

## Freedom Tension: 1. Comfort or Challenge?

### Call to Worship: Isaiah 42:1-8

1 “Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him, and he will bring justice to the nations. 2 He will not shout or cry out, or raise his voice in the streets. 3 A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out. In faithfulness he will bring forth justice; 4 he will not falter or be discouraged till he establishes justice on earth. In his teaching the islands will put their hope.” 5 This is what God the Lord says—the Creator of the heavens, who stretches them out, who spreads out the earth with all that springs from it, who gives breath to its people, and life to those who walk on it: **6 “I, the Lord, have called you in righteousness; I will take hold of your hand. I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant for the people and a light for the Gentiles, 7 to open eyes that are blind, to free captives from prison and to release from the dungeon those who sit in darkness. 8 “I am the Lord; that is my name! I will not yield my glory to another or my praise to idols.**

### Responsive Reading: 2 Peter 3:1-16

1 Dear friends, this is now my second letter to you. **I have written both of them as reminders to stimulate you to wholesome thinking.** 2 I want you to recall the words spoken

in the past by the holy prophets and the command given by our Lord and Savior through your apostles. 3 Above all, you must understand that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires. 4 They will say, “Where is this ‘coming’ he promised? Ever since our ancestors died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation.” 5 But they deliberately forget that long ago by God’s word the heavens came into being and the earth was formed out of water and by water. 6 By these waters also the world of that time was deluged and destroyed. 7 By the same word the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly. 8 But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. **9 The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.** 10 But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything done in it will be laid bare. **11 Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives** 12 as you look forward to the day of God and speed its

**coming.** That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. 13 But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, where righteousness dwells. 14 So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him. **15 Bear in mind that our Lord's patience means salvation, just as our dear brother Paul also wrote you with the wisdom that God gave him. 16 He writes the same way in all his letters, speaking in them of these matters. His letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction.**

**Old Testament:** Isaiah 48:12-22

12 "Listen to me, Jacob, Israel, whom I have called: I am he; I am the first and I am the last. 13 My own hand laid the foundations of the earth, and my right hand spread out the heavens; when I summon them, they all stand up together. 14 "Come together, all of you, and listen: Which of the idols has foretold these things? The Lord's chosen ally will carry out his purpose against Babylon; his arm will be against the Babylonians. 15 I, even I, have spoken; yes, I have called him. I will bring him, and he will succeed in his mission. 16 "Come near me and listen to this: "From the first announcement I

have not spoken in secret; at the time it happens, I am there.” And now the Sovereign Lord has sent me, endowed with his Spirit. **17 This is what the Lord says— your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel: “I am the Lord your God, who teaches you what is best for you, who directs you in the way you should go.** 18 If only you had paid attention to my commands, your peace would have been like a river, your well-being like the waves of the sea. 19 Your descendants would have been like the sand, your children like its numberless grains; their name would never be blotted out nor destroyed from before me.” 20 Leave Babylon, flee from the Babylonians! Announce this with shouts of joy and proclaim it. Send it out to the ends of the earth; say, “The Lord has redeemed his servant Jacob.” 21 They did not thirst when he led them through the deserts; he made water flow for them from the rock; he split the rock and water gushed out. 22 “There is no peace,” says the Lord, “for the wicked.”

**New Testament:** Revelation 1:1-20

**1 The revelation from Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John, 2 who testifies to everything he saw—that is, the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ. 3 Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those**

**who hear it and take to heart what is written in it, because the time is near.** 4 John, To the seven churches in the province of Asia: Grace and peace to you from him who is, and who was, and who is to come, and from the seven spirits before his throne, 5 and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. **To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, 6 and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father—to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen. 7 “Look, he is coming with the clouds,” and “every eye will see him, even those who pierced him”; and all peoples on earth “will mourn because of him.”** So shall it be! Amen. 8 **“I am the Alpha and the Omega,” says the Lord God, “who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty.”**9 I, John, your brother and companion in the suffering and kingdom and patient endurance that are ours in Jesus, was on the island of Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. 10 On the Lord’s Day I was in the Spirit, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet, 11 which said: “Write on a scroll what you see and send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea.” 12 I turned around to see the voice that was speaking to me. And when I turned, I saw

seven golden lampstands, 13 and among the lampstands was someone like a son of man, dressed in a robe reaching down to his feet and with a golden sash around his chest. 14 The hair on his head was white like wool, as white as snow, and his eyes were like blazing fire. 15 His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of rushing waters. 16 In his right hand he held seven stars, and coming out of his mouth was a sharp, **double-edged sword**. His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance. 17 When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. Then he placed his right hand on me and said: **“Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. 18 I am the Living One; I was dead, and now look, I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades.** 19 “Write, therefore, what you have seen, what is now and what will take place later. 20 The mystery of the seven stars that you saw in my right hand and of the seven golden lampstands is this: **The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches.**

### **Freedom Tension: 1. Comfort or Challenge?**

I hold in my hand a rubber band or elastic as some might call it. Limp, it does nothing. Pulled taut, it begins to stretch. Pulled too far it breaks, left too loose it does not serve its purpose. This is the what happens to the Word of God in our

lives. Left alone, it does nothing. Read, studied and applied to your life it stretches you. However, if you try to get ahead of the Holy Spirit's guidance as you read, study and apply it to your life, you'll break. So, be careful as you study the book of Revelation. It's one thing to read, study and apply it. But somewhere along the way, people I've met, good meaning people, they've pulled on the Book too tightly, trying to figure out every little symbol. Getting caught in the minutia of the book, they snap; forgetting about the other prophecies, promises and proclamations in the Word of God that are meant for today. This may be the last book of the Bible. It may hold prophecy for the future of all mankind. But it is not meant to keep us from the Great Commission; that call upon God's people in Mark's Gospel chapter 16:15 "He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation."

As we begin our Freedom Tension series today, call out to the Holy Spirit, seek His guidance as you answer whether this book and the messages it contains, comes as a comfort to you or a challenge, just like it was for the early Church.

### **What is this?**

The book of Revelation are the plans of things to happen or unfold in the future, given by God the Father, to Jesus Christ, and then proclaimed John, the apostle some 60 years after

Christ's Ascension. What John was given, was meant to be addressed publicly or read publicly for all to hear. This is what we get when we unpack the three verses of Revelation 1.

*"3 Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it, because the time is near."*

For the early Churches this book was meant to be read aloud and treasured. It was to be understood as prophecy, not history. As hearers and doers of the Word of God, blessing was to come to the Church. Remember, then and now, the Church of God was and is a persecuted Church. You and I are not held in any high esteem by the world around us for our belief in this book, the Bible. Regardless of what others think, say or believe, we are to watching over this very Word of God and ensuring that it's public reading or proclamation continues on – regardless of whether or not we pay attention to it. Is this comforting or challenging?

### **Who is from and who this for?**

Revelation 1:5b, 6, 8, 17b, 18 *"To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, 6 and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father" 8 "I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty." "Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. 18 I am the Living One; I*



**was dead, and now look, I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades.**” God, in all His wisdom has made it clear as to who these words are from – they spoken from the Second Person of the Trinity – Jesus Christ. The hints come from “by his blood” God the Father didn’t shed His blood and neither did the Holy Spirit. Although this might be vague for some, as you read on it says referring to himself as the “First and Last” – again pointing to the trinity, but clarity is made when he says “I am the Living One... I was dead, and now look I am alive for ever and ever.” This points to Jesus as being the One who brings this message to John, from the Father. And as Jesus reveals himself to John, the one who walked with Jesus, was at the Crucifixion, burial and resurrection of Jesus, there is a bit of a calming affect as Jesus utters these words to John, “Do not be afraid” v. 17c.

Believer, I share these words with you “Do not be afraid”. If you have placed your faith and trust in Jesus Christ, there is nothing for you to fear. These words should provide hope for all who’ve called upon the name of the Lord when He reaches out to you. You, according to Revelation 1:6 become part of “a kingdom” and as “priests to serve his God and Father”, that is we are to be His servants. This means that we are not of this worldly kingdom. As believers, we have a place in God’s kingdom because of Christ, the One who holds the keys

of death and Hades. It was Christ who overcame death, hell and the grave, for you and me. That's how we have redemption, that's how we have Salvation, that's why we are called priests. Not because of what we have done, but because of what He has done on our behalf. Is this comforting or challenging to you?

### **When will it happen?**

7 *“Look, he is coming with the clouds,” and “every eye will see him, even those who pierced him”; and all peoples on earth “will mourn because of him.”* This particular coming is not the rapture, this the fulfillment of the promise given to the disciples in Acts 1 “6 Then they gathered around him and asked him, “Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?” 7 He said to them: “It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. 8 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” 9 After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight. 10 They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. 11 “Men of Galilee,” they said, “why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into

heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.” This is what Revelation 1:7 is referring to. The Return of Christ will happen after the Rapture. In fact, it will occur after the Great Tribulation that all believes will be spared from because of the timing of the Rapture before the Tribulation and the Great Tribulation. But exactly when, is not for you nor I to know. What we are to be assured of, is that this promise that God, the Creator and Sustainer has made, will occur. God not only makes promises, He keeps them. The events unfold as we will see over the coming weeks: Rapture, Tribulation, Second Coming of Christ, Millennium (1000-year reign), New Heaven, and New Earth. Does this bring comfort or does this challenge you?

## **Conclusion**

Over the next number of weeks, we will be pulling on all that John was given by Christ to record, feeling the tension between comfort and challenge. All of this prophecy written, so that we might be blessed... Revelation 1:3 *“Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it...”* Read it from your Bible. Hear it read to you via the links on the Facebook page or on [www.newhopemiramichi.ca](http://www.newhopemiramichi.ca) under the sermon tab, then take to heart what is written.

Let's Pray

**Benediction: 2 Peter 3:17-18**

17 Therefore, dear friends, since you have been forewarned, be on your guard so that you may not be carried away by the error of the lawless and fall from your secure position. 18 But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever! Amen