

Sermon

A REASON FOR COURAGE: WAITING TO SEE

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Scripture Reading:

Revelation 1:1-3, NIV

¹The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John, ²who testifies to everything he saw—that is, *the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ*. ³Blessed is the one who reads the words of this prophecy, and *blessed are those who hear it and take to heart* what is written in it, because the time is near (emphasis supplied).

I. INTRODUCTION

A sports stadium is a noisy, crowded place. Tiers and tiers of benches can pack in thousands of fans shoulder to shoulder. [Describe a stadium, if most of your audience hasn't been to one.] Anytime *that* many people get together it's confusing, especially if you're blind. There's not a lot of reason to go watch a game you can't see.

But it seems two young fellows joined a crowd of fans packed into a stadium to cheer on their favorite team. Someone with a camera who was standing just below them on the risers seems more interested in recording their experience than the soccer match. So imagine with me—

The video begins with the camera scanning a packed stadium. The sea of faces are intently focused on the field—all except for a certain big fellow with thin, closely cropped hair. His dark hoody stands out against the red shirts many fans are wearing. His large, round face is blank, no expression. His deep-set eyes are fixed straight ahead. He's blind. And he's watching a sports match, you say?

Of course. Standing shoulder to shoulder with him is an athletic, clean-cut young man with a well-groomed beard and warm smile. He's fully engaged in the game, slapping the blind man on the shoulder, gesturing up the field, down the field. You can tell he can see; he's following every move on the field. He presses close to the blind man with a running commentary, his hands as expressive of the face. The blind man—a cousin or brother or a really special friend—gazes straight ahead, his face deep in concentration. That's what it's like to concentrate on what you're hearing if you can't see.

At one point, with the crowd standing and waving around them, the man who can see leans over the broad, right shoulder of his friend, grabs the back of his neck with one hand and slaps his chest confidently with the other as he buries his face in the man's ear, probably to explain the latest move. They each break into a broad smile and begin clapping.

In the last scene, the friend stands quietly, his arms crossed as he leans over toward the big fellow with a slower commentary. Everyone's serious. Nobody's moving. The blind man begins clapping alone. Is he anticipating what he can't see?

Suddenly the friend erupts in a cheer, grabs the blind man in a full hug, the two begin jumping up and down, grinning gloriously, slapping each other's back. The crowd is roaring, arms are pumping the air. It must've been a good game.

Interestingly, the friend has more to tell though. The game seems over, but he's talking fast, his face beaming with information. Is he describing the last, fast moves of the game? Is he rehearsing the close call? Is he sharing how nerve-wracking it felt to watch? Or is he exclaiming how much fun it is to share a match? The blind man throws his head back, they laugh together, hug again.

It's so meaningful to be at a match with someone who can see.

II. JOHN SEES WHAT WE CAN'T

Today I'm so relieved that John, that old apostle, can still see. You know, the older you get, the harder that is! Contact lenses, glasses, then magnifying glasses come out. But John can see. Notice that he assures us that he is going to tell us "everything he saw" too (Revelation 1:2). He is a prophet, and he has just been given a vast vision of time ahead—time into eternity.

I am relieved, because when it comes to the future, I'm blind. You're blind. Actually, the whole stadium of our world is blind. The only way we might have a chance to know anything that is going on is to stand close by someone who can see the future! And John is well qualified. Not on his own. His eyesight is limited like ours. But God has graciously shown him what is happening on the world field and he promises to tell us everything!

Like the friend at the match, John realizes how important it is to see, and what a gift it is to share what you see.

He begins his first epistle—we call it First John—with the words "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have **seen with our own eyes**, which we have **looked at** and our hands have touched—**this we proclaim** concerning the Word of life" (1 John 1:1, NIV). He opens his gospel by describing **Jesus as the Light** that was the light of man. You know that he had watched Jesus for a few years as a young man. He knows Jesus is really the **only way** humanity will ever be able to see God or themselves clearly (see John 1:1-18).

So, as he promised, in the record of his vision of the Revelation of Jesus Christ, John tells us what he saw of the future. Scene by scene, move by move, detail by detail, he tells us what we cannot see on our own: the beginning of this terrible conflict we're in, its tragic development, heaven's full response, God's victory.

Like the good friend who's watching the soccer match for his blind friend, John is fully absorbed with what he is seeing so he can tell us. He describes the details, the action, the sound, the music, everything God shows him. He notes the threats, the wars, the wins, the losses. Everything.

If what is happening in the world is confusing and noisy and even scary to you, I invite you to bend your ear down close to God's Word today to hear John's account of what he saw. Listen.

¹The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show His servants—things which must shortly take place. And He sent and signified *it* by His angel to His servant John, ² who bore witness to the word of God, and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, to all things that he saw (Revelation 1:1, 2, NKJV).

Some of us who followed this vision before may cringe at the things John describes and, like a bad dream, we tend to remember the scary parts the easiest. Beasts, talking heads, horns and dragons, beheadings, and rivers of blood. But John assures us that's not what his vision is about, and that's not what he remembers the most! "I witnessed the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ. That's what I saw" (Revelation 1:1, paraphrased).

If you you've never seen anything meaningful in Revelation before or are worried about you've heard, it's worth paying attention to this.

III. PUT GOD'S WORD IN WRITING

When John says he "saw" the word of God and the testimony of Jesus, he's mostly referring to the incredible experience of meeting Jesus on Patmos and receiving one of the most comprehensive, in-depth experiences God has ever shared with a human being. A vision of things to come. The rest of our world's story. To the end.

He explains, then, that what he was told to write is **God's word and the testimony of Jesus Christ**. This isn't his vague memory of an afternoon dream, like one of those disconnected images that clutter your thoughts as you're falling in and out of deep sleep. This is a word from God to be put on record for generations of listeners, readers, and believers. It is a full-color, surround-sound, real-presence experience—a message from heaven to earth, from the angels to John, from John to you, from you to . . . We'll talk about that later.

But during the next few hours of that Sabbath afternoon on Patmos, he experiences the most profound, most detailed picture of Jesus that a human being has ever been privileged to see—a panoramic view of the third member of the Godhead from ages past to ages future. This is from Jesus' past activity to His current work to His future activity for the sake of our world. For your sake.

Please, lean in close and listen carefully to what he is saying: "I was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day, and I heard behind me a loud voice, as of a trumpet" (Revelation 1:10, NKJV).

John was startled. A trumpet on Patmos? Remember, he was a banished prisoner; he was probably very much alone. None of the occasional guards or Roman inspectors sounded like that. And it had been years since he'd heard Jesus' voice.

¹²Then I turned to see the voice that spoke with me. And having turned I saw seven golden lampstands, ¹³ and in the midst of the seven lampstands *One* like the Son of Man, clothed with a garment down to the feet and girded about the chest with a golden band. ¹⁴ His head and hair *were* white like wool, as white as snow, and His eyes like a flame of fire; ¹⁵ His feet *were* like fine brass, as if refined in a furnace, and His voice as the sound of many waters; ¹⁶ He had in His right hand seven stars, out of His mouth went a sharp two-edged sword, and His countenance *was* like the sun shining in its strength (Revelation 1:12-16, NKJV).

IV. OH, TO SEE JESUS

John's response is natural; he was overwhelmed. "When I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead" (Revelation 1:17, NKJV, first part).

So many years had passed. So many things had changed. This was not the Jesus John remembered waiting for a cup of water, falling asleep in the back of a fishing boat, or groaning in the Garden of Gethsemane under the weight of his burden. This was the Alpha and Omega, the First and the Last, the One with the keys to hell, the firstborn from the dead. He realized this was the Jesus who had loved him and washed him from his sin (Revelation 1:5). Of course, he is overwhelmed.

So, like the fellow relaying the match to his blind friend, John leans over and tells us poignantly what happened next. It is a memory forever printed on his memory—a picture we can hold precious too.

The brilliant, majestic Jesus bends down to where John had collapsed and places a comforting hand on John's shoulder, like the one He places on *your* shoulder today even as we read John's account. He says, "Do not be afraid. I am alive, I am here."

Jesus is saying, you don't need to sit alone in the dark, blind to what is happening around you, confused or fearful. The prophetic word of God and the witness of Jesus Christ Himself assures you that He has been present and working through the centuries, right up to this very moment. He has been involved in all that has gone before you; he is deeply involved right now in all that is happening around you. Our restless and suffering world is not on its own, and neither are you.

Before John sees anything else, he sees Jesus. Before he tells us any more of his vision, he shows us Jesus. The first word from God, the most touching message John has for you is, "Do not be afraid" (Revelation 1:17, NKJV). The Jesus who loved John is bending down to you too; He loves you as much.

Does it make any difference which hand touches John, or which hand reaches down to encourage you? God's **right hand** is the symbol of authority, power, honor. In the Bible, every resource available in heaven comes through the right hand of God. Moses knew that God's right hand was Israel's deliverance (Exodus 15:6). God promised Isaiah His right hand (Isaiah 41:10). David knew God's right hand was his help, his strength, his salvation (Psalm 16:8). John knew the right hand that touched him was the divine hand of blessing and help. I pray you know that God's right hand is near.

V. OUT OF DARKNESS INTO LIGHT

In a remarkable conclusion to God's special revelation of Himself to us, the "word of God and the testimony of Jesus" that John is telling us about is the last great story recorded in the Bible that I hold in my hand or that you hold in your hand today. [Show the pages of Revelation at the end of your Bible.]

Did you know that the Book of Revelation draws on 28 of the 39 books of the Old Testament? Of 404 verses that make up John's vision, 278 of them contain direct quotations or allusions to the Old Testament? The word of God John saw was a collection of the Word of God already revealed!

Like all of God's Word, the Book of Revelation extends God's word to the very end of the conflict, to the end of sin, all the way to the triumph of everything true and real and good. God's Word assures you that you don't have to go into the future blind.

If you listen carefully, you will be able to see—

"Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path!" (Psalm 119:105, KJV).

"Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your law" (Psalm 119:18, NIV).

"The unfolding of your words gives light; it gives understanding to the simple" (Psalm 119:130, NIV).

"My eyes stay open through the watches of the night, that I may meditate on your promises" (Psalm 119:148, NIV).

"I lift up my eyes to you, to you who sit enthroned in heaven" (Psalm 123:1, NIV).

Whether it's Moses writing so that Creation isn't forgotten, or John recording everything he saw so you know how the story ends—and everything in between—the Bible was written so you could see!

VI. LET THE BLIND SEE!

When it comes to "seeing" through God's Word, the enemy of your soul would be delighted to keep you blind and alone, worried about what you can't see, what you don't know, what the future holds, where God is. Because if you follow Moses through the wilderness and see what God did for His people, you will see with the eyes of faith what God will do for you too. If you listen to Job work through the trying of his faith, your faith will stretch with his. If you hear David's cry, Daniel's prayers, Jeremiah's tears, Hosea's pain, and John's vision your faith, will see God working, saving, comforting, and—finally—overcoming.

In this Book [hold up the Bible] is story after story, picture after picture, promise after promise, to fill your mind with a very different reality than what you experience every day, all day. Rely on the Word of God to help you see beyond this world, beyond your day, beyond your own experiences, beyond what threatens to blind you: emotions, relationships, finances; discontent, jealousy, pride.

Nothing is more centering to your heart, more calming for the restlessness that surrounds you than seeing God over all, working His will, fulfilling His promises, bending down over you and touching you with the right hand of His presence. I invite you to look up, and see a new revelation of Jesus Christ, your Savior.

SO much more I can say about what we can see through the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. John saw so much. He has shared so much with us. John has been a faithful witness. I pray I am, I pray you are a faithful hearer.

Look! John added one more line to his introduction that carries an unusual promise. This is nothing to take for granted: "Blessed are those who read and those who hear this word and keep it!"

Read it, dear friend. Talk to God about what you see. Live what you learn--and be blessed. That's what it means to "keep the things written here." Guard what you learn. Protect what God tells you in John's vision. You will be blessed.

But. One more treasure is hidden in this verse that I must share with you.

VII. YOUR GREATEST PRIVILEGE

This isn't just your own blessing. This isn't just seeing new things about God or getting inside information about the future.

As encouraging as John must have found the visit from Jesus His Savior, Jesus immediately said to him, "Write it down. Others need to hear this! Let it be read to the churches of Asia, repeat it to new believers, recite it in prison, pass it across the generations, share it down through the ages. Others need to read it, hear it, and 'see' what I have shown you!"

This isn't just your own blessing.

As you open the Word of God—whether Matthew, Genesis, or Romans—
if you begin seeing what you've never seen before,
if a blurry outline of God's love is becoming clearer to you,
if His promises sound more sure,
if you find His word more dependable.

As you study the Revelation of Jesus Christ
if the Holy Spirit's witness of Jesus is more personal to you than ever,
if His coming is more exciting to you,
if you are beginning to see what John saw—a life-changing Revelation of Jesus Christ,

If that is the revealing, eye-opening work God is doing in your heart, there's a good possibility that *you are standing very close to someone who is blind.*

You may even know who around you is blind. You may not.

But if your spiritual eyesight is strengthening, and you can see what others can't,
then lean over close to those around you, step into their lives, and let them know
what God is doing, what you have seen about Him.

Let them know how He will win. Let them know they can join Him.

I am so grateful John did not keep all this to himself. I am so grateful that he wrote down everything he saw, so I can see it too. I am so grateful that Daniel, Moses, David, Matthew, Paul, Malachi—all those 40 writers—faithfully wrote what God showed them.

Where would I be without their witness? Where would you be if they had kept it all to themselves? What if they had been too shy, too fearful, too sad, too busy, too self-conscious? John, the same one who shared the Revelation of Jesus Christ with us, explained in his first epistle the full-circle experience of what it means to tell someone *everything God has shown you*:

"That which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship *is* with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. And these things we write to you that your joy may be full" (1 John 1:3, 4, NKJV)

Like the two friends at the match discovered, sharing what you see with someone who *can't* see is a powerful bond. John describes it as joy, full joy!!

As you listen closely, prayerfully, to John's account of his vision in the coming weeks, I pray you will see such an amazing new Revelation of Jesus Christ—Jesus Christ comforting, appealing, warning, strengthening, preparing you—that you will be compelled to share. Chances are someone very near to you is waiting in the dark. Waiting to see.

PRAYER MOMENTS

Dear Jesus of Revelation, the God of visions and dreams and all things beyond this world—open our eyes to see You more clearly. Then open our hearts to those around us who are waiting to see. Give us the conviction, the bond of fellowship, the joy to share what we learn. Together, along with a "great crowd of witnesses," we want to meet You, and see You face to face. By faith we look forward to that day, by faith our hope. In the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord, AMEN.