

Why we do what we do

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[0 : 0 0] Well, let's pick up our Bibles and we'll turn to the last book of the Bible, to the Revelation of John. If you have one of our church Bibles, you'll find it, I think, on page 1028.

And we're going to read on from that passage I read at the beginning, Revelation 1, and from verse 9, right through to the end of the chapter. And John, that is the Apostle John, imprisoned on the island of Patmos, writes to the church that he loves, I, John, your brother and partner in the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance that are in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.

I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day. And I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet saying, Write what you see in a book and send it to the seven churches, to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamum and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea.

Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking to me. And on turning, I saw seven golden lampstands. And in the midst of the lampstands, one like a son of man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash around his chest.

The hairs of his head were white like wool, as white as snow. His eyes were like a flame of fire. His feet were like burnished bronze refined in a furnace.

[1 : 5 0] And his voice was like the roar of many waters. In his right hand he held seven stars. From his mouth came a sharp two-edged sword.

And his face was like the sun shining in full strength. And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. But he laid his right hand on me, saying, Fear not.

I am the first and the last and the living one. I died. And behold, I am alive forevermore.

And I have the keys of death and Hades. Write, therefore, the things that you have seen. Those that are. And those that are to take place after this.

As for the mystery of the seven stars that you saw in my right hand. And the seven golden lampstands. The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches.

[2 : 5 3] And the seven lampstands are the seven churches. Amen. And may God bless to us this, his word.

Would you like to turn back then, please, to the reading we had a little while ago, Revelation chapter one.

Was it page 1082, I think, in your church Bibles? Yes. We're going to look at the whole section from verse nine down to verse 20.

But I really am going to focus mainly on just that first verse. So let's pray together.

Dear God, as we have sung, so now indeed we ask you from the bottom of our heart that you would give us eyes to see, ears to hear, minds to understand, and hearts to respond to you in your word this evening.

[4 : 13] For we ask it in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. So if nothing else this evening, I hope as you wend your way home, you will take with you Revelation chapter one and verse nine, where we read, I, John, your brother and partner in the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance that I in Jesus was on the island called Patmos on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.

Now, I don't know whether you like motto text. Some churches do. You know, they choose a particular text for a year to help sort of focus prayer and attention and mission.

Those who establish the mission society that they called the BCMS, the Bible Churchmen's Missionary Society, back in 1922, were casting around for a motto text, for a verse that would sum up what they were going to do and why they were going to do it.

Now, I understand that a number of possible texts were considered. The obvious ones at the end of Matthew's gospel, you know, go and make disciples of all nations.

It's a great text. The Luke version in Luke 24, perhaps another summary text, like John 3.16, God so loved the world, he gave his one and only son that whoever believes.

[6 : 00] And all of those would have been great texts. But in fact, what they did was to choose this text. And I think at first sight, it is a rather surprising choice.

I wonder how many of us, have we been involved in 1922, would have said, I know, the key text to have is Revelation chapter 1 and verse 9. It may be that for some here tonight, this is the first time you've ever really focused on this verse.

But the thing is, that on closer inspection, it turns out to have been a brilliant choice. At least, that is my view, and I hope it will be your view by the time we finish this evening.

Because what we have in this simple text is to begin with a marvelous summary of what we possess in Christ.

You're a real Christian here tonight. Here is a summary of what is your treasure. If you're not yet a real Christian, here is a summary of what could be yours if you were to put your faith and trust in the Lord Jesus.

[7 : 14] A summary of what we possess in Christ. Secondly, there's a statement of why it is we persevere in Christ.

Why do we keep on going as Christian believers? My title tonight is, Why We Do What We Do. Well, alright, why do you do what you do?

If you're a Christian believer, why do you go on doing what you're doing? Why have you gone on doing it all these years? A statement of why we persevere in Christ.

And then thirdly, a reminder of the significance of church to the Lord Jesus. Here we are this evening. We are church gathered together.

Around the world tonight, there are literally tens of thousands of congregations meeting in the name of the Lord Jesus. So what? What does that mean to the risen and ascended Jesus?

[8 : 16] Here in this passage, there is a reminder of the significance of church to Jesus. Well, there we are. That's where we're heading tonight. So would you come with me to verse 9 of Revelation chapter 1.

I, John, your brother and partner in the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance that are in Jesus.

Now, you don't have to be a reader of the New Testament for very long to notice that to be in Jesus or to be in Christ is the normal description of a Christian believer.

I hope you're not somebody who says, well, you know, I can't be in two places at once. If you're a Christian believer, you are always in two places at once because you are where you are and you are in Christ.

So when I was a week ago in Kagoro, I was in Nigeria, but I was also in Christ as I was when I was in London and I am now when I'm here in Glasgow.

[9 : 24] We are always in two places at once. It's one of the great privileges of being a Christian disciple. And for John, the author of this, it had all started and kicked off about 50 years previously.

You remember that extraordinary day when John was about his fishing business on the shore of Lake Galilee and the teacher from Nazareth was there teaching a great crowd.

And as the crowd pressed on him, he borrowed the fishing boat belonging to John's partner, Simon Peter, and taught them from the boat and after a while pushed out into the deep water and they went fishing even though they had fished all night and caught nothing.

And the result was that miraculous catch of fish so astonishing that when John and Andrew brought their boat out, the two boats were loaded so full of fish that they began to founder in the water.

And at the end of that remarkable day, it was Jesus' call to Peter and to Andrew and to John and to James to follow me for I will make you fishers of men that changed the entire course of his life.

[10 : 52] Leaving behind the fishing business, leaving behind the boats and the nets and even the catch of fish, they set out and for three years were Jesus' associates in his public ministry.

John witnessed the Last Supper, the disciple whom Jesus loved. He describes himself. You remember it was John to whom Jesus entrusted the care of Mary from the cross.

Jesus, dying on the cross, says to John, John, behold your mother. Mary, behold your son. John, an eyewitness of the risen Jesus.

There at his ascension, there at Pentecost as the Spirit was given. And so John with the other disciples became apostles of the church.

And now for 50 years, John has been engaged in that gospel business, in that great fishing business. And how does he sum it up? He says that he is a brother and a partner to those to whom he writes in three things.

[12 : 11] And the three things he spells out are a summary of what we possess in Christ. You see them in verse 9.

They are these. I, John, your brother and partner in the tribulation, that is the suffering, and the kingdom, that's the second one, and the patient endurance that are in Jesus.

You imagine an interview. Here is John, the aged apostle. John, how has it been the last 50 years? Come on, tell us.

Give us the lowdown. What has it meant to you to be an apostle and a disciple of the Lord Jesus for 50 years? What's your experience been like? And John says, well, first of all, it has been full of tribulation.

Not exactly a PR merchant's dream, is it? It's been full of suffering, actually, says John. It's been jolly tough. We have found opposition.

[13 : 18] We have found enemies. We have found resistance to the message. It's been hard and tough toil.

But he says, it's not all tribulation because there's also the kingdom. And the great theme of the Lord Jesus from the very first day we heard him was the coming of the kingdom of God.

A kingdom that is coming in because God is bringing it in. A kingdom that will last forever. That will endure forever. That will never, ever finish. A kingdom that has been the hope of God's people for centuries.

You have to be born again to enter this kingdom. This kingdom is not of this world. It is an eternal kingdom. But it is a glorious kingdom.

And I've had the privilege, says John, of becoming and being a citizen of that kingdom for these past 50 years. Now, it's a remarkable thing, isn't it?

[14 : 21] As Christians, we are not only in two places at once, we are citizens of two kingdoms at once. Yes? So I have a British passport, but I am also a citizen of a heavenly kingdom.

Earlier this evening, Edward here introduced me to a Nigerian brother who I had not met before, who's just moved to live and work in this city of Glasgow.

I imagine that, where is Isaiah? Isaiah, where are you, brother? Brother, do you have a Nigerian passport? You do? Okay, so here we are. So he and I only just met each other.

We are citizens of two different countries. But actually, we are citizens of one country. And that is the privilege of being in Christ, isn't it? It's the privilege of traveling internationally.

Because what God is doing around his world is building his church. And his church has a common citizenship. So, says John, what we have in Jesus is tribulation, suffering, trouble, but we have the kingdom.

[15 : 31] And it is an eternal kingdom. And I'm a citizen of that kingdom. And therefore, thirdly, John says, there is the need for patient endurance.

And John knew all about patient endurance. Now, as an old man, he is in exile. He's on a prison island called Patmos.

He's not there because of criminal activity. He's not there because of financial fraud. Neither is he there in order to enjoy a quiet retirement.

You know, going back to fishing and enjoying the beach and the sea. He is there. Well, he's there because or on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.

And so, for John, to be a Christian disciple was a package deal. It involved three elements and they were all intertwined. It's not possible to have one without the other.

[16 : 40] What is ours in Jesus? Well, it's tribulation and Jesus warned us much. No servant is greater than his master. It is kingdom. That is the great good news of what God is doing in his world and it is therefore a call for patient endurance.

A package deal as we possess the kingdom but we possess it in the midst of tribulation and so patient endurance is required.

Well, there we are. That's where we begin. A summary of what is ours in Christ. Now, this verse also though speaks of why we persevere in Christ.

And I've hinted at this already. John was not on Patmos trying to enjoy a quiet retirement. He was there for a very specific reason.

You get it there at the end of verse 9. He was there on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. That was the reason why John was under arrest.

[17 : 55] That was the reason why he was a prisoner on the island of Patmos. And it was this element of the text that caught the imagination of those founders of the BCMS.

It caught their imagination because they suddenly saw that here was the big motive. Here was the driving force for the Apostle John's willingness to put up with the tribulation.

To display the patient endurance as one who possessed the kingdom. And here was a text that summed up why they would do what they had set their minds and their hearts to do.

Here was a text that answers the question why do we do what we do? And the answer is we do it because or on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.

Now for the founders of BCMS it led to tremendous gospel heroism. And those who are familiar with the story will know about the way they took the gospel into a country like say Burma modern day Myanmar or how they undertook original gospel work in the Arctic amongst the Inuit people.

- [19 : 22] My privilege today as somebody who is now working full time for Crosslinks is regularly to encounter men and women sometimes individuals sometimes married couples who are prepared to abandon security career comfort home family support friends in order to take the gospel or to serve the cause of the gospel in far-flung places.

Why is it that David and Julie Robry are risking the life of their children as some would see it by living in Joss in Nigeria?

is it not on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus? Why is it that my good friends Rick and Alanna Crichton are there in Kagoro with their three children?

Is it not on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus? Why is it that countless Christians around the world as well as countless Christians up and down Britain are serving sacrificing giving in a myriad of hidden ways for the cause of the gospel?

Is it not on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus? Why do you do what you do? Why do you serve the cause of the gospel?

- [20 : 56] Why do you belong to this church? Why do you make a stand for Christ in your place of work or your college or your university class or your sports club or with your neighbors?

If you do, is it not on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus? Now that little phrase is one that John has already used.

If you cast your eye across to verse two of chapter one, you'll see where it crops up first. He speaks there about the way the risen and ascended Jesus has sent a messenger to him, to the servant John, who bore witness to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw.

Later on in this wonderful book of Revelation, John speaks about the testimony of Jesus being the spirit of prophecy. If you want another phrase for it, well it is none other than the gospel of the Lord Jesus.

That is, it is on account of the word of God, and you remember that is the title that John gives Jesus at the beginning of his gospel, and because of the testimony of or about Jesus, it was for that cause that John was on Patmos.

- [22 : 28] That was the reason why he did what he did. That's the reason why he underwent the tribulation. That's the reason why he was focused on the kingdom, and the reason why therefore he was ready to display patient endurance.

So, not a bad text, is it, when you actually look into it. A great summary of what we possess in Christ, a brilliant statement of why it is we do what we do.

And then the rest of this passage, well the rest of the passage is generally interesting as well, and that gives a reminder of the significance of church to Jesus.

Now, you remember that what is happening here is that John on the island of Paxmos receives from God a remarkable vision.

It is on the Lord's day, I take it the first day of the week, the Sunday, that John hears behind him, by the work of God's Holy Spirit, a loud voice.

- [23 : 40] A voice that sounds like a trumpet, which means it is very loud, and you definitely want to turn around and look at it. Is that not right? Somebody sneaks up behind you, blows the trumpet, I think you would turn around.

That's what John did. And as he turns, he looks to see the voice of the one speaking. And what the voice says is, now John, I want you to write down what I'm about to show you.

You need to write it down and send it to all these seven churches. The churches scattered around, the Graco-Roman world. And verse 12, as he turned to see the voice that was speaking, what he actually saw was, well, it's a very detailed account of what he sees, isn't it?

What he sees, first of all, are seven golden lampstands. So, mention up here in this little dais, the golden lampstand, yes? So, this is not an electric lamp, is it?

Do you remember? So, this has got a sort of flame of some sort, maybe an oil lamp on the top, but the lampstand is made of gold, seven of them. And that's not a coincidence, because he's just been told to write to seven churches.

[24 : 54] And in the midst of the seven lampstands, he sees a figure, one like a son of man. Now, of course, that is a very evocative phrase.

It's taken from the Old Testament. It's, well, it's the language that the prophet Daniel used of the coming Messiah King. And this one like a son of man is clothed like a king.

He has a long robe, and he has a golden sash around his chest. The hairs of his head were white like wool, as white as snow. Therefore, he looks very distinguished.

Now, that was meant to be a joke, right? Thank you. Thank you very much. His eyes were like a flame of fire.

His feet like burnished bronze that is polished and shining, refined in a furnace. And his voice, well, it was like a trumpet, but it was also like the roar of many waters.

[26 : 01] If you've ever walked alongside, perhaps a river that then cascades into a waterfall, you know what an extraordinarily rich and vibrant sound the roar of many waters is.

And in his right hand, he holds seven stars, and from his mouth comes a sharp, two-edged sword, and his face is like the sun shining in full strength.

That is, you cannot bear to look at its brilliance. Now, this is all pictorial language, isn't it? But it is language that speaks of a majestic, glorious, extraordinarily powerful, and captivating person.

No wonder, verse 17, when John saw him, he fell at his feet as though dead. And you and I would do precisely the same, for this was truly an awe-inspiring figure.

man but this figure lays his right hand on John's head, and you're not meant to worry about whether he drops the stars, all right?

[27 : 13] This is pictorial language. He lays his hand on John's head and says, John, don't be afraid. It's all right. I am the first and the last, and the living one.

I died, and behold, I am alive forevermore. And of course, by now, the penny would have dropped, wouldn't it? Don't you think? Now John understands who this figure is.

I died, and behold, I am alive forevermore. And now listen to what he says, and this is very important to know this, and I have the keys of death and Hades.

We gather here tonight as mortal men and women, do we not? One day we will die, and who knows what a day will bring.

My friends, we need to know who's got the keys. He's got the keys of death and Hades that he's very important to know. Because if he has the keys, then he can open the door.

[28 : 20] And one day, you and I will need the key to be turned in the lock. And then the voice says to John, words that he spoke before, write, therefore, the things you have seen, those that are and those that are to take place after this, and the result is this wonderful book of Revelation.

And then notice verse 20, because the figure now explains to John the symbolism of those seven golden lampstands and the seven stars.

And what do they stand for? Have a look at verse 20. As for the mystery of the seven stars you saw in my right hand, and the seven golden lampstands, the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches.

We're not entirely sure what John means by these angels. They are the ones to whom the letters are addressed. It may be that they are the pastor teachers of the churches.

It may be that they are in some sense the spiritual representation of the churches, but whatever they precisely represent, the meaning is clear. For the Lord Jesus both walks amongst the churches and holds them in his hand.

[29 : 49] Holding them in his hand, they are safe and secure and protected. Walking amongst them, they are intimately known by him. You see what is being pictured here?

For the Lord Jesus, these churches are of huge significance. He walks among them. Not only does he walk among them, looking, observing, knowing, understanding, and if you've read the letters, you'll know that in a sense he is also assessing, he knows their strengths and their weaknesses, he urges them to press on and to do better and to stop doing the things that are bad and to keep doing the things that are good, but he also holds them in his right hand, for they are supremely precious to him.

For the Lord Jesus, churches are what it's all about. This is the great work that he died to achieve.

This is the great reason why he delays his return. for what God is doing in the world is he is building his church. You ever looked around the world and wondered why there is so much bad news, suffering, oppression, warfare, conflict, natural disaster?

You ever felt like sort of kicking the furniture and saying to God, what on earth are you doing? And the answer is, God is building his church and he's quite good at it.

[31 : 24] and he's doing it in every country and amongst every people and in every language and every culture on the face of the planet. It is a remarkable thing that God is doing and he's doing it because the risen Lord Jesus values churches.

He walks among the lampstands and he holds them in his right hand. So if you're ever tempted to think, gosh, is church really worth it?

Remember that the Lord Jesus walks amongst the churches and holds them in his right hand. In Crosslinks, we describe ourselves as a mission society in business to serve churches in their engagement in God's mission because we recognize that the churches are God's lampstands.

God's mission agency, shining light in a dark world. Let's come back to our text.

It is a great text, isn't it? It's rather a fine choice, do you not think? Let me finish by suggesting some things that we might ponder as we go home this evening.

[32 : 49] Here's the first one. Do you count yourself capable of being described in the way John describes himself in verse 9?

Look how he describes himself. I, John, your brother and partner. Do you see yourself as a brother and partner or a sister and partner in these things?

Christian? That is the great privilege, isn't it, of being a Christian. And if you do, is this how you teach what you possess in Christ to others?

Now, I don't know what you do. Perhaps you lead a Bible study at college. Perhaps you teach a Sunday school class. Perhaps you help in a youth group. Maybe you host a home group. Maybe you are involved in gospel ministry of another kind.

how do you teach what you possess in Christ? Do you teach it as a package deal? Are you honest enough to say, well, yes, it is about the kingdom, but it's not only about the kingdom, it's also about tribulation and it's about patient endurance.

[34 : 03] The temptation, of course, is just to tell half the story, isn't it? Is that not right? So often, one hears a testimony that focuses just on the privilege of the kingdom.

Well, they are great privileges, but the truth is that what we have in Christ is tribulation and the kingdom and patient endurance, is it not?

Do you count yourself a brother or a sister and a partner in these things? And if you're not yet, if you're here tonight and you're looking in, as it were, from the outside, well, John would say, these things are more precious than anything else in all the world.

And they are for whoever will believe. For God so loved the world he gave his one and only Son that whoever believes should not perish but have eternal life.

Second question. Are you bashing on? are you bashing on with patient endurance, looking ahead to the kingdom and therefore enduring tribulation along the way?

[35 : 19] Is that your motive? Are you doing what you do for the same reason John did what he did, that is because of or on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus?

And when you next think to yourself, gosh, I really cannot face another meeting this evening after a long day's work. Do I have to pitch out to this prayer meeting? Will you say to yourself, yeah, of course you do, on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.

Do I really have to speak up for Jesus at my place of work? Yeah, of course you do, on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. And when you do what you do for that reason, you do what you do in company with countless hundreds of thousands of brothers and sisters and partners around the world.

Is that your motive? Other motives can creep in, can't they? Sometimes we do what we do for our own personal glory or status or out of sheer pig-headed obstinacy.

Let's get back, if we need to get back, to this motivation. Why do we do what we do? For the sake of, on account of, the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.

[36 : 47] Thirdly and lastly, are you bearing your mind, are you consciously aware of the importance of church, the significance of church, to the risen Lord Jesus?

us. It's a terrible thing where people speak derogatively or dismissively of church. Church is meant to be a glimpse of God's kingdom.

The coming together of those from different backgrounds and languages and cultures who have nothing else necessarily in common and yet who have everything in common because we share together this citizenship.

And what are we together? Well, we're meant to be a lampstand. And the point of a lampstand is to stand a lamp. That is, it is to shine light.

Light locally where we are. Yes, in this part of this great city, that Tron Church should be a light to all those around.

[37 : 49] But also concerned for the shining of that light globally. So we need to keep asking ourselves, don't we, what more can we do on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus?

What does the risen Jesus make of us as he walks around this particular lampstand tonight? But as we ask that, is it not wonderful to know that we are held securely in his hand?

I, John, your brother and partner in the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance that are in Jesus was on the island called Patmos on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.

[illegible]

Amen. Take a moment's quiet. Father, we thank you for your servant, John, those centuries ago willing to endure tribulation, to display patient endurance as a citizen of your kingdom because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.

[39 : 32] And we cover that for ourselves. We pray that you would help us this week to do what we do on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.

We ask that your church in this place might do what it does on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. And we pray for our brethren, for brother and sister Christians around the world, some bearing their witness in much more difficult circumstances than us.

Strengthen them. Lord, please, we pray. As we have prayed for Nigeria, we remember brothers and sisters in many even more demanding places than that. Give them grace and strength this week, we pray, to persevere on account of the word of God and the destiny of Jesus.

And so we commit ourselves to your care tonight. I'd ask that you put this text in our hearts and our minds and send us on our way, rejoicing, to be like John, brothers and sisters and partners in these things because we ask it in the precious name of Jesus.

Amen.