

---

## Full-Time Ministry

*By David Wilkerson*

September 30, 2002 In the early years of the church, a great persecution took place. During that awful period, the apostle John was taken prisoner and sent to Rome. The Roman emperor at that time (either Nero or Diocletian) banished John to the Isle of Patmos. This island was a small, desolate, uninhabited place. Its only populace was a few prisoners who'd been banished there to live out their days. Like them, John was sent to Patmos to die.

The apostle I'm referring to was the same "beloved John" whom Christ so loved. He was the one who laid his head on Christ's bosom at the Last Supper. He was also the brother of James and a son of Zebedee. And he authored the fourth gospel, as well as the three biblical epistles that bear his name.

Try to picture the scene as John disembarks at Patmos. He steps down the boat's gangplank onto a desert island. There are no trees, only sand. Before him stands a small group of ragged, hardened, cursing prisoners. They all wear a look of doom. They know they're going to die there.

Behind John, sailors unload a few crates of food supplies - probably rice, flour, the bare essentials - and dump them on the beach. Then they go back aboard and pull up the gangplank. And, slowly, the boat sails away.

John watches as the ship heads toward the horizon. He doesn't know if he'll ever see it again. He's been left stranded, exiled, forsaken, meant to live out his days in isolation. He would later write, "I am banished to Patmos, for the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ" (see Revelation 1:9).

Why was John, a lowly disciple of Jesus, given such a sentence? Why was Rome, the world's ruling power, desperate to isolate him from civilization? John easily could have been jailed on the mainland. Why did the emperor want to silence him? Clearly, Rome considered this man a threat. John was obviously renowned, among both Jews and Gentiles. What powerful influence, what an effective ministry he must have had.

Now, as John watched the prison boat disappear, his own words must have come back to him. He was the one who had quoted Jesus as saying, "The time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service. And these things will they do unto you...But these things have I told you, that when the time shall come, ye may remember that I told you of them" (John 16:2-4).

How many cold, wet, shivering nights did John endure on Patmos? How often was he soaked to the bone by the Mediterranean's vicious storms? Did he even have shelter, or a change of clothes? How many colds and diseases did he have to battle? And what kind of diet did he have? Maybe a few bags of rice? Did he have to ration it, knowing it would last only so long until the prison boat returned? Was he forced to catch snakes or lizards to supplement his meager food?

By anyone's standard, John was a failure. Many Christians today would look at him and say, "What a waste. Why would God allow one of the most anointed men of all time to be isolated this way? Why would he allow a devoted disciple to be exposed to the elements and nearly starve? I don't understand why John didn't ask God for deliverance. After all, he wrote that Jesus said, 'Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it to you...ask, and ye shall receive' (John 16:23-24). Where was John's faith?"

Now imagine the reaction of church leaders today. Sadly, they would measure John by the current

---

standard of success: he had no congregation, no church building, no money to rent or buy a structure. He had no vehicle to travel in, no house, no decent suit to preach in. He had no ministry agenda, no outreach to the community, no plan to win nations. Leaders today would quickly write him off, saying, "This man has nothing. He's finished. Why was he called to ministry in the first place?"

How wrong they all would be. On that very first Sabbath on Patmos, John started a church. He called it THE CHURCH OF "I, JOHN." He wrote, "I John, who also am your brother, and companion in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ...was in the Spirit on the Lord's day" (Revelation 1:9-10). John was saying, in other words, "Yes, I'm shut off from civilization. But I have a church. And I minister unto the Lord here. I have no brother or sister to join me. But I'm in the Spirit." I assure you, the praise John offered from that isolated island was as glorious to God as a thousand holy voices worshipping in a thousand different tongues.

Something incredible happened to John after his first few days on Patmos. He made a decision that impacted the entire church world for eternity. Simply put, John died to all his own plans and thoughts of ministry.

As far as John knew, his exile on Patmos was his final lot. He probably thought, "I may be stranded here for life. But I'm not going to lose the fire of God. Even if it's only me here, I'm going to worship the Lord. I may have no congregation, no fellowship with brothers or sisters. But I'm going to walk in the Spirit. And I'm going to give myself to seeking the face of God. Now I have time to get to know him as I never have."

John sought the Lord fully in his isolation. He moved in the Spirit. And he gave himself as a living sacrifice. Beloved, this is the heart of my message: John was now in full-time ministry. I don't mean this in terms of how we normally think of such ministry. It was full-time in the sense that John had God all to himself.

You see, on Patmos there was no need for fund-raising, slogans or hype. There was no need to compete with other ministers or erect a bigger church building. And there was no one around to praise John, congratulate him, boast on him. His life was reduced to a single focus, a single ministry: Jesus Christ alone. That's all John had. And he said, in essence, "That's all I'll ever need: prayer, worship and communion with the Lord."

What is full-time ministry? Full-time ministry doesn't simply mean pastoring a church. Nor does it mean traveling as an evangelist or holding revival meetings. Full-time ministry isn't determined by a diploma, or a certificate from a Bible college, or ordination from church officials. In fact, you can pastor a large, successful church and still not be in full-time ministry. You can preach hundreds of messages, reach crowds of thousands. But none of these things makes you a full-time minister in God's eyes.

People often come to me asking for prayer that the Lord would send them into full-time ministry. These are mostly lay people with jobs or careers. Some truly believe God has called them into ministry full time. But others are simply unfulfilled or bored in their jobs. The idea of being paid a livable salary for doing God's work appeals to them.

Others are involved in God's work part-time, but have an urgent desire to minister full time. In fact, in most countries, ministers have to hold secular jobs because their congregations can't support them. And those who do receive a salary are underpaid. They're convinced they would be more effective in

---

ministry if they had sufficient support to do it. So for years they've pleaded with God, "When will the door open for me?"

I believe God desires every believer to be involved in full-time ministry. Scripture says we're all called as priests unto the Lord. Yet first, we have to remove from our minds that full-time ministry is a paid position or career. In the Lord's eyes, full-time ministry is ministry unto himself.

Simply put, you can be like the apostle John, stranded on an island alone, and be involved in full-time ministry. In fact, I consider John one of the most successful ministers in the Bible. Here is how you'll know you're ready to be a full-time minister:

You no longer need human applause. You don't need an assignment, a plan, or to be involved in some great work. You don't need an endorsement or credentials. You don't need a congregation or a church building. The only ministry that satisfies your soul is your prayer and worship to the Lord. You'd rather be alone with Jesus, feeding him with your praises, than to be admired as a great minister. You know all ministry to others flows out of ministry to him. So you've given yourself completely to a single thing: "My one calling on this earth is to minister unto the Lord." Then you'll be ready for what God sees as full-time ministry.

Many preachers who are seen as full-time today aren't ministers at all in God's eyes. I know of preachers who receive a salary but don't minister to the Lord. They have no burden from him. They don't seek him diligently in prayer. And they don't get their sermons from him. Instead, they borrow their messages from other preachers. Such ministers are mere hirelings, getting a check for simply doing a job. They're prayerless, with no fresh word from heaven.

I also know lay people who are much deeper in their knowledge of Christ than the men who pastor them. These people don't receive a dime for their ministry unto the Lord. But they're known in heaven as full-time ministers. They're intercessors, hungry for truth, serving God wholeheartedly. And they're given to prayer, shutting themselves in with Christ. These are true ministers, having outgrown their pastor long ago. In fact, their pastor may be a castaway, not a minister of God at all.

Let's go back now to John on Patmos. There's no record that John had contact with anyone on the island. (I believe the few criminals there had no desire to be around such a godly man.) John had nobody to fellowship with. He had no godly counsel, no voice to listen to him. All he heard was the pounding of the surf and the squawking of gulls.

Anyone might go crazy in that kind of situation. But John didn't. Instead, he learned to be dependent on the voice of the Holy Spirit. He clung to him for comfort and protection. When John testified, "I was in the Spirit" (Revelation 1:10), he was saying, in essence, "I was wholly given up to the Holy Spirit. I trusted in him. And I was taught by him. He's the one who showed me the corruption in the churches of Asia, which I wrote about in Revelation. And he showed me everything that's coming upon the earth."

Indeed, in his full-time ministry, John was given a revelation of the glory of the exalted Christ: "A door was opened in heaven: and (a) voice...said, Come up hither, and I will shew thee things which must be hereafter. And immediately I was in the spirit: and, behold, a throne was set in heaven, and one sat on the throne" (Revelation 4:1-2).

A door to heaven has been opened to us today as well. Like John, we've been called to "come up

---

hither." Scripture says, "Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need" (Hebrews 4:16). This call to come to the throne room has been mostly ignored by pastors and lay people. Few believers truly know God's voice. And few ministers speak as his oracles.

I believe what's needed most in the church today are men and women who'll impose on themselves a Patmos experience. Christians today make time to watch TV, shop or surf the Internet, but few ever come up to God's throne. Yet the Lord promises, "If you come up hither, I'll reveal my mercy and grace to you. I'll show you things you've never seen before, because you seek me."

So, where are the full-time ministers who'll shut out every fleshly voice and program of men? Who'll turn away from all self-ambition to be governed and led by the Holy Spirit alone? Who'll let others bypass them according to man's standards, because they've reduced themselves to a single focus of ministry: to live and walk in the Spirit?

John's isolation was imposed on him by godless men. But the Lord is pleased whenever we willingly submit ourselves to an "exile" with him. This doesn't mean we set aside outward ministry. It doesn't mean we give up our job, our family, our witness. In fact, it's possible to be a busy person and have a Patmos experience. What matters is that we shut out every voice, activity and thing that hinders us from hearing the Lord. And we concern ourselves with one focus: am I listening to men, or to the Holy Spirit?

Once Christ becomes our sole focus, we're able to receive discernment and guidance from above.

Let me tell you what I've seen in my own "Patmos time" of being shut in with the Lord. Jesus tells us that in the last days, men's hearts will fail them for fear (see Luke 21:26). I believe that time is coming soon. I foresee multitudes, in America and throughout the world, numbing their hearts and minds to the coming terror. They'll try to delude themselves so they won't have to face any more fearful news.

Right now, especially in New York City and Israel, masses of people suffer from sleeplessness. Clinics have opened throughout the city here because thousands are kept awake by a sense of dread. And according to Scripture, the worst is still to come. Whenever the Old Testament prophets received a glimpse of our day, they shuddered.

I believe the economic crash has already begun. Over the past two years, more than \$7 trillion has been lost in the stock market. There may be an upward trend for a while, but it won't last. The buying spree will end. And credit-card debt will bankrupt multitudes. There will be weeping and wailing on all sides because of past spending.

The real estate bubble is also going to burst. The market will be full of sellers but no buyers. Even now, expensive homes are for sale by owners who are almost bankrupt because of falling stocks. A builder in New Jersey told me of newly built, near-million-dollar homes with no furniture inside, because the owners were hit so hard financially.

Most frightening of all, I see war about to break out. The world will soon teeter on the edge of a hydrogen-war scare. It will cause leaders around the world to tremble.

I'm not trying to frighten anyone. But the body of Jesus Christ must hear the truth about these times. A devilish spirit is about to be unleashed on the earth. And as frightful events mount, believers are

---

going to numb themselves to fear. Some will even narcotize themselves like heathen, through alcohol or drugs. Others will give themselves over to sensuality of all kinds. Satan has already provided them with a massive menu of filth, through TV and the Internet. This will all lead to a hardening among God's people.

In Revelation 16:9, John describes an awful, scorching heat coming upon the earth: "Men were scorched with great heat, and blasphemed the name of God...and they repented not to give him glory." These sufferers will be so numb, they'll refuse deliverance. They'll prefer hell instead.

Some of these blasphemers are going to be Christians. In the coming days, passive, lukewarm believers will experience a searing of their conscience. This won't be a hardening against God; they'll hold to a form of godliness, and believe they're safe. But the time will come when they have no feeling whatsoever. And in turn, they'll have no fear, shock or concern for eternity. They'll stop growing in Christ. And they'll become easy targets for Satan.

Paul describes what happens to those who refuse to grow up in Christ: "Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart: who being past feeling have given themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness" (Ephesians 4:18-19). The literal meaning here is, "They have become apathetic, without emotion, without conviction, deadened." In short, they've become casual about the things of God. And they ignore all calls to wake up and seek him.

These same believers had been warned to "grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ" (4:15). Paul wanted them to have the inner resources necessary to stand against Satan's final attack on the church. But they had no flow of life in them. And they chose to narcotize their minds with lasciviousness. Preferring to walk in ignorance, they blinded their hearts to their dangerous condition.

And in their blindness, they couldn't handle any fearful news. They couldn't face the terrors that were falling fast upon the earth. So, instead of running to Jesus, they gave themselves over to every conceivable kind of sensual pleasure, greed and wickedness. Simply put, they couldn't get enough.

Like Paul, I urge every young believer: if you've grown lukewarm and apathetic toward Jesus, wake up. Don't let the fire of the Holy Ghost go out of your life. Hear the Spirit's trumpet call, and seek the Lord. Become a full-time minister unto him, seeking him with all your heart. Then you'll have the power of Christ to face the days ahead.

Paul makes it absolutely clear: you must either grow up in Christ, giving your all to him, or end up like those Paul describes. If you continue in ignorance, you'll be beyond all feeling. You'll no longer have any concern for the things of God. And you'll become one of the worst sinners on earth, committing evils you never thought possible.

I see signs of this numbing process among Christians already. Some go on mad spending sprees with credit cards. Some buy houses they can't afford. And many are falling deeper and deeper in debt. Their reasoning is like the world's: "If everything's about to come down, then we'll all go down together. I've got to enjoy it while I can."

No, never. They don't recognize the times. Right now, one-third of America is under drought conditions. Fires have scorched huge swatches of earth in several states. Floods have plagued vast

---

areas, including major cities in Texas. We're seeing unprecedented changes in the weather. Yet many Christians still don't get the message.

God help every prosperity preacher, every compromised shepherd, who bribes his congregation with a shallow gospel empty of repentance. God help such men when everything comes crashing down. People are going to storm their pulpits, demanding an explanation: "What's happening, pastor? You said all was well. You've led us astray." Churches will fold, believers will scatter. And God will hold those ministers responsible for every disillusioned soul who numbs himself because of their false teaching.

After 9/11 last year, people flocked to churches, but within six months they left. People turned to the church in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks. But they found no hope there. They didn't hear a word from heaven, or receive salve for their hurting souls. Many of the pastors who preached to them were as ignorant of God as they were. Most were prayerless men, worldly shepherds, not true ministers at all.

So the people walked away. And they won't go back when the next awful terror hits. They'll realize they were cheated the first time. So, next time around, when their minds are boggled by terrifying disasters, they won't seek hope. Instead, they'll numb themselves. They'll turn to wild sensuality to narcotize their minds.

In fact, the fearful, troubled and despairing will make a pact with death itself. We find this pact in Isaiah 28, as the prophet describes a trembling Ephraim under judgment: "Ephraim, whose glorious beauty is a fading flower...as a tempest of hail and destroying storm...[God] shall cast down to the earth with the hand...the priest and the prophet have erred through strong drink...all tables are full of vomit and filthiness, so that there is no place clean...Because ye have said, We have made a covenant with death, and with hell are we at agreement" (Isaiah 28:1-15).

Here is the numbing I'm talking about. These people were saying, in short, "We've given ourselves over to hell. We see ourselves as already there." Why would they say such a thing? They had numbed themselves to any fearful news of judgment. Isaiah had warned, "It shall be a vexation only to understand the report" (28:19).

The terrifying events we face will be utterly beyond our understanding. What will people do then? Like Ephraim, they'll numb themselves, accepting hell as their destination. You may ask, "But what about Christians?" Note who Isaiah was describing in this passage: he was talking about believers, followers of Almighty Jehovah. Why would these people make a pact with hell? They were backslidden, polluted by the filth of the world. And because of their sensuality, they'd grown spiritually blind. So, when judgment came, they were so numb that they accepted hell as their fate.

What awaits those who are full-time ministers unto God?"Thus saith the Lord God, Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste" (Isaiah 28:16). While the world panics in terror and insecurity, God's full-time worshippers will be at rest. The Lord will be their fortress in the storm, an unshakable rock. And all those who hide themselves in him will be safe from danger.

In that day, Christ himself will prove to be everything to his people: precious redeemer, protector, keeper, hope amidst the storm. And while the world has its pact with hell, we'll have a pact with Jesus. When judgments are falling all around us, we'll be at peace, because we see ourselves as

---

already in heaven.

"He that believeth shall not make haste" (28:16). The Hebrew meaning here is, "He shall not be ashamed or confounded." Nothing will be able to shake us, because we'll know our God is at work. We'll know he's carrying us, just as he carried Israel in the desert.

Let me end with this piece of good news: one day on Patmos, John saw the ship coming back toward the island. When it landed, John was told the Roman emperor had died. Now the apostle was being given his freedom. So he climbed aboard, sailed away from his place of exile, and settled in Ephesus. From there, his writings became an anointed light to the world. You see, it was after Patmos that John wrote his three epistles to the church on the subject of love. That's what God had taught this devoted servant through his hard times: to love.

Will Christians suffer in the coming days? Yes, we will. But as surely as Satan couldn't destroy John, God won't allow the enemy to destroy his holy remnant. He's raising up a church of full-time ministers, who will stand in him through every storm.

**Copyright/Reproduction Limitations:** This data file/publication is the sole property of World Challenge, Inc. It may be printed in its entirety for the reader's personal use or to pass on to family and friends. It may not be altered or edited in any way and all reproductions of this data file/publication must contain this copyright notice. This material is not to be posted or transmitted publicly/electronically on any Web site, Web page or FTP site other than: [worldchallenge.org](http://worldchallenge.org), [davidwilkerson.org](http://davidwilkerson.org) or [tscpulpitseries.org](http://tscpulpitseries.org)

© 2002 World Challenge, Inc., PO Box 260, Lindale, Texas 75771