those contexts that are preferred. So, for some, “hiding” is the preferred context. For others, “showing” is the preferred context. It is like Isaiah 40:31, “But they that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint.” Some prefer to run—in fact, some are really good runners. Often those who are good runners are not very good walkers. Some prefer to walk, and, in fact, those typically are very good walkers. Often those who are good walkers are not very good runners. My point is to say that we like what we like and place a higher value on the things that we like and prefer.

The question for Elijah points to whether he would insist on his human preferences or opt in favor of obeying the Lord. The question to you and to me is the exact same question. Do you insist on your own human preferences, or can you be trusted to obey the word of the Lord? This also opens the need for a larger conversation (into which we will not delve too deeply into this message). Those who are led by the Spirit are the sons of God (Romans 8:14). The high calling of the son is representational obedience. Frankly, one of the failures of the churches is that far too often they have abandoned the great commission communicated in Matthew 28:18-20. The emphasis of going into the nations and the actual purpose of going into the nations have to do with seeing sons come into the kingdom, enrolling them in discipleship, and training them to live and walk in obedience. Go and “teach” (g3100. μαθητεύω *mathēteuō*; from 3101; intransitively, to become a pupil; transitively, to disciple, i.e., enroll as scholar: — be disciple, instruct, teach)—“teaching” them to observe or obey. Matthew’s emphasis is to see a person converted to Christ, discipled and trained, and established in a walk of obedience to the Lord. In contemporary thought, the leaders of the churches have often sought to build congregations rather than train sons into maturity. This has contributed to a seeker-friendly social experience that generally ministers to the emotions of the attendees and rarely actually produces a disciple that goes on to maturity. I will stop there—you get the point. You were not called to a life of insisting on your own preferences. Your life is not your own (1 Corinthians 6:19). You have been called to walk in obedience. Period. End of report.

### **Are you familiar with the wilderness?**

Jesus was taken into Egypt (and through several desert regions) to be hidden from his enemy. The word of the Lord came to John the Baptist in the wilderness. Paul spent years in critical preparation in the Arabian desert. How familiar are you with the desert? With the wilderness? Have you found yourself in a wilderness experience at times? When you became aware that you were in a wilderness, how did your soul respond? Was your morning cry, day after day, “How long?” Were your inner thoughts consumed with questions like “Why has God done this to me?” or “Why hasn’t the Lord rescued me out of this place by now?” Have you had your Patmos experience yet? Are you in your Patmos now?

Since beginning the work of writing this message, I have heard the Holy Spirit emphasizing Song of Songs 8:5, which says, “Who is this that cometh up from the wilderness, leaning upon her beloved?” As a young believer in Jesus, I can remember the times that we so exuberantly sang about how we were “learning to lean on Jesus.” We

really were (and are) sincere about learning to lean on Him. But, we must absolutely understand that the place we most often learn to lean on Jesus is the solitary place, the desert place, the wilderness.

My beloved brethren, Patmos (my killing) is not a place of punishment. It is important to note that during Elijah's three and a half years of hiding, the "brook dried up" (1 Kings 17:7). When the brook dried up, the Lord said to Elijah, "Arise, get thee to Zarephath, which belongeth to Zidon, and dwell there: behold, I have commanded a widow woman there to sustain thee" (1 Kings 17:8). Zarephath means "refinement." In this time of hiding, the Lord intended to continue to refine Elijah. It was necessary for Elijah to experience additional training. God knows the end from the beginning, and He knew that soon enough He would send Elijah to face down Ahab. It was in John's time on Patmos that God would visit him, speak to him, and show him "things to come."

I have been in the wilderness. I have experienced times of being "in hiding"—times of separation. The wilderness can be a lonesome place. It can be a place where we experience the dark night of our soul. We must remember that the wilderness, our Patmos, is not a punitive place. Most often we are not there because we have done things wrong or made mistakes. We are there in our Father's sovereignty, and He intends to train us there. In Galatians 1:15-17, Paul said, "But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by his grace, to reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the heathen; immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood: neither went I up to Jerusalem to them which were apostles before me; but I went into Arabia, and returned again unto Damascus." Arabia was a desert place. A barren place. I want to invite you to review Isaiah chapter 35. This text is a beautiful picture of the redemptive purposes in our Father's heart for us. You are not alone. You are never alone.

It is also critical for us to understand a particular part of the training of the Lord. In Acts 26: 16-17, Jesus told Paul, "But rise, and stand upon thy feet: for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee; delivering thee from the people, and from the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee." Do you see that? Jesus told Paul that He was going to "deliver him from the people, and from the Gentiles." Jesus intended to deliver Paul from the power and from the influence of both the Jews and the Gentiles. Jesus was going to send Paul to the Jews and to the Gentiles. Paul was delivered from the ones that the Lord intended to send him to. Our times of deep, intentional preparation will condition us to be able to go and stand before whomever the Father is sending us to. It is really only after sufficient transformation and training that we can be trusted with certain missions. It is oftentimes during these Patmos times—these wilderness times when we are transformed—that God reveals His Son in us.

Perhaps you are currently in a Patmos season. Perhaps there is a shadow of hopelessness bearing down on you. I pray that this message today will bring you into an understanding that lifts your soul in hope. God truly is working all things together for your good. I remember being in the dark night of the soul and saying to God, "Why are you doing this to me?" The Lord answered me by saying, "I am not doing this to you; I am doing this for you." I said, "But I feel like life is passing me by." And, the Lord said, "No, but you are passing life by." I look back now, and I realize that those Patmos times—the times in hiding by the Brook Cherith—were so incredibly critical for my training and preparation. As is most often the case, you cannot see it when you are in it. Later, you will see the redemptive purposes of your Father and realize that the times in hiding and the times of waiting on the Lord become some of the richest parts of your story.

### **Make your calling and election sure**

You may be thinking— "But I am not John; I am not Paul; I am not Jesus." True. But, you are you and you are called just like the others. Your calling and your election are different and unique, but you are called, nonetheless. You are a royal priest, beloved. Your part is critical to the plan and intention of God. By now, every one of us

should understand that we were chosen before the foundation of the world. Every one of us were selected by God and were ordained for a specific purpose in the Lord. The royal priesthood is made up of every believer—every son of the living God.

Sadly, so much of the historical activities of the churches have conditioned the sons of God to see themselves as “laity” and not as a part of the many-membered body of Christ. This many-membered body of Christ is ordained to be a functioning body. The clergy-laity construct has been used by the enemy to make most of the sons of God spectators and not participants. As a son of God, you were never intended to have a vicarious Christian life. The priest, the pastor, the lead elder, the bishop, etc. and even the ones who are genuinely sons of God and called into a role of leadership in the body of Christ are no more called, anointed, and ordained than you are. I know that in these final words of this message I am opening up a whole new chapter in the book. There is a tremendous need in the body of Christ for these fundamentals to be taught and practiced. I will say this emphatically: most of the provision of God for the body of Christ and for the world is locked up in the people regularly sitting in church meetings week after week. The five-fold ministry is given by Christ to the whole body of Christ with the purpose of “equipping the saints for the work of the ministry.”

Furthermore, there is nothing secular in the kingdom of God. Wherever God sends you—into whatever field of endeavor it may be—God is sending you there, because He wants His presence there. So, your calling may be to be sent into the medical industry or to the financial industry. Your calling may be to be sent into the field of education or industry. Whatever your calling is, God has gifted you perfectly for it. Certainly, there is a need for you to be disciplined, trained, and brought to some maturity in Christ, but your calling and field of service should never be considered secular. You may be gifted as a teacher, or as a giver, or as a vessel of mercy and compassion. You may be called to be a giver or a prophetic person. Every part of the body is critical. Every grace and gift are needed to put on display the glory of God. Our Father is committed to preparing us and maturing us.

Do not think it strange when you find yourself in a wilderness place—in a Patmos place. When you do, you must know that this place is necessary, and it is profitable for you. You are not being punished—you are being prepared. And remember your Patmos is not forever; the wilderness is not forever. Soon enough you will be coming up out of the wilderness leaning on your Beloved! May God our Father give you strength and wisdom in these times. I pray that you would be strengthened with might in your inner man. Lift up your head and set your affections on things above in these times. May the enduring love of God and His tireless grip of grace encourage you and strengthen you in these days, dear brethren. Grace and peace to you from the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!

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*April 2, 2023*