

Passages of Rare Comfort in Revelation

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In approaching this area I am thinking not only of the comfort which we ourselves can take from the passages to which we shall refer, but also of calling attention to material which pastors can use in their ministry of comfort, especially when they look for material to use when repeated calls on shut-ins that stretch out over a period of years keep them searching for variety.

We have had occasion to refer to the doxology in chapter 1:5,6: “Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.” What a wealth of comforting truths: the need for help caused by our sins; the shedding of His blood to save us from the guilt and punishment of sin; the proof of His love for us furnished by His willingness to shed His blood for us; the glorious effect, being made kings (here the original has “a kingdom”) whom everything, also tribulation, must serve; being made priests who may boldly approach the throne of God in prayer; His living forever to be with us also in our dying hour and to bless us in all eternity.

Much more brief, but comforting nevertheless, is the designation that John gives to himself in 1:9: “Your brother, and companion in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ.” The original is significant, one article τῆς uniting tribulation, kingdom, and patience, and adding “in Jesus,” “in” denoting in connection with. Thus viewed we understand that being joined to Jesus in faith involves tribulation in this life, a reminder which suffering Christians need because there is always the temptation to imagine that our hard lot is unique. Remember what Peter wrote: “Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: but rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ’s sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy” (I Pet. 4:12,13). The fulfillment of this promise is sure because our connection with Jesus also makes us companions in the kingdom. Nothing happens to us by chance; He rules over us in His grace and will accomplish His gracious purpose. And so there is patience in connection with Jesus, the willingness to endure in submission to His will because the outcome will be glorious.

To strengthen the patience of the saints and to keep their eyes fastened upon the goal we do not want to overlook the promises with which each of the letters to the seven churches closes. “To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God”(2:7). As a commentary to this promise we might refer to 22:2: “In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, was there the tree of life, which bare twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month: and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.” Continuing life, continuing health, what a prospect for those whose body is wasting away and whose life is ebbing away ... and all this from Jesus!

“He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death” (2:11). Death as the end of physical life is inevitable, but through Jesus there is no danger of falling victim to the second death, but rather the inheritance of eternal life.

“To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it” (2:17). This promise is given in symbolical language, but its implications are clear enough: manna, eternal refreshment; a white stone, a mark of the Lord’s favor, and that eternal; a new name, indicating personal interest in the individual on the part of the Lord, but also a new life in which all of the sorrows and reverses which are connected with the name which we bore in this life will be forever forgotten.

“He that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron; as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers: even as I received

of my Father” (2:26, 27). What comfort for the not many wise, not many mighty, not many noble—eternal partnership in the rule and power of their glorified Lord!

“And I will give him the morning star” (2:28). Although in 22:16 Jesus calls himself “the bright and morning star,” here I would see the promise of the beginning of the eternal day of heavenly glory. On the basis of the reference in chapter 22 and the reference to the daystar in II Peter 1:19 Peters¹ refers this promise to Jesus and His Word, but both of these references do not seem to fit, since those who enter glory as conquerors have long since called Jesus their Lord and clung to His Word. Lenski is more to the point:

Jesus himself is the royal Star; as such he gives to every victor ‘the star’ of royalty, ‘the morning one’ (τὸν ἀστέρα τὸν πρωϊνόν) the article being repeated as in 22:16); by this gift he makes us like himself: ‘we shall be like him’ (I Jn. 3:2), eventually even as to our bodies (Ph. 3:21) in the resurrection at the time of his *Parousia*. All this agrees with Ps. 2, with the royalty of Jesus as the King supreme, and with this King’s first gift to us in v. 26,27, authority over the nations. The symbolism of the morning star is that of royal splendor. It is extending the expression unduly when the idea of the morning is pressed to the point of meaning the morning of the consummation, even to the paling of our splendor in the brilliance of Jesus as the Sun that rises when the full morning comes. The adjective ‘of the morning’ suggests unfading, glorious brilliance both for Jesus in 22:16, and here for us. The Victor King Jesus is the brilliant Morning Star in royal splendor; and he gives to every faithful believer the gift to be like him in royal splendor. He and all these other victors shall shine together, all being as morning stars in brilliance, our brilliance being derived from him.²

Duesterdieck comments:

The bold poetical reference appears ... to be, that the victor beams in the brilliance of the morning star, because he has the morning star in his possession, just as a precious stone adds its effulgence to those who wear it.³

Plumptre, quoted by his American editor:

The fruition of his glorious presence... When he gives that star, he gives himself (22:16). The star had of old been the emblem of sovereignty; cf. Numb. 24:17; Mt. 2:2. It was the symbol of sovereignty on its brighter and benignant side, and was, therefore, the fitting and necessary complement of the attributes which had gone before. The king came not only to judge and punish and destroy, but also to illumine and cheer (Lk. 1:78)... The conqueror in the great strife should receive light in its fullness, and transmit that light to others (Dan. 12:3).⁴

Hoeksema after referring to Daniel 12:3 and Matthew 13:43 says:

All the righteous, therefore, shall shine. That is the glory of their perfected, new being in Christ. Cleansed and purified in the blood of the Lamb, they shall forevermore reveal themselves in eternal luster and resplendent glory. To that eternal glory also the symbol of our text refers. But evidently there is this difference, that the morning star shines with greater splendor, is more

¹ W. Peters, Ev. Luth. Pastor in Wurtoa, *Der Richter ist vor der Thuer!* Auslegung der Offenbarung St. Johannis (Zwickau in S.: Druck und Verlag von Joh. Herrmann, 1899), p. 61.

² R. C. H. Lenski, *Interpretation of St. John’s Revelation* (Columbus: The Wartburg Press, 1943), pp. 124f.

³ Friedrich Duesterdieck, D.D., *Critical and Exegetical Handbook to the Revelation of John* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, Publishers, 1887), p. 155.

⁴ *Ibid*, p. 157

obvious in brightness, than the other stars in the firmament. It is a star of special luster and glory. Thus also they who keep themselves pure in the midst of great temptation, who remain faithful in times of special stress and danger, shall shine forth with distinguished glory in the eternal kingdom of God.⁵

“He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels” (3:5). All sins blotted out, in no more danger of losing the heavenly inheritance, acknowledged as the Savior’s own—what a prospect!

“Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out: and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, which is new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God: and I will write upon him my new name” (3:12). The glory of the new Jerusalem is described in chapter 21. Here is the promise of permanent citizenship in it. How it will strengthen the suffering saint to say: “Here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come” (Heb. 13:14).

“To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne” (3:21). Not only a porter in the new Jerusalem, not only one in a crowd, but for each of His own a throne! Here is strength for the sufferer: “If we be dead with him, we shall also live with him: if we suffer, we shall also reign with him” (II Tim. 2:11,12). Yes, there is rare comfort in these promises.

“Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life” (2:10). The suffering saint will appreciate this passage, especially since in some cases at least it may have been his memory verse at the time of his confirmation, and in more cases will have been deeply impressed upon him at that time. Lexicographers may argue whether ἄχρι means degree or time. In the former case a reminder of what the martyrs endured while still remaining faithful will encourage the sufferer not to think that he is being overwhelmed by the miseries that precede death. In either case the Lord is encouraging faithfulness to Him, no matter how grievous a testing may be, because beyond death the crown of life is waiting.

3:11 is similar: “Hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown.” The temptation may be strong to doubt the Lord’s love and His truth when pain and weakness increase. But the Lord encourages His own to hang on to what they have in Him and His Word, for soon the cross will be exchanged for a crown. Note that the immediate reference is to “the word of my patience” (10), that is, my Word which works patience.

There is comfort too in the passage which has inspired the paintings of Christ knocking at the heart’s door: “Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me” (3:20). There is a special kind of knocking when the Lord permits suffering to come. When suffering reminds us that sin brought suffering into the world and that we too are sinners, He knocks to urge us to let Him in with His assurance of forgiveness. When suffering makes us realize how transitory are earth’s pleasures and riches and fame, He knocks at our door to let Him in to be our Priceless Treasure, whose love endures. When the way over which we are being led seems purposeless, hard, or confusing, He knocks that we might let Him in with the assurance that our Good Shepherd always chooses the right way. And when He has entered, there will be spiritual refreshment and the joy of knowing that He is our Companion: He with us and we with Him, and that not even death shall be able to separate us.

If I were to be asked to select what I consider the most comforting passage in the book, I believe that I would mention 7:9–17, especially 13–17. I don’t believe that we have to be limited to what the futurist interpreters call The Great Tribulation. “We must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22) covers every believer, no matter in what period of the church’s history he may be living. Those who are safe in glory had to walk that way. But tribulation does not earn for the believer a place in glory. The Savior, in whose blood the believer’s garments are made white, earned this for him. But in glory tribulation is a thing of the past. Now they are before the throne of God, and He dwells among them. They serve Him, for there is no idleness or boredom in heaven; but rather constant opportunity to serve the Lord, and only Him, with no

⁵ Herman Hoeksema, *Behold, He Cometh! An Exposition of the Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Reformed Free Publishing Association, Distributed by Kregel Publications), p. 109.

more struggles against sin from within and temptation from without. No discomfort, and no need, but the constant loving care of the Lamb as He pastures the redeemed and provides constant refreshment. And no more tears, either because of painful memories or because of new pain or heartache. I shall never forget the reaction of a woman who was dying of cancer when I had presented a devotion on this text. Her eyes lit up with joy as she exclaimed, “Won’t it be wonderful!” Death had lost its sting. We may still struggle for more light with some of the portions of the book, but because of passages like this we’ll love it.

There is a comforting scene in 12:10–12a: “I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ: for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night. And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death. Therefore rejoice, ye heavens, and ye that dwell in them.” As long as we live upon this earth, regrets and the memory of past sins will plague us. Daily we need to ask for forgiveness; regularly we seek personal reassurance in the Lord’s Supper. But in heaven Satan will never be able to refresh the memory of sins that God has forgiven and forgotten, nor will he be there to demand that God deal with our sins in stern justice. The blood of the Lamb has prevailed; we shall be eternally secure.

13:8 speaks of those “whose names are . . . written in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.” These words afford an opportunity to speak of the eternal counsel of God, our election because the Lamb would die for us, the assurance of our preservation amid all of the trials and temptations of this life, and looking to 20:15, our security in the judgment.

“I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors; and their works do follow them” (14:13). We may think of this comforting passage primarily as a funeral text. But it is equally suited to prepare the Lord’s people for facing death with anticipation. For they do die in the Lord, in intimate connection with Him, clinging to Him for forgiveness and the gift of everlasting life. Blessedness begins for them when they die. There is no soul sleep, nor a waiting in suspense to see what the verdict will be. Those who are in the Lord by faith have eternal life, for them dying is the crossing over into a fuller enjoyment of this life. Negatively this enjoyment is described as a resting from their labors. These include more than the toil and effort involved in earning a livelihood. The Lord’s people exert themselves in fighting off temptation, in resisting error, in keeping the faith, in overcoming the reluctance and lethargy of the flesh in order to do good works. With the Spirit’s help they did do their kind of works, good works, and these, they are assured, follow with them. They do not go ahead to serve as the passkey that unlocks heaven for them. They know that the admission price for them was the blood of the Lamb. But their works are not forgotten. “Whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water only in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you, he shall in no wise lose his reward” (Mt. 10:42). To have the Lord in His way show us that He saw and appreciated what we in our feebleness did for Him, what lasting joy this will be!

Another passage that will fill the soul of those who are weary of earth with eager longing is the description of the marriage supper of the Lamb: “I heard as it were the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunderings, saying, ‘Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth. Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honor to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready. And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints.’ And he saith unto me, ‘Write, Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb.’ And he saith unto me, ‘These are the true sayings of God’” (19:6–9). Here we meet with an exegetical problem, for where the King James Version has “the fine linen is the righteousness of saints” the original has “the righteousnesses of the saints.” There are those who interpret this to mean the righteous acts, the good works, of the saints. While it can be argued that our good works are something that is given to us and not something that we performed by ourselves, the thought of works seems to be foreign to the context of the book. While the terms used in chapter seven are not identical, the figure is the same, and there the white robes of the countless host before the throne are explained: “These are they which . . . have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb” (14). It is true that the bride is said to

have made herself ready (7), but immediately the words follow: “And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white” (8). It would seem that we here have an allusion to Isaiah 61:10: “I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness.” As is so often the case, the parallelism here interprets righteousness with salvation. I would therefore feel no hesitancy about using the text as we have it in the King James Version. Let the righteousness be: “Jesus, Thy blood and righteousness,” of which we confess that they are our “beauty, our glorious dress,” in which we shall stand before God. And then eternal blessed fellowship with the Lamb as a result. Heaven’s joy is likened to the joy of a wedding. The dying saint was right who was granted a foretaste of heaven and exclaimed, “The battle was hard, but now I am going to the marriage joys.”

On *δικαίωμα* Thayer has this to say:

From *δικαίωμα*; ὁ δὲ δεικνύεται ἢ τὸ δεικνυμένον; 1. that which has been deemed right so as to have the force of law; a. what has been established and ordained by law, an ordinance; b. judicial decision, sentence; of God—either the favorable judgment by which he acquits men and declares them acceptable to him, Ro. 5:16; or unfavorable: sentence of condemnation, Rev. 15:4. 2. A righteous act or deed, Rev. 19:8.⁶

Here I would ask why “righteous deed” must be the meaning, when 19:8 and Romans 5:18 are cited as the only examples of that use, and not “favorable judgment,” as Romans 5:16 clearly indicates by the opposition to *κατάκριμα*. Since many saints are involved and each has received a favorable verdict, the plural *δικαιώματα* is justified.

Arndt and Gingrich present the same definition as Thayer, adding the explanation that in Romans 5:18 “righteous deed” is indicated because of the opposition to *παράπτωμα*. They say it is chosen in Romans 5:16 obviously because of the other words in *-μα*, and is equivalent in meaning to *δικαίωσις*.⁷ This latter word is used in Romans 4:25, where, however, the opposite is also *παραπτώματα*, our offenses.

Cremer has this to say: “*δικαίωμα*, the product of *δικαιοῦν*, designates the recognition of an act which is *δίκαιος* as completed; a. the action by which a *δίκαιον* is presented or effected; b. the action by which one is presented as righteous or has presented himself, as Rev. 15:4 of God; 19:8 of men—righteous act or act of justification”⁸ (translation mine).

Hoeksema straddles:

This righteousness is, first of all, the fundamental righteousness of the saints in the blood of Christ, the Lamb. It is their legal righteousness, the righteousness of their state, according to which the perfect righteousness of Christ is imputed to them... But the reference is also to the righteousness of the saints in the spiritual, ethical sense of the word, or, if you will, to the holiness of the bride. She has kept her garments clean and unspotted from the pollutions of the world, of Babylon. She has heeded the call to come out of Babylon and not to be partaker of Babylon’s sins... By faith and in love, and with a view to meeting her Bridegroom, through grace, the bride has prepared herself, has put on the garments provided by the Lamb Himself, and kept herself unspotted from the world.⁹

⁶ Joseph Henry Thayer, D.D., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (New York, Cincinnati, Chicago: American Book Company, 1889) p. 151.

⁷ William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1957), p. 197.

⁸ Hermann Cremer, *Biblisches-theologisches Woerterbuch der Neutestamentlichen Graecitaet* (Gotha: Friedrich Andreas Perthes, 1872), p. 198.

⁹ *Op. cit.*, p. 618.

Duesterdieck comments:

Just deeds in which the saints have maintained their fidelity. On the contrary, Ew. (Ewald): declaration of righteousness; also Meyer, on Romans 5:16: the divine sentence of justification which the saints have received. But the plural form resists this mode of exposition, which, so far as the subject itself is concerned, refers to the writer of the Apocalypse a thought of so peculiarly a Pauline stamp as does not occur elsewhere in the Apocalypse. Of course, an allusion to the grace bestowed by God, as the ground and source of the *δικαιώματα* belonging to the saints, is contained in a delicate way in the *ἐδόθη αὐτῇ ἴνα*, etc.; but just this reference to the Divine giving prevents us, on the other hand, from defining the *δικαιώματα* as a Divine activity, but allows us to think only of the just deeds of saints.¹⁰

His American editor adds this information:

Some of the older Protestant interpreters explain the plural *δικαιώματα*, as determined by the fact that it comprises the two righteousness' of the believer, the imputed righteousness of Christ and his own inherent righteousness... Calov also explains it this way, upon the ground that the imputation of Christ's righteousness to the believer will never cease. Others ... maintain that each saint has a *δικαίωμα*; and, therefore, there are *δικαιώματα*, because there are many saints... John Gerhard also adopts the distributive use of the plural, although referring it to imputed righteousness. Philippi, however, concurs with Duesterdieck.¹¹

Peters summarizes: "The righteousness which Christ has won for His church by His merits, by His active and passive obedience."¹²

Lenski has this to say:

δικαίωμα with its *-μα* suffix is a term that expresses result: a product of being or acting righteous as God regards righteousness. These are undoubtedly righteous works of which 14:13 says that they follow the blessed. There is no difficulty between the imputed righteousness of Christ, the garment with which he clothes us, and this brilliant, pure garment of our own works of righteousness. When they are given the one, the saints are given the other; by having the second it is made evident that they have the first. In fact, that is the very evidence Christ will use in public at the last day, at his *Parousia*, in the final judgment (Mt. 25:34, etc.). For this very reason 'the righteous acts' must be mentioned here. All the passages that speak of the judgment deal with works.

But are the works a *βύσσινον*, a robe of fine linen, and even *λαμπρόν*, brilliant like a lamp, *καθαρόν*, clean, pure, spotless? Is that not saying too much about them? Not according to Mt. 5:14 as far as brilliance is concerned; not according to Eph. 5:27 as far as cleanness and stainlessness are concerned. All the imperfections of our good works are made good by the perfect righteousness of Christ, which is ours from the very start. So we 'are clean every whit' (Jn. 13:10).¹³

To this I would only add: Is this a judgment scene? Does he come around to imputed righteousness after all?

¹⁰ *Op. cit.*, p. 453. 461.

¹¹ *Op. cit.*, p. 461.

¹² *Op. cit.*, p. 315.

¹³ *Op. cit.*, p. 543.

Zorn says: “The wedding garment of the righteousness of faith.”¹⁴

21:1–7 brings us another comforting scene upon which not only the Christian sufferer, but also all of us should delight to dwell: the blessedness in the new Jerusalem, the new heaven and earth. Here is the promise that God will dwell, tent, among His people, climaxing in the assurance that this will be as intimate as a father associating with his dear children (7). The result will be no more tears, either because of unpleasant memories or because of unpleasant experiences. This is amplified with the promise that that which causes tears will be no more: death, the physical aspect of which can cause even the strongest believer to writhe and weep, and which, when it strikes one close to one’s heart, can cause tears to well into the eyes of even the strongest man; and then those precursors of death, inner grief, sorrow which breaks forth into loud lamentation, and pain in every form, emotional or physical. Rather, all will be new, and complete refreshment is assured under the picture of drinking of the fountain of the water of life. All of this is sealed with the Lord’s Amen: “These words are true and faithful” (5).

As a final passage of rare comfort, I would point to the description of the new Jerusalem: 21:9–22:5. There is light (11), reminding us of Paul’s words: “Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light” (Col. 1:12). This light is further explained in verse 22: “The city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof.” “There shall be no night there” (25). “The city lieth foursquare” (16), the cube being the symbol of perfection. There is the heaping up of terms of precious jewels that formed the twelve foundations in which were inscribed the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb (14). The twelve gates are of one great pearl each; the street is of pure gold. Its inhabitants are those “which are written in the Lamb’s book of life” (27). And then there is the final scene of Paradise restored, linking this last book of the Bible with the first; the pure river of water of life; the tree of life, the figurative guarantee of never-ending life; free and lasting association with the Lord; light; “and they shall reign for ever and ever” (5). I wonder how many of our people are familiar with this scene. Ought we not to acquaint them with it, especially when they are making ready to leave this world? Would not their reaction be the same as that which is so beautifully expressed in Meyfart’s hymn, “Jerusalem, Thou City Fair and High?”

Jerusalem, thou city fair and high,
Would God I were in Thee!
My longing heart fain, fain, to thee would fly,
It will not stay with me. (619:1).

Read this section, comment on it briefly, and use as a closing prayer all of Meyfart’s hymn, and it will strengthen the saint to say with Paul: “I am ... having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better” (Phil. 1:23).

How distant now seem all of the horrible scenes that unfolded when the seals were opened, the trumpets sounded, and the vials were poured out. Now all is calm and serene, and peace and joy reign forever. This is the effect which the book is to have, to remind us that conflict and turmoil are not the full story, that our Lord Jesus is still Head overall things and in the end will triumph over all who oppose Him and perfectly bless those who with the Spirit’s help refused to surrender their faith, but remained patient and knew how to wait. May the Lord grant that by being thus comforted and strengthened we may experience the blessing which is promised: “Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand” (1:3).

¹⁴ Carl Manthey Zorn, *Offenbarung St. Johannis* (Zwickau in S.: Druck und Verlag von Joh. Herrmann, 1910), p. 292.