

Sermon to the Saints which are at Topeka, Kansas -- Sunday, April 28, 2024

“¶ 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.” (Revelation 1:9)

We have finished the introduction of the book of the Revelation; covering what the book is about, the authentication of the text, the engaged parties to the events, and the authority and power behind the guarantee and execution of the things written herein. Carefully selected expressions in the Greek language, captured and preserved for those souls who would – at the appointed time in providence – open up those words in preparation for the ushering in of the eternal Christ’s earthly kingdom.

Now we turn to the first subject within the execution of the Day of the Lord. At verse nine, the book transitions from talking about the author’s time in providence (what to us is history) – which was at the *early years* of the New Testament Church dispensation – to the presentation of the Church of the Revelation in preparation for the transition to Christ’s millennial reign. The lens shifts right in this place, and if the student of this book and these things of eschatology does not shift with it you will be lost as you try to understand this beautiful book.

When John previously spoke in third person reference to himself, he was demonstrating the authenticity of his words by declaring plainly that the eternal God, who gave this Revelation to Christ, ***“sent and signified it by his angel unto his servant John”***. (Revelation 1:1). Now he is providing testimony to the reader, related to his exemplary position to speak on this next subject. He provides us, I believe, a template that was prepared at the appropriate hour for the Church of Revelation.

As a young man, first being exposed to these beautiful words of the Revelation, I saw this about John as focusing on his hardship. He suffered significantly at the hands of the Roman authorities, including his imprisonment. It was an outrage and those who took part in it were – and will for eternity be – punished far beyond what they were able to do to him, unless they had the intervention of the grace of God to give them repentance. No different standard than what has existed from the beginning of the human experiment. But I do not believe that is the purpose in this description of our author. We grieve for his affliction, certainly ... but the verse is preparatory in tone and context, not plaintive. This verse is a – *“this is what you need to know about me, so that you will be properly prepared to understand what I am going to tell you next”* – kind of a thing.

The oracle that is initiated with these words is a 12-verse description of the setting for the seven letters to the churches of Asia. That setting puts the face on the purpose of those letters. For the New Testament Church era servants of God, there is no writing more perfectly designed to tell us what it will look like when the transition occurs, from that budding new dispensation (1st Century AD) and the millennial reign of Jesus Christ.

Extrapolating backward, then, from the thrust of the oracle, it is a fair position that we should be looking at John's description of his own status in the world – vis-à-vis those to whom he is writing – from that same lens. So let us do that, and we will see if we do not unfold some wonderful gifts from this opening passage. We should consider what is meant by the following expressions:

- What is it, that John is our **“brother”**?
- What is it, that John is our **“companion”**?
- What is intended by the interesting trio of **“tribulation of Jesus Christ”**, the **“kingdom of Jesus Christ”**, and the **“patience of Jesus Christ”**?
- What does it mean to be imprisoned **“for the word of God [and] testimony of Jesus Christ”**?

Then we should take all of these thoughts and put them into motion, so to speak. I believe we will then begin to understand how satisfying a launching point these words are, about our friend John the Revelator.

John begins the discussion of his relevant credentials by listing the chief thing he has in common with those for whom he is preparing this opening discourse on the Revelation of Jesus Christ. He shares common spiritual blood. He shares a common father. One of my favorite verses in the Bible snuggles up to a statement about this critical relationship, to wit:

“Then they that feared the LORD spake often one to another: and the LORD hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the LORD, and that thought upon his name. And they shall be mine, saith the LORD of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels; and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him.” (Malachi 3:16-17)

Who is Christ coming to redeem? God's children ... those sons and daughters of His, and brethren of each other and of Christ, **“the firstborn among many brethren” (Romans 8:29)**. These are they who have this blessed prophetic distinction of speaking often to one another, *about their father*, whom they all love (Malachi 3:16) ... and thinking continuously upon His name. This is not the brotherhood of mankind, this is the peculiar brotherhood of the saints. These share that royal blood about which Brent spoke recently. These, unique to the whole race of mankind, will share the glories of heaven. These, unique to the whole race of mankind, are united in that peculiar love flowing from the Trinity – and consequently distinguishing themselves in this world displaying that they have been **“taught of God to love one another.” (1 Thessalonians 4:9)**

So John begins by telling that final collection of Gentile sheep that he is not a disinterested observer of these things he undertakes to lay out to the Church. Rather, he is himself among that **“chosen generation, [that] royal priesthood, [that] holy nation, [that] peculiar people” (1 Peter 2:9)**, to whom the Revelation of Jesus Christ holds the greatest moment. He is their brother. He is our brother. He has the same eternal and very personal stake that we have in the subject matter he now introduces to his brethren.

“For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: ¶ And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together.” (Romans 8:15-17)

This is a lovely transitional verse between the first of John’s identified credentials, and the second. Having identified he is one adopted along with those to whom he writes his epistle, he then amplifies the intimate nature of the relationship he has with them, by laying out the three most relevant interests they have in common ... in the experience of which, they are companions: The Tribulations of Christ; the Kingdom of Christ; and the Patience of Christ.

The English word here translated **“companion”** means he is a partaker. Getting his hands on the work – messy as it often is, since we’re wrestling with our sinful flesh every day, all day. We’re plainly warned not to partake of the sins of our generation, if we don’t want to also partake of the plagues that will certainly follow (Revelation 18:4). This is not a neutral term. It is an intense activity. It is specifically distinguished – in the definition language – from merely being present in the same place as another person. It is an intimate cohesion between the actors such that there is no separating them in the eyes of the world. John previously wrote Christ’s guarantees about our great Companion in our tribulations, to wit:

“These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.” (John 16:33)

Satan will make you ashamed to be one with Christ or one with His elect children. You will be shamed often in this life, even beyond the direct tribulation. You will be at continual risk of being afraid of that face-burning shame when you are mocked as one of the members of Christ’s church. There is no end of the ways you can shift a position, so you are a little less likely to be known as “one of those people”. Like Peter uttered, in his distresses at seeing how willing the Jews were to take and crucify and kill the Christ ... **“I know not the man” (Matthew 26:74)**.

What this term describes, however, is that John loved and owned that he was associated with Christ and the members of His body and bride. That is the import of his companionship. My son said to me that he thought we were doomed when the \$10.9 million dollar verdict was handed down. He wanted no part of that destruction, so he disassociated himself. That showed an eternal disinterest in being companion to Christ and His people. We need to be a body of companions, not convenience cling-ons.

But we go further in this text. We drill down to three categories where this companionship is relevantly reflected. That suggests that there is a unique importance to those three categories. The first is tribulation.

“Behold, the hour cometh, yea, is now come, that ye shall be scattered, every man to his own, and shall leave me alone: and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me. These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.” (John 16:32-33)

The guarantee to every living saint in every generation – as our blessed Savior plainly tells us – is that we will have tribulation. It is an indelible earmark of the elect soul. It is a gift that is inseparable from the faith (Philippians 1:29). That same Savior declares the severity of the tribulation that is coming upon the earth’s inhabitants:

“And there shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars; and upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring; Men’s hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth: for the powers of heaven shall be shaken.” (Luke 21:25-26)

And for the saints who will be present and preaching to that dying world about what exactly is coming and why, two realities will intensify their tribulations. First, their sensitive souls know the ***“terror of the Lord” (2 Corinthians 5:11)*** so, as the expositor Trapp puts it *“Moses himself may tremble at the terror of the mount, and Abraham show some trepidation in such a fright”*. Second, the ploy of the Revelation, seemingly endless prophecies, and even our Savior has plainly set forth how the world’s inhabitants – under Satan’s energizing and Antichrist’s sway – will turn in on those humble saints when they are unable to get at our beloved Christ:

“For in those days shall be affliction, such as was not from the beginning of the creation which God created unto this time, neither shall be. And except that the Lord had shortened those days, no flesh should be saved: but for the elect’s sake, whom he hath chosen, he hath shortened the days.” (Mark 13:19-20)

John has intimate familiarity with this distress and tribulation related to serving Christ. So there is gravitas to his words for those souls who are appointed to undergo this extreme experience, and they are in desperate need of his words to keep their sight on their husband: *“The Bride eyes not her garment, but her dear Bridegroom’s face. I will not gaze at glory, but on my King of grace.”* It will only be possible to endure that tribulation if that Church of Revelation has their lens correct, and receiving the instruction of one who is their demonstrable companion in that tribulation will help them grasp the importance of the tribulation and the glories that will follow.

And, oh what patience this deep tribulation works. What steadfastness ... what constancy ... what endurance ... what sustaining. Yes, in the depths of the hate-filled fits the inhabitants of the earth will most certainly pour out upon that happy band of elect saints, our blessed book here reveals; ***“here is the patience and the faith of the saints” (Revelation 13:10)***. And it is one of the good things revealed about the church in Thyatira that Christ sees ***“thy ... faith, and thy patience” (Revelation 2:19)***. The flesh we dwell in will swell continuously with aggravations of our afflictions because we wrestle with the lack of patience in waiting upon the Lord’s deliverance. But this patience referred to in this passage invokes a cheerful endurance because of the ***“hope***

we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which entereth into that within the veil” (Hebrews 6:19), which – of course – is where Christ “the forerunner is for us entered” (Hebrews 6:20) after He patiently waited for the appointed hour for Him to fulfill His Father’s demand for a sacrifice.

In the golden chain of the spiritual attributes the saints of God develop in their walk, patience is that critical link in the synapse pathway between temperance and godliness (2 Peter 1:6). This place where we learn to take ***“joyfully the spoiling of [our] goods” (Hebrews 10:34)*** because we ***“count them but dung, that [we] may win Christ” (Philippians 3:8)*** – who, of course, is the Spring of our godliness.

“¶ My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.” (James 1:2-4)

The unbreakable connection between the severity of our trials and the strength of our patience is continually linked in scripture. John, writing to that body of saints who will experience the pinnacle of those trials – as a matter of documented truth – must have an understanding that he also has learned through many trials as one of Christ’s apostles ... patience. I believe this is the best lens to grasp John’s words here. It will, if such a thing can be said, make those souls thankful and joyful for the afflictions they receive as *training for the big race*.

What, then, is this Kingdom of Christ referenced? The use of this phraseology in the Bible has historically felt a little slippery to my intellect. ***“Kingdom of God”*** is a phrase used 69 times in Scripture, ***“Kingdom of Christ and of God”*** only once, and then the clause in this passage ***“kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ”***. The use of the phrase is always in the New Testament writings, which suggests strongly that we are discussing something most relevant to the current dispensation. The most obvious intent of these words, particularly with the understanding that the office of God the Father and God the Son are two of the Trinity members, is captured by this typical analysis that expositor John Gill provides:

Gill on Ephesians 5:5 language: ***“kingdom of Christ, and of God; meaning either a Gospel church state, in which persons of such characters, and living in such sins, ought not to be; or else the kingdom of heaven and of glory, which may be called the kingdom of Christ, because it is in his hands, for his people; and it is his righteousness that gives a title to it, and his Spirit and grace which make meet for it; and it is by his power saints are preserved unto it; and he will put them into the possession of it; and which will greatly consist in the enjoyment of him: and this is also the kingdom of God, either of Christ who is God, or of God the Father; it being of his preparing and giving, and which he calls unto, and makes meet for; and this may be said to be an inheritance, because it is peculiar to children, the bequest of their heavenly Father, and is not purchased or acquired by them, but comes to them from the free donation of God, through the death of Christ”***.

My impression of how the term is utilized throughout the writings of the apostles is that they are joined to this body of the elect who are made kings unto God through the blood of Jesus Christ. That, through that sacrifice, these are given the necessary graces to overcome the flesh and the kingdom of Satan and are put into possession of a kingly crown to rule with Christ in the Kingdom of our God. To capture that notion, I would offer up the use of the phrase *“kingdom of grace”* because it captures how the Kingdom of God and Christ is presently in the earth in a state of grace-covered warfare.

Expositor Thomas Watson, in his work *The Great Gain of Godliness* spends a good bit of time on how the elect in this life should walk with the bearing of royalty to reflect their active citizenship in the Kingdom of Christ and God. True royalty doesn't brood. They're not petulant and surly. They don't express themselves in petty squabbles with fellow citizens. They move with grace and affection for all of the fellow members of the kingdom. They have continual thoughts of how they should (and might) honor the King with all they think, say, and do. Saints understand their citizenship in that kingdom, so they quit themselves like the King's subjects.

That kingdom of grace transitions to the kingdom of heaven, when that elect soul leaves this flesh. There, all of the bounties and glories await the traveling soul of God's little chosen ones. They take – at least in some significant portion – possession of their royal estate. You see glimpses of them in their present state, where they have robes of white and they have golden crowns upon their heads. These notions of that coming state are quite comforting and keep the fire of our passions toward our eternal God lit and burning. All of them are good things, so long as no filthy flesh-driven thoughts of that place and condition creep in.

But I want to offer up here that there is quite a different intent from John in this passage. If we remember the subject of this writing, it will seem quite simple to understand that he is speaking to the Church of Revelation about a Christ who is now preparing to come into his earthly Kingdom – ***“The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ”***. (**Revelation 11:15**) Christ is appointed an earthly Kingdom – to which Isaiah's Messianic prophecy refers as ***“the throne of David and ... his kingdom”***. (**Isaiah 9:7**). There is an intimacy in the relationship John the Revelator has with that transition period and, I submit, the relationship between John and the Saints of God who will traverse that transition period. Like John the Baptist held a unique place in the ushering in of the first advent of Christ ... John the Revelator is appointed to a unique place in the ushering in of the second advent of Christ when He will then be placed upon His earthly throne in His earthly Kingdom. He was, as it says very shortly in our Revelation chapter one text, taken to ***“the Lord's day”*** (**Revelation 1:10**) in his spirit, where he receives directives and visions to share with the Saints who will take part in those matters. Sprinkled throughout the narrative of the book, we see John shifting from seeing, to talking, to measuring, to testifying. He seems as much a part of the narrative as he is the recorder of the matters. He's truly a companion – a partaker – with those saints appointed to live the transition.

The remaining descriptor we receive from our author, brother, and companion is this imprisonment on the Isle of Patmos. More than what we have examined so far, can this specific

reference teach us about the author's perspective? I think yes ... and in truth, I think the unique nature of that affliction might be a key thing to understanding John's introduction of himself.

There are a great number of persons in our generation who are imprisoned because of their words. The shocking nature of that truth further testifies to the dying condition of the nation and world. Being imprisoned – rightly or wrongly – for the commission of a crime against another, is an all-too-common reality. Being imprisoned because you have a truly strong enemy who influences the authorities to press you into that place ... well that's an increasing reality but an outrage for any civilization.

But being imprisoned because you plainly preach the Word of God and testify of Jesus Christ – that glorious doctrine of election and reprobation that is the single lynchpin for the entire creation? To a righteous soul, this may be the worst it can get short of pure martyrdom. John was imprisoned because he preached Christ. Some of the saints in the Day of the Lord are said to be ***“slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held” (Revelation 6:9)***. John's afflictions – and the patience he was given to bear through it joyfully – makes him uniquely qualified to open this work of God to the Church of Revelation.

The other unique point here is that he was so fully isolated. He was not simply imprisoned. He was sent to an island to be removed from mankind altogether. He was put into the proverbial wilderness where he would be expected to die a miserable, lonely death ... but instead, he was communing with Christ about the intimate details of His return. When Moses communed with God, he was called apart from the people into the mountain (Exodus 19:20). Elijah was sent to the wilderness where the Ravens would feed him, while matters were preparing in Israel (1 Kings 17:3). A pattern can be discerned in Scripture where God's servants are separated apart from the population of the earth to be in communion with Him in preparation for significant shifts in the providential timeline of the human experience.

So, John pronounces that he was taken away and was prepared by the Spirit to do this work in setting forth a template. When it is time for the earth's population to transition out of the New Testament Church dispensation and into the millennial reign of the Christ, what will the people of God be doing ... like Peter wrote: ***“what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness” (2 Peter 3:11)*** The word ***“manner”*** here captures the idea of ***“where are you coming from?”***. Like as if Peter is asking a rhetorical question about the spiritual frame of mind and life for the body of believers who will usher in that cataclysmic period of providence when the world is proverbially on fire. John tells that little body of believers that he was separated from the world himself, and prepared in his body, heart, mind, and spirit to walk that pathway ... so he could put forth plain words of prophecy to guide them.

So now we have looked at the sense of the descriptors the Apostle provides in his introduction of this oracle. Since there are so many components of each one of God's little lambs, it is a fair question to ask why these were the ones selected. Why John's brotherhood? Why are John's partaking of Christ's tribulations, kingdom, and patience the elements drawn forth? Why his

isolation on an island where he is separated from the world's population – in a uniquely lonely way?

This, I believe, is where we find the greatest value in this opening verse of the oracle. This, I believe, is where we find the trajectory of momentum initiated. We get a stronger sense of how the oracle ties into the work of letters to the churches that were in Asia ... to the Church of Revelation.

“¶ The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God.” (Isaiah 40:3)

This prophecy from Isaiah lays down a pattern that, when examined, will help us to know why it is that John in this ninth verse of the first chapter begins with a simple discussion of his own relationship to all of this amazing work. So we will discuss in some detail this pattern, and then tie in these attributes that John focuses on in relationship to introducing the Church of Revelation.

These words of Isaiah are brought to bear on our subject in the midst of Luke's account of events surrounding Christ's introduction to the Jewish people in the days of His first advent, like this:

“¶ Now in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judaea, and Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip tetrarch of Ituraea and of the region of Trachonitis, and Lysanias the tetrarch of Abilene, Annas and Caiaphas being the high priests, the word of God came unto John the son of Zacharias in the wilderness. And he came into all the country about Jordan, preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins; As it is written in the book of the words of Esaias the prophet, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be brought low; and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways shall be made smooth”. (Luke 3:1-5)

Up to this point in the account of the Apostle Luke, the arrangements had been made to prepare the world for the first advent of Jesus Christ. That is what the first two chapters of Luke are spent doing, in a masterfully cryptic fashion. John's parents and Jesus' parents are visited by the angel Gabriel and told specifically what was (and is) coming. The appointed years it took for those two humans to grow to the point of action have passed. The relevant social, religious, and governmental authorities are established in that part of the world. Now it's time to kick events off that will usher in the New Testament Church dispensation.

The initiating action? ***“the word of God came unto John ... in the wilderness.”*** In response to that word John the Baptist went into motion doing the work appointed to him. To *him* I say; because that work was the work of the New Testament Church dispensation – ***“preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins”***. The transition John the Baptist's preaching initiated was between the legalistic period where the public worship of God was done through the ceremonial types of the law, and the spiritual period where the public worship of God was to

be accomplished through the collection of saints called out of the world's population and joined together in an assembly – the Church.

“Jesus saith unto her, Woman, believe me, the hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father. Ye worship ye know not what: we know what we worship: for salvation is of the Jews. But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him. God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.” (John 4:21-24)

It is of some value, I think, to make a distinct point here – though not formally part of my passage analysis today. The public worship of God in the Mosaic period was centered in the temple ... situated on Mt. Zion ... within the City of Jerusalem ... in the nation of Israel (for several hundred years, “Judah”). While the Jews were establishing this practice, wandering in the wilderness between Egypt and the Promised Land, they set up a tabernacle that predated the formal temple. These reference points, therefore, are often used to put a proper application of the blessings God brought to those places upon the Church in the current dispensation. So, when we read of the beauties of, or the blessings that flow to, Mt. Zion we properly understand them to apply to the Church in a type.

This brings me to one additional thought, and then I'll return to our primary focus for today's sermon. When the souls in this house are reading in the books written in this blessed canon – and particularly the prophecies contained in any of those writings – I would ask that you engage in a mental exercise and see if it vastly improves your understanding of the prophetic words. Read those words with a three-tiered lens – and force yourself to do so. First, what is it saying about eschatology? Second, what is it saying about the Church? Third, what is it saying about history (or, from the perspective of our God, providence)? If we read all of these words preserved for us, as though they are pointing to the eternal kingdom of our Triune God, I believe we will read them as they are prepared to be understood.

In the context of the transition from Mosaic law to the Church dispensation, John the Baptist is identified in three¹ of the four gospel accounts as an expression of the prophecy of Isaiah that I cited above (in part). Here is the efficient exposition by John Trapp on this Luke account:

Trapp: ***“The voice of him that crieth: See Mt 3:3 Joh 1:25, but Luke citeth this text more fully than the other evangelists, applying it to the Baptist crying in the wilderness — (i.e., of Judea, where he first preached), or, as some sense it, in the ears of a waste and wild people. Hereby is meant***

¹ Here are the other two references to John the Baptist as applying to the Isaiah prophecy: ***“¶ In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judaea, And saying, Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. For this is he that was spoken of by the prophet Esaias, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.” (Matthew 3:1-3); “The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. John did baptize in the wilderness, and preach the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins.” (Mark 1:3-4)***

the world, saith one, {a } void of God's grace, barren in all virtue, having no pleasing abode, nor sure direction of any good way in it, being full of horror and accursed."

That is to say, the use of the Isaiah reference was in great measure appropriate to the behaviors of John the Baptist in that he was indeed crying to a generation wholly given over to the sins of spirit and flesh – where the light of God's truth was all but perished and the effects of that darkness were felt in the decay of the society. In Arthur Pink's work *The Redeemer's Return* he gives an account of the historical record of this time preceding Christ's first advent:

Pink: "The world had reached its climacteric of sin. History has given a faithful record of the terrible moral conditions which obtained among men in the century which immediately preceded our Lord's appearing. At Rome, which was then the metropolis of the world, the Court of Caesar was steeped in luxury and licentiousness. To provide amusement for his senators, six hundred gladiators fought a hand to hand conflict in the public theater. Not to be outdone, Pompey turned five hundred lions into the arena to engage an equal number of his braves, and delicate ladies (?) sat applauding and gloating over the flow of blood that followed. At this period children were the property of the State, to be disposed of as was deemed best for the public interests. Weak and sickly infants were looked upon as a useless encumbrance and generally suffered an early and cruel death. The aged and infirm were often banished to an island of the Tiber, there to starve out their few remaining days. Marriage, if such this holy institution could then be called, was wholly a matter of sensual caprice. Divorces were so common and frequent that it became the custom for women to count them by the number of rings worn on their fingers. Almost two-thirds of the population of the entire civilized (?) world were computed to have been slaves. Those who were in this unhappy situation were treated with the utmost cruelty. Their masters had absolute power over them and were permitted to scourge or put them to death at pleasure. This right was exercised in the most merciless manner. When punished capitally slaves were generally crucified. So wretched was the lot of mankind that the sanest of the philosophers of that time calmly advocated suicide as the best way of escape from the miseries of life.

Conditions in Greece were even worse. Sensual indulgence and every species of cruelty were carried to the highest pitch. Eating, or we should say, gluttony, became the chief occupation, everything being ransacked to gratify the appetite. Fornication was indulged without restraint. Parents were at liberty to expose their children to perish with cold and hunger or to be eaten up by wild beasts. Such exposure was frequently practiced and passed without punishment or censure. Wars were carried on with the utmost ferocity. If any of the vanquished escaped death slavery of the most abject kind was the only prospect before them and in consequence death was considered preferable to capture. The nature of their conflicts then can well be imagined. The Greeks commonly sacrificed their captives at the tombs of their heroes. With what truth then did the Scriptures declare that, 'the dark places of the earth are full of the habitations of cruelty'!

We say then, the world had reached its climacteric of sin. Often-times a disease cannot be treated until it 'comes to a head.' In view of the above conditions surely the world was ready for the appearing of the Great Physician, and surely we can now discover a deeper meaning in the words, 'When the fullness of time was come, God sent forth His Son.'"

So then, this wilderness in which John the Baptist cried, is expressed less in terms of the physical location – though he was said to have been living off the land in the Judean wilderness – and more in terms of the spiritual conditions that prevailed in those dark days. Interestingly, Pink wrote his words during the years of the first World War, and frequently refers to the horrors that conflict brought to the earth, so he had some understanding of human spiritual decay. While the recent explosion of warfare across the globe – in splintered conflicts playing out on the newsfeeds – may not weigh as heavy as the worldwide conflicts, we can certainly see it building to another worldwide condition. It feels ripe for the conditions Christ spoke of, and as described under the red horse of Revelation chapter six. This picture of worldwide spiritual and physical decay – that branded the days before Christ's first advent and now brands our present day – is certainly a factor to consider in the symmetry between the two eras.

What I think needs to be more fully considered is the use of the Isaiah prophecy in connection with John the Baptist, because he is clearly articulated as the "typecast" fulfillment of this prophecy. In Apostle John's account, he says ***"I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Make straight the way of the Lord, as said the prophet Esaias."*** (John 1:23) Which may be seen as him proclaiming that he is the very and personal expression of Isaiah's prophecy. Such a conclusion, however, creates a clear conflict between the prophecy itself and the events of the first advent of Christ. If the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled with John the Baptist, then we might fairly expect that the whole of the prophecy would be thus fulfilled. Our knowledge of both Scripture and history shows it was not. Here is the relevant remainder of Isaiah's prophecy:

"Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low: and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain: And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together" (Isaiah 40:4-5)

In Christ's first advent, valleys were not exalted ... mountains were not made low ... crooked was not made straight ... rough places were not made plain. Most certainly, the glory of LORD was not seen by all flesh together. Some saw Christ's glory, in blessed deed. Some saw the glory and power of God through Christ in the performance of miraculous alterations of natural and physical nature. But all of that was in a tiny part of the world. It certainly did not take place in front of all flesh simultaneously. And to the extent the people of the earth made any improvements in their lives, it was a restless and stuttering process of change that almost immediately began a descent back into violence and chaos. Nothing reflecting the glories of Christ's earthly kingdom.

So John the Baptist was a fulfillment of the prophecy, but only as a type. The full application of the prophecy is eschatology and about the Church of Revelation. John the Revelator was given an understanding of this truth, and can see that the church ushering in the complete fulfillment

will need the assistance of the more sure word of prophecy, to which they might cling, as the passage instructively teaches us:

“¶ We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts”. (2 Peter 1:19)

Interestingly, Sir Isaac Newton expressed the opinion that the ***“more sure word of prophecy”*** specifically referenced the book of the Revelation. He believed the beauties of that detailed template is much preferred over the spontaneous workings before the saints who lived in the days of Christ’s first advent and who learned as they went and were guided by Christ.

The expositor Thomas Watson suggests this day star is a reference to the work that John the Baptist did for Christ’s first advent ... and what the Church of Revelation is appointed to do at Christ’s second advent. The day star references that star that is most visible just as the dawn of the day breaks. When you see it, you know the sun will very shortly break across the eastern sky. Likewise, when you see the Church of Revelation in just the proper state and engaged in just the right practices of preaching, you know that Christ the Sun of Righteousness is soon to come in glory.

We have much to gain from a close examination of these letters John was directed to write and send to the seven churches of Asia. Between the introduction passage we examine today and the specific writings to those churches, we get to become more intimately acquainted with the relationship between Christ and His Bride. Lord willing, that will be what I am next honored to bring forward from the Revelation.

I love you all. Amen.