

# **THE ADVANCEMENT OF THE DIVINE REVELATIONS AND THEIR APPLICATIONS**

**By Titus Chu**

## **MESSAGE FIVE: JOHN'S APPLICATION OF THE VISION HE RECEIVED**

In the previous messages we have looked at how Peter and Paul were affected by the revelation of Christ and the church they received. In this message we will consider how John's revelation impacted his life and ministry.

### **JOHN'S REVELATION**

John likely wrote the book of Revelation around 95 AD. He was probably more than eighty years old when he turned to see the voice that spoke with him on that Lord's Day. He was living in exile on a tiny island called Patmos because of his labor on behalf of the Lord's testimony (1:9). Peter and James and Paul had all been martyred some twenty-five to thirty years earlier. After their deaths, Jerusalem itself had been destroyed. This was the situation when John received his revelation.

It was thus in his old age that he received this clear revelation of Christ and the church. To John, the churches were revealed first, and then Christ as the Son of Man as the One who walked in their midst. This revelation became his focus for the rest of his ministry. (Most scholars feel he wrote his Gospel and First Epistle after he wrote Revelation).

### **THE REALM OF JOHN'S EXERCISE UNDER REVELATION: THE LOCAL CHURCH**

As with Peter and Paul, John practiced what he saw within sphere of the local church. John's realization was that the

believers needed to abide in the living Christ for the organic Body in the local churches. John's ministry focused very much on abiding in Christ, for it is when we abide in Christ that we experience the virtues needed for living the church life. He told us to love one another, for love is of God, and God is love. If we desire to live in the church life and love the brothers, we must know how to abide in Him. Furthermore, we must also know how to abide in the Christ others experience. We all appreciate singing that song, "My going on is for you, your going on is for me." All believers should realize that the experience we have in Christ is for others as well, and not just for ourselves!

### **THOSE WHO RECEIVE THE LORD'S REVELATION WILL ENDURE PERSECUTION**

What John saw caused him to endure persecution, both from those in religion, and from those in politics. Everyone who sees Christ and the church in the way John, Peter, and Paul did will endure persecution. All who truly serve the Lord will experience this.

Watchman Nee, for instance, was faithful to the revelation he received, and because of this, he endured persecution. He was even attacked in the press; it was claimed that he poisoned the spring of a city's water supply, and that he had spread nails along a waterway to prevent cargo from reaching the other side! Those in the world also spread rumors about his personal life. He likewise was criticized and accused by those of religion. He was even excommunicated by those leading the church in Shanghai. When the leading brothers from another locality welcomed him to their Lord's table, however, he refused, for he felt that until the issue was resolved, he could not bypass the decision of the brothers in Shanghai. (He did, however, agree to spend time outside of the church meetings with brothers in a home. Some of what was shared during that time comes to us in his book on the Song of Songs.)

Witness Lee also experienced persecution for his stand. He was arrested and imprisoned by the Japanese. During that time, the Japanese could have killed him for any reason, for they killed people just as easily as they might kill a dog. Thankfully, he was eventually released, but until after he had suffered at their hands. Brother Lee was persecuted by religion as well. He was accused of teaching heresy and of leading a cult. He was also personally slandered.

I believe John himself endured persecution from the religious element in the church in Jerusalem. In Acts 3:1 we can see John and Peter together, operating in quite a prevailing manner. After chapter 5, however, John disappears. What happened? He might have escaped the city after his brother James was beheaded by Herod. It may also have been that he felt many in the church no longer received him, or he might have just remained quietly in Jerusalem while those “of the circumcision” grew in power. He surely came under political persecution at some point, for that was the reason he was on the island of Patmos when he received his revelation.

### **THE LAST APOSTLE’S OPERATION AMONG THE CHURCHES: AS AN ELDER AND A BROTHER**

In those latter days he had been dwelling and laboring in Ephesus. He refers to himself as “your brother” in Rev. 1:9 and “the elder” in his Epistles (2 John 1; 3 John 1). Peter referred to himself still as an apostle in his Epistles (1 Peter 1:1; 2 Peter 1:1), but John left that designation behind. Whom would you rather come to and fellowship with, an apostle, or a brother? In a very sweet way the aged John, the last of the great apostles, who fifty years earlier was the only disciple to follow the Lord all the way to the cross, speaks of himself merely as a brother, and an elder.

Whether by “elder” John meant “I am a very old brother,” or whether he meant “I am an elder in the church in Ephesus,” it matters little. He was lovingly caring for the churches Paul had

raised up. Paul raised up these churches, was persecuted, forsaken by the churches in that area, and eventually martyred. He must have been greatly concerned about these churches after they left his ministry. Yet John was there, as if to say, “Paul, don’t worry. The churches you raised up, I will shepherd. They are something of the Lord’s work. You pioneered in this region, but it is still the Lord’s field, not yours.” No Christian belongs to any other Christian. No Christian belongs to anyone’s ministry. All believers, and all churches, belong to Christ alone. John’s care for the churches Paul had raised up gives us a beautiful picture.

John labored among the churches faithfully until his death. He did not die a martyr’s death as did the other apostles, but to his last breath he loved the Lord, and to his final days he served the saints and cared for the churches. He was faithful to the end.

### **JOHN’S APPLICATION OF HIS REVELATION THROUGH HIS MINISTRY**

In his writing, John unveils to us the practical way to live the church life. His writing is simple, yet profound. The days of the apostles were nearing to their close; the era of the apostolic revelation ended with John. The initial leaders were gone. Nobody knew how the churches should go on. A great number of “epistles” were circulating at that time that claimed to be written by various apostles.

The truth of God’s New Testament economy was not yet clearly seen by many. The New Testament canon had not yet been fully established. Many were writing all kinds of things, including heresy. In such an environment, John wrote his first Epistle, and in those five simple chapters he clarified everything. How profound was John’s ministry! In his writings, John brings us to focus upon four great matters: the living Christ producing overcomers in the churches; Christ being the reality of the Triune God; fellowship with the Triune God, the apostles, and the saints; and the “three-dimensional” church life.

## **1. Christ Operates Within the Churches to Produce Overcomers**

First of all, John's writing focuses us upon the living Christ who is walking in the midst of the churches to produce overcomers and to consummate the New Jerusalem. According to John, every local church must have some overcomers. It is in the churches that the Lord must gain His overcomers.

John's Revelation begins with local churches, and concludes with the New Jerusalem. The Lord's care for the churches produces the New Jerusalem. Without overcomers, however, there is no New Jerusalem. Therefore, if someone asks you what kind of life you live, tell them you are living the New Jerusalem life! The life we live in the local church will produce the New Jerusalem. But first, the overcomers must be produced in this age. This is why the Lord is walking in the midst of the churches. He calls to each church, "he who overcomes...he who overcomes!"

## **2. Christ as the Triune God is the Anointing for Our Abiding**

Secondly, John in his writings testifies that Christ is the entire Triune God. He is not only God's Son; Christ is the complete Triune God - the Father, Son, and Spirit. As the complete Triune God, He is the Word of life (John 1:1, 14; 1 John 1:1-3). "Word of life" is a marvelous phrase. If you touch Him, He is life to you. Once you enjoy Him, He becomes the living Word. In this way Christ is not simply the truth Bible teachers seek, nor simply the inner life sought by the mystics, for He is both.

If we do not have both aspects, something is lacking. Bible teachers can know something, but without the life, there is a lack. And if some only seek to know life without knowing truth, their experience also will be deficient. For our experience of both life and truth, John points us to Christ, for Christ is the Word of life that can be heard, seen, beheld, touched, and handled.

Many handle a lot of spiritual books, but never handle Jesus. And others handle many spiritual activities, but never touch the Lord. John tells us that the Word of life is something (or Someone) that we must not only hear, but also see; something we not only see, but also behold; and something we not only behold, but also handle. As the Word of life, Christ should become very real to you. In this church life which we are living, there should be nothing but such a Christ!

### **3. We Must Be in Fellowship with the Father, the Son, and the Lord's Servants Together with All Saints**

Thirdly, John writes that if we want to be healthy, we must have fellowship with the Son, the Father, and God's servants. The Christian life is a life of fellowship. The apostles are in fellowship with the Father and the Son, and we must join them in this fellowship. To fellowship with the apostles in this sense is also to fellowship with the Father and with the Son. There is a sweet organic enjoyment between the Triune God and His true servants. Fellowship is the purpose of that entity composed of the Triune God and His people. Therefore we should not bypass fellowship. When you are in fellowship with God's apostles, you are in fellowship with the Father and the Son, and when you are in fellowship with the Father and the Son, you are in fellowship with His apostles.

This should be the kind of fellowship we have with one another in the church life. It is as we are in the fellowship that we experience the blood of Jesus cleansing us from all our sins (1 John 1:7). This is a marvelous thing! Many times in our daily life something takes place, and we fall, sometimes terribly, and we come under condemnation and experience guilt. But as we enjoy the fellowship in the meetings, something happens.

As we begin to touch the Lord with all the saints, we begin to experience a sweet cleansing. You just feel washed, and your relationship with the Lord is restored. According to John, we experience the blood of Jesus cleansing us of all our sins in the church life! To John, this matter of cleansing is very practical.

Of course, we still need to confess our sins to the Lord (1 John 1:9). You may feel sometimes that your sins are too ugly, or too serious, to bring before the Lord in confession. But if you do not confess, do not think that the Lord forgets. He knows. Even as we commit our sins, He is with us, struggling to recover us. When you confess, He forgives. If we do not confess, our fellowship with Him will be hindered.

Because the Lord is with us as the anointing in all situations, we are able to know how to experience Him in all situations (1 John 2:20, 27). In this way, we learn to abide in Him.

#### **4. As God's Little Children, We Are Fathers, Young Men, and Young Children in the Church Life**

Finally, John reveals that we must live a “three-dimensional” church life, recognizing the portion of those who are fathers, young men, and young children, while realizing that we are all “little children” who need to continue to grow in life together in this family.

John reminds us that we are all little children (1 John 2:1, 18, 28; 3:1, 7, 10, 12, 18; 4:4; 5:21). It doesn't matter how long you have been saved. Whether you are an elder, a deacon, or a serving one, you still need to grow and pursue the Lord. We should never feel that we have attained. Instead, our desire should be, as Paul said, to gain Christ by forgetting whatever lies behind and by stretching forward to what is yet ahead for us to lay hold of (Phil. 3:13-14). Whether we have been saved for five minutes or for fifty years, we are little children in the church life. We should always be struggling for more advancement, more revelations, and more experience in life.

Among the little children, however, there are fathers, young men, and young children (a different Greek word than “little children”) in 2:13-14. In the recovery today, we need many fathers who know God’s economy and who cannot be distracted by other things. They know the One who is from the beginning, and they know what is according to God, and what is not. We also need many young men, who are strong to fight the battle for the Lord’s interest on the earth. The young men are those who know how to overcome the evil one. Then, how sweet it is when the church life is full of young children who are growing up under the older ones’ care.

Therefore in the church life we cannot say to anyone, “I do not need you.” If we would carry the practical church life, we must see what John saw. We need Christ, we need the fellowship, we need the anointing, and we need to take care of one another as we go on together.

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