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Revelation 1:1-8

Outline

- I. Prologue (1-3)
- II. Greetings to the Seven Churches (4-8)

I. Prologue (1-3)

Discussion Questions

- Why is this called the "revelation of Jesus Christ?"
- What does this phrase tell us about the theme of this book?
- What does this mean that God gave this revelation to Jesus?
- What was Jesus supposed to do with it?
- What was John's role in this?
- What does God want us to testify of?
- Why do you think there is an emphasis on reading this aloud?
- Who will receive the blessing mentioned in verse 3?
- What is the focus of how we should approach a study of the book of Revelation if we then want to receive this blessing?

Cross-References

Acts 22:15 - For you will be a witness for him to everyone of what you have seen and heard.

Isaiah 43:10 - "You are my witnesses," declares the Lord, "and my servant whom I have chosen, that you may know and believe me and understand that I am he. Before me no god was formed, nor shall there be any after me.

Acts 4:20 - For we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard.

Joshua 1:8 - This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success.

1 Timothy 4:13 - Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching.

Cross-References

1. The revelation of Jesus Christ - The very first sentence contains the theme of the book of Revelation. What is it a revelation of? It is a revelation of Jesus. A revelation means to reveal something, to uncover it, to show it off. A monument, movie, or book can have a revelation when they are unveiled and shown to the world. A person has a revelation when he becomes aware of something he never knew before.

This book is the revelation of Jesus. He will be revealed for all to see. Jesus was made visible in part at His first coming. At His second coming, He will be made visible for "every eye" to see Him. And every single person in the world will see Him in His power and glory as He truly is.

That is an exciting thing! Now we have faith in Jesus. We believe in Him as King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

Hebrews 11:1 - *Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.*

Our faith is currently based on something we do not see. But when Jesus is revealed, we will be able to see Him. Our faith will be validated. No longer will people mock. No longer will people deny Jesus' existence.

Therefore, the focus of the book of Revelation is not on the Antichrist, the mark of the beast, the judgments, or the angels. It is on Jesus. Currently, He is working behind the scenes. He is interceding for us at the right hand of God. But then He will be unveiled. Everyone will know Him as the Creator, the King, the Savior, the Lion of Judah, the Alpha and the Omega.

Application: As you go through this book, let your focus be on Jesus. We are His followers. Let us fix our eyes on Him. Do not be distracted by debates on lesser points of eschatology. Yes, study those and seek to understand. But do so with an emphasis on how these things point to and glorify Jesus. Our hope should be that at the end of this study we have a deeper understanding of our Lord and Savior and a closer walk with Him.

2. Which God gave Him to show to His servants - God the Father presented to God the Son the record of Jesus' future glory. In Philippians 2:5-11 Jesus' humility in submitting to the incarnation is described. And finally, it says that "every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord." Revelation is the detailed story of how exactly this future exaltation will take place.

The purpose of this revelation is primarily for our benefit, His servants. Being God, Jesus knew this from eternity past. In this passage, we see that God the Father entrusts the Son with the task to pass on this revelation to His followers so that we can know the things that are going to happen.

Reflect: Why is it important for believers to know the prophecies described in Revelation about what is to come? How should it affect our lives now?

3. The things that must soon take place - Many Bible passages describe us being in the last days or the last hour.

1 John 2:18 – Children, it is the last hour, and as you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come. Therefore, we know that it is the last hour.

The last days is a period of time encompassing the whole church age in between Jesus' first and second coming. We don't know how long these "last days" will last, but they are typified by increasing evil and rebellion toward God. Because God didn't set any specific time period for the last days, they could end at any time.

We must remember that to God a day is as a thousand years and thousand years as a day (2 Peter 3:8). The events in the book of Revelation are fixed. God knows the exact hour when they will occur. And history is speeding toward this epic climax. For our part, God designed it to be unknown and imminent so that every generation would live with that expectancy and readiness required.

At the same time, we know that people will mock and believe that this return will never happen because of the time it takes to happen.

2 Peter 3:4 - They will say, "Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation."

Thus, we should not be surprised that He seems to tarry. For we also know that He waits because He wants more people to enter into His kingdom first (2 Peter 3:9).

4. Being a witness - We see that God entrusted the revelation to Jesus who then sent an angel to tell John, whose role it was to then testify to us. God often works in this way. He entrusts the message to His people and wants us to then pass it on to others. Whenever a person is part of that process, it is a great blessing.

John took his role as a witness very seriously. Throughout his writings, he often refers to the fact that his goal is to faithfully pass on the things he is an eyewitness of.

1 John 1:1-3 - That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life— the life was made manifest,

and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us— that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ.

John was greatly privileged to have a first-row seat of Jesus' first coming. And now he is blessed with a vision of the second coming. In both cases, he was responsible to pass on what he saw and heard.

Application: In like manner, God wants us to testify of Him to those around us. We have witnessed answers to prayer, providence, and life transformation due to the gospel. Let us tell others.

Mark 5:19 - And he did not permit him but said to him, "Go home to your friends and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you."

From the above verse, we see that every person, even new believers, is expected to tell others about what God has done in our lives.

Are you doing this? Do you regularly share testimonies of God's goodness with your circle of friends and family?

5. Blessed is the one - This is the only book in the Bible that is accompanied by a blessing for those who read and follow it.

Reflect: Why do you think this special blessing is given for the book of Revelation?

One possible reason for the special blessing of this book is that God knows it is difficult and hard to understand. Because of this many believers may be tempted to skip this book and focus on others that are simpler. However, this blessing is an important reminder that studying this book is well worth the time. It is a challenge, but a rewarding one!

6. The blessing is for those who read, hear, and keep it - Note that the blessing is not given to those who only read it. You must read, hear, and keep it. It is possible to read or listen to Revelation without really hearing it. To fully hear something, we have to pay attention to it. We have to listen with our heads and our hearts. It is not about hearing the sound of the words, but about taking it to heart.

That is made even more clear with the admonition to "keep" what is written. This verse is very important and we should not take it lightly. It will guide the entire approach of this study of Revelation.

The goal is to keep it. Obedience to the principles within is what brings the blessing. Many people may approach Revelation from an academic perspective, seeking to find the keys to interpret the mysteries within. We should seek to accurately divide the word of truth by correctly interpreting even difficult-to-understand passages.

However, interpretation is a means to the end. And the end goal is not merely a correct interpretation. We must not seek to pat ourselves on the back with our skillful looks at the text. The goal is application. The purpose of our study is to obey what we find within. We want to grow in our understanding of Jesus. Seeking to grow our faith and holiness, we focus on Christ. This is a revelation of Him.

Therefore the study of Revelation should above all be a practical one. At every moment during our investigation of this book, we should ask ourselves, "what do I need to obey from this passage?"

II. Greetings to the Seven Churches (4-8)

Discussion Questions

- What were the seven churches referred to here?
- What does the phrase "who is and who was and who is to come" teach us about God?
- What may the seven spirits refer to here?
- What do these verses teach you about Jesus?
- In what way was Jesus the "firstborn of the dead?" What hope does this give to us?
- How should the book of Revelation affect our view of God and His relationship with this world?
- What does it mean that He is "coming with the clouds?"
- How might every eye see Him since only a small part of the world can see any section of the sky at once?
- Why is it important that "every eye will see him?"
- Who are the ones who pierced him?
- How will the earth respond to His second coming? Why? In light of this, what should you do?
- How does Jesus' title of the "Alpha and Omega" directly relate to the book of Revelation?
- How is this significant for you as an individual?

Cross-References

Psalm 90:2 - Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever you had formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God.

Psalm 102:25-27 - Of old you laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands. They will perish, but you will remain; they will all wear out like a garment. You will change them like a robe, and they will pass away, but you are the same, and your years have no end.

Zechariah 4:2, 10 - And he said to me, "What do you see?" I said, "I see, and behold, a lampstand all of gold, with a bowl on the top of it, and seven lamps on it, with seven lips on each of the lamps that are on the top of it. These seven are the eyes of the Lord, which range through the whole earth."

Hebrews 1:8 - But of the Son he says, "Your throne, O God, is forever and ever, the scepter of uprightness is the scepter of your kingdom.

1 Peter 2:9 - But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

Exodus 19:6 - And you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words that you shall speak to the people of Israel.

Teaching Points

1. To the seven churches - The seven churches are Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea. These were all located in the province of Asia Minor, which is the location of modern-day Turkey. Later in Revelation Jesus will write a personal letter to each of the seven churches, and by extension to the whole church.

2. Who is and who was and who is to come - God is eternally existent. He is the great I AM.

Exodus 3:14 - God said to Moses, "I am who I am." And he said, "Say this to the people of Israel: 'I am has sent me to you.'"

He is the only being in the universe who exists forever of His own accord and by His own power. He has no beginning and no end. Nothing caused Him and He is the cause of everyone.

This truth has profound implications as we study Revelation. It reminds us that the events described are set in stone. Revelation is just as much history as Genesis is from God's perspective.

3. The seven spirits who are before His throne - The seven spirits are mentioned four times in the book of Revelation (1:4, 3:1, 4:5, 5:6). Each of the other three instances refers to these as "the seven spirits of God." The Greek word for spirit here is "pneuma," which can mean "wind," "spirit," or

"breath." The most normal use is when "Holy" is attached to it and it means "Holy Spirit."

There are various interpretations of what the seven spirits of God refer to.

A. It could refer to the Holy Spirit Himself. Seven is used in the Bible over 800 times. Many of these references are in Revelation. The number seven is often used to denote completeness or perfection. So it could be a way of referring to the Holy Spirit as complete and perfect. We know that there is only one Holy Spirit (Ephesians 4:4).

B. Some see this as a reference to what they call the seven-fold ministry of the Holy Spirit as seen in Isaiah 11:2.

Isaiah 11:2 - And the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord.

The seven-fold ministry would include:

- Spirit of the Lord
- Spirit of wisdom
- Spirit of understanding
- Spirit of counsel
- Spirit of power
- Spirit of knowledge
- Spirit of fear

This would be an obscure reference if this is the case. Also, if you look at Isaiah 11:2 carefully it would seem that the Spirit of the Lord is mentioned as having 6 ministries, not 7.

C. It may be a reference to seven spiritual beings (angels) that are not described in detail here or elsewhere.

The first or third option seems the most likely, but we cannot be dogmatic. There are some aspects of Revelation we will not fully understand on this side of heaven.

4. Description of Jesus -

Faithful witness - Jesus came to preach the kingdom of God (Matthew 4:17). Over and over (especially in the book of John) Jesus is recorded as declaring the Father, bringing people to the Father, and letting people know the Father. As such, Jesus was continually a faithful witness.

John 1:18 - *No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him.*

Firstborn of the dead - Jesus' resurrection to a glorified body is the first of many. Just as the first fruit on a tree is a promise of more to come, so Jesus' resurrection is a foreshadow of what is held in store for the church.

Colossians 1:17-18 - *And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent.*

Ruler of kings on earth - Satan once offered Jesus the kingdoms of this world. But Jesus did not need to take this route to be king. He already is the King of Kings. At His first coming, Jesus did not exercise His divine right as king (John 18:36.) At the second coming, He will.

Who loves us - Some of the descriptions in Revelation are frightening. There are many plagues, judgments, and disasters. It is important for us to remember that Jesus is ever-loving. Firstly, we can avoid His wrath when we trust in Him. Secondly, we should remember that even many of the judgments serve as warnings to induce people to repent and turn to Him before it is too late.

Has freed us from our sins by His blood - Revelation is also a depiction of Jesus' wrath against sin and justice. We must view these events side by side with the cross. No one must face that justice because Jesus already gave His life to set them free. If one will admit Jesus is Lord and repent of his sins, then he can experience the love of Christ.

Made us a kingdom, priests to His God and Father -

1 Peter 2:9 - *But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.*

Every believer is a priest to God. Priestly duties include worshiping God, sacrificing to God, and instructing people in the ways of God. We too are to worship God by being a living sacrifice for Him (Romans 12:1-2). And we are to perform the priestly function of acting as His representatives to the people of the world, preaching the gospel of reconciliation to the lost.

5. To Him be glory and dominion forever and ever - In fact, He is glorious. And every dominion is His. He is over the entire universe. This is the absolute truth. And that fact will not change even if people deny it.

But it is our job as His priests to recognize and affirm this. Then we publicly declare it to be true. In the book of Revelation, it is clear that this fact will

finally be made manifest to the whole earth. Before then it is our privilege to announce this truth to the world and to ascribe to Him the praise and glory He deserves.

6. He is coming with the clouds -

Daniel 7:13-14 - I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed.

Acts 1:11 - "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven."

Jesus' second coming will be from the air with the clouds. This is distinct from His first coming when He was born as a baby. It will be more visible, more spectacular. The event will be clearly supernatural. If there is any doubt before then, this revelation of Jesus in the air coming with the clouds will silence any possible doubters.

Though the cloud formations will surely be awesome, Jesus Himself will be the focus.

Application: When you look up at the sky and see the beautiful clouds He has put there, remember that one day Jesus will return. As the rainbow reminds us of God's promise to never flood the whole earth with water, the clouds in the sky can remind us of His promise that He is coming again.

7. Every eye will see Him - Every single person in the world who is still alive will see Jesus in His glory returning to the earth (Matthew 24:30). Only a small number of people in the world can see any fixed point in the atmosphere so Jesus' second coming will be a supernatural event. He will miraculously enable every person on earth to see Him at the same moment.

Sadly, for many, it will not be a joyous occasion. Instead, most people around the world will be "wailing" at His return. It is the wailing of guilt and shame, knowing that they missed the chance offered. It is the fear of punishment, the certainty of their impending doom, which is brought about wholly by their own sin and pride.

Here is a foreshadow of what we will see in the rest of Revelation. Even after many clear signs, prophecies, and supernatural events which point to Christ, huge numbers of people will still reject Jesus and follow the evil ruler of this world.

Application: Bow the knee to Jesus now. Submit your lives to Him now. Do not put it off. Do not indulge in sin and think that perhaps later you will turn to Him. Every knee will bow. But those who do so willingly now will be able to celebrate on that day. For them, it will be a day of joy and excitement like none has seen before. There will be two sides witnessing this event. Let us witness it as members of Jesus' team, not as His enemies!

8. Even those who pierced Him - This refers to the Jews who were responsible for Jesus' crucifixion. In the below verse Zechariah describes them as the "house of David."

Zechariah 12:10 - "And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and pleas for mercy, so that, when they look on me, on him whom they have pierced, they shall mourn for him, as one mourns for an only child, and weep bitterly over him, as one weeps over a firstborn."

9. I am the Alpha and the Omega -

It is interesting to note that both the Father (here) and Jesus refer to Himself as the "Alpha and Omega." Alpha and Omega are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet. So this is a way of saying that He is the beginning and the end.

Revelation 22:13, 16 - I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end." "I, Jesus, have sent my angel to testify to you about these things for the churches. I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star."

It is a divine title that only the Creator can use. The fact that the Father and Son both use it is a strong proof of the doctrine of the Trinity.

All three uses of the title "Alpha and Omega" are from the book of Revelation. That is significant because the title is directly related to the contents.

It is a reminder to us that God holds all of history in His hands. From before creation to the very end, He is orchestrating the events of this world to come to His planned conclusion. Sometimes He does this subtly behind the scenes. And at other times like in this book, He will do it for all to see.

He is the giver of life. And not just physical life, but our spiritual life is from Him. But He is also the end. He created the world, but after that He didn't just leave it to itself. He is still involved in the world and leading it towards a definite conclusion. We see that conclusion in Revelation when every eye will see Him.

The fact that He is the end is not only true in a general sense, but also a very personal sense. He will have the last say in our lives. One day every single person will stand before Him in judgment (Hebrews 9:27, 2 Corinthians 5:10). We are responsible to Him for what we do and say. We will have to give Him an account. Then He will give His verdict. And that judgment will stand. There will be no negotiation. Neither will there be any second chances or redoes.

Poor and rich, strong and weak, male and female, will stand before Him. Stout atheists like Richard Dawkins will stand before Him. So will all agnostics. And they won't be agnostics or atheists anymore.

Application: Are you ready? If not, what do you need to do to get ready?

Revelation 1:9-20

Outline

- I. Background of the Vision (9-11)
- II. Vision of the Son of Man (12-16)
- III. John's Interaction with the Son of Man (17-20)

I. Background of the Vision (9-11)

Discussion Questions

- What did John have in common with his audience?
- Why was John on Patmos?
- What likely motivated his opponents to put them there?
- How can we see that God providentially used this for the advancement of the kingdom?
- What can we learn from this about God's providence?
- What does it mean that John was "in the Spirit?"
- What was John commissioned to do?

Cross-References

Philippians 1:5 - Because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now.

Romans 8:18 - For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.

1 Peter 5:10 - And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you.

Romans 12:12 - Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer.

Teaching Points

1. I, John - The testimony of the early New Testament church unanimously agrees that this is John, the apostle of Jesus.

2. Your brother and partner - John emphasizes the fact that he was a peer of the saints. He was one of them, a brother and a partner. As followers of Jesus, they shared many common experiences and characteristics. These include:

- Brothers - Children of God are brothers and sisters of one another. This word denotes the close bond that we have with one another. John uses it to stress the relationship they have as peers and does not focus on his authority as an apostle. Using the word brother shows his attitude in writing it. He is not primarily giving them instruction or commands (Jesus Himself does this in His letters to the churches). Rather, he is writing as a messenger, passing on what he has seen. And he is one of the group, sharing the same challenges.
- Partner in tribulation - John and the saints he was writing to faced persecution because of the gospel.
- Partner in the kingdom - Every single believer has a role to play. We are each to use our gifts and resources entrusted to us for building up the body.
- Patient endurance - The period that John lived in was known for increasing persecution toward the church. While they waited for Jesus' return, they endured.

3. Was on the island of Patmos on account of the word of God and testimony of Jesus - Patmos is a small island off the coast of Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey). It measured only 10 miles (16km) long and 6 miles (10Km) wide. This island was used by the Romans to exile people who were considered to be a threat in some way to Rome. Enemies of the state were banished there.

John lived and ministered in Ephesus. Most Bible scholars believe that he wrote the Gospel of John and his three epistles in that city.

Emperor Domitian set himself up as a god and demanded that he be worshiped. Christians like John did not go along with this idea. At some point, John's stand against emperor worship would have reached Domitian's ears. It may have been this or some other aspect of John's teaching that he didn't like. Because of John's

opposition to emperor worship, he was exiled to this island at some point around 95 AD.

In Revelation 1:9, John identifies the reason he was on this island as "on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus." In other words, he was there because he taught the word and witnessed of Jesus. Because of this, he was persecuted. This also fits with the preceding phrase, which says that he was a "partner in tribulation" and needed "patient endurance."

4. God's providence - Man intended this exile to harm John. They hoped that by isolating John they could suppress his message. In short, they wanted to shut him up. But what people intended for evil, God intended for good.

Genesis 50:20 - As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today.

As we also see in the story of Joseph here, God makes a habit out of working all things together for good (Romans 8:28) for His people. His banishment did not suppress his message in the slightest. Instead, it provided the perfect place and opportunity for John to receive this vision and then write it down. Thus, not only the churches of John's day received a vital message of hope and encouragement, but the church through all ages is strengthened as we are reminded of Christ's second coming.

Next time you face trials, remember that God's providence is also at work in your life. God wants to use even those difficulties to shape and teach you.

Reflect: What "bad things" in your life has God caused to work for good?

5. I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day - The Lord's day was used in the early church for Sunday, the day of Jesus' resurrection. The Holy Spirit enabled John to receive this vision.

6. I heard a loud voice like a trumpet - This was no vague feeling. It was no mysterious sound or ambiguous whisper. It was loud and clear and like a trumpet. There could be no mistake. It was from

God. When God supernaturally communicates with His people, He does so in a clear way so there can be no misunderstanding.

II. Vision of the Son of Man (12-16)

Discussion Questions

- What did these seven golden lampstands represent (see also verse 20)?
- What is significant about the title "son of man"?
- Who is this Son of Man?
- Why is it important that He is in the "midst of" the lampstands?
- What can you learn about Jesus and His character from the description of Him here?
- What might His white hair represent?
- What is the significance of the fact that His eyes are like a flaming fire?
- What was His voice like? What does teach us about Him?
- What are the seven stars in His right hand?
- What is the two-edged sword mentioned?
- Why was His face shining?
- After reading this description of Jesus, how has your understanding of Him deepened?

Cross-References

Matthew 5:14-16 - "You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

Daniel 7:9 - 9 "As I looked,
thrones were placed,
and the Ancient of Days took his seat;
his clothing was white as snow,
and the hair of his head like pure wool;
his throne was fiery flames;
its wheels were burning fire.

Revelation 19:12 - His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems, and he has a name written that no one knows but himself.

Teaching Points

1. I saw seven golden lampstands - In verse 20 Jesus explains that these are the seven churches. These churches refer specifically to: Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea.

Jesus will write a letter to these seven churches in the following chapters and John was to make sure that the book of Revelation would be sent to each of them. They were not far from Patmos, all being in Asia Minor. Though they were literal churches, they also act to serve as representatives for the universal church of all times and ages.

They are referred to as lampstands. While some symbolism in Revelation may be hard to understand, this is not. The churches are to shine the light of Christ in a dark world. That is their primary function. It is through the church that the saving message of the gospel goes out to all the world. The church reveals sin, stands against it, and warns about its consequences. If the church was to be snuffed out, then the world would quickly plunge into much worse darkness and sin.

Application: As individual members of the church, our role is to shine the light of Christ. Are you faithfully shining His light? Share some specific ways you can shine the light in your family, your workplace, and your community.

2. One like a son of man - This is the same exact phrase as is used by Daniel in Daniel 7:13. The Son of Man was the title most used by Jesus for Himself. It was used 81 times in the gospels. The title highlights Jesus' humanity. It reminds us of the incarnation. He became a man to represent us before the Father. Just as sin entered the world through one man (Adam) so we were delivered from sin by one man (Jesus).

Daniel 7:13-14 - *"I saw in the night visions,
and behold, with the clouds of heaven
there came one like a son of man,*

*and he came to the Ancient of Days
and was presented before him.
And to him was given dominion
and glory and a kingdom,
that all peoples, nations, and languages
should serve him;
his dominion is an everlasting dominion,
which shall not pass away,
and his kingdom one
that shall not be destroyed.*

Yet even though it highlights Jesus' humanity, it is also a divine title. It is clearly taken from Daniel 7:13. So this Messianic title emphasizes both Jesus' humanity and His divinity.

3. In the midst of the lampstands - Jesus is described as being in the midst of the lampstands. It is an important reminder that Jesus is among the churches. Revelation 2:1 also describes him as walking among the seven lampstands.

This is one of the things that "are" in verse 19. It is a present reality. Jesus did not abandon the church when He ascended after the resurrection. He is still very much involved. Because He is among us, He knows intimately our deeds. In each letter to the churches, He tells them that He "knows" their works.

It is comforting to know that our Savior is among us. He strengthens and sustains us. He watches over us. We are secure in His hands. Every attack of the enemy is known to Him. Jesus is aware of all of the trials and sufferings we face. No one is weak or sick without Him knowing and sympathizing (Hebrews 4:15).

However, this knowledge also should motivate us to be alert. All of our sins, our innermost thoughts, are exposed to Christ. No sin is kept secret from Him.

Application: Jesus is in the midst of your church. He knows your individual struggles and successes. Don't try to hide from Him. Instead, go to Him for help in the time of need, and He will give it.

4. Clothed with a long robe and a golden sash around his chest -

Leviticus 16:4 - He shall put on the holy linen coat and shall have the linen undergarment on his body, and he shall tie the linen sash around his waist, and wear the linen turban; these are the holy garments. He shall bathe his body in water and then put them on.

Hebrews 2:17 - Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.

The clothing is similar to that the high priest would wear. One of the chief roles of the high priest was to come as a mediator between God and man. He offered sacrifices to God, made atonement for sin, and brought God's messages to the people. Now Jesus is our mediator. He is our high priest. He offered Himself as a sacrifice for sins. It is through His work that we can approach the Lord. In the book of Hebrews, we learn that Jesus is a priest of the order of Melchizidek. It was a unique line different from the Levitical priesthood. Melchizidek was a king and a priest, whereas in Israel the role of priests and Levites were separate. Jesus too is a priest and a king.

5. The hairs of his head were white like wool -

Jesus' white hair reminds us of two things. Firstly, it shows us His "age." He is the Ancient One, existing from eternity past. As a man, he was born as a baby and grew up to maturity. But He only lived on this earth for 33 years. Here we see Him with His white hair. It evokes a sense of maturity, experience, and wisdom stemming from His eternal existence.

Proverbs 20:29 - The glory of young men is their strength, but the splendor of old men is their gray hair.

Secondly, His white hair shows us His complete perfection. In Him, there is no blemish.

6. His eyes were like a flame of fire -

2 Chronicles 16:9 - For the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to give strong support to those whose heart is blameless toward him.

Luke 8:17 - *For nothing is hidden that will not be made manifest, nor is anything secret that will not be known and come to light.*

Jesus sees all and knows all. He has supervision and His gaze penetrates any facade people put up, piercing our innermost thoughts. Nothing is hidden from Him. Instead of thinking that we can keep secrets from Him, we should take "every thought captive" (2 Corinthians 10:5) to Christ.

Application: Think about your own life. What is one "secret" you have that you wouldn't want to be announced in church next Sunday? Take it to Christ. Admit to Him that He knows all. Confess. Bring it to the light. Seek for His help to defeat this temptation and He will help you.

7. Feet like burnished bronze - The altar outside the tabernacle was covered in bronze. Here the bronze is described as "refined in a furnace." It is hot and glowing. Thus it signifies Jesus' holiness. And it reminds us that He is moving through the churches to refine His church.

Isaiah 48:10 - *Behold, I have refined you, but not as silver; I have tried you in the furnace of affliction.*

1 Peter 1:7 - *So that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.*

Throughout Scripture, we see that God uses the furnace of afflictions to purify us. Suffering and trial and discipline are all meant to refine us, burning out the sin and strengthening our faith.

Jesus wants to sanctify His church so that we will become like Him.

Application: Is your life being refined? Share an area of your life that God is refining lately.

8. His voice was like the roar of many waters - Don't you want to hear what that sounds like? I do.

Though we can't quite imagine this sound, water invokes many ideas for us. Water can be an extremely powerful force. Floods and

tsunamis plow through everything in their way. The rumbling force of giant waterfalls can be heard far away. Given enough time, water can destroy anything obstructing its path, even solid rock.

And yet, the sound of water can also be soothing. Bubbling brooks, rainfall on a lake, gentle waves: all of these make us feel peaceful. Many listen to white noise of gentle water sounds to calm them.

And in the Bible, water is also a purifying force. Like fire, it cleanses.

Jesus' voice is like all of the above. It is simultaneously powerful, majestic, forceful, peaceful, calming, and gentle. His voice purifies.

Let us look forward to the day when we can hear His wonderful voice with our own ears.

9. In His right hand He held the seven stars - These stars refer to the leaders of the seven churches (20).

10. From his mouth came a sharp two-edged sword - The sword represents the Word of God.

Hebrews 4:12 - *For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.*

Jesus is the Word (John 1:1). His words are the very words of God. These words convict. They reveal. They shatter lies, confusion, doubt, and deceptions. All opposition of the nations will be struck down with merely a word (Revelation 19:15).

In this description, we see Jesus' awesome power and authority. Just as He can create the universe with a word, so He can end anyone at any point in time with a simple command.

Application: Be on His side. We do not want to find ourselves being His opponents. For them, there will be no hope.

11. His face was like the sun shining in full strength - At Jesus' first coming, He veiled His glory. It was only partially revealed for a short period at the transfiguration. But this book is about the

Revelation of Jesus. One day all will see Him as He truly is. His glory will not be veiled any longer. It is like the blast of seeing the sun at close range. Even the sun, we do not see in all of its power. The atmosphere shields us from its worst.

In Genesis, we can see that light existed before the sun. That light was most likely the glory of God.

Revelation 21:23 - And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb.

And at the end of Revelation, we see that the eternal city will also have no need for the sun. God Himself is its light. Jesus, the Lamb, is its lamp.

Reflect: What does this teach us about Jesus?

Application: Reading this description of Jesus in all His glory, how should you respond to this? How should this knowledge affect your everyday life?

III. John's Interaction with the Son of Man (17-20)

Discussion Questions

- How did John react when he saw him? What does this show us about Jesus?
- What did Jesus do when John reacted that way? What does this teach us about Him?
- How does Jesus' statement that He is the first and the last, the living one, connect to His instruction to "fear not?"
- What does it mean that Jesus has the keys of Death and Hades? What implication does that hold for us?
- What are the "things that are" and "those that are to take place after this?"
- Who are the "angels of the seven churches?" Are they actual angels?

- Why are churches referred to as lampstands? What does this teach us about the role of the church in the world?

Cross-References

Numbers 16:22 - And they fell on their faces and said, “O God, the God of the spirits of all flesh, shall one man sin, and will you be angry with all the congregation?”

Ezekiel 1:28 - Like the appearance of the bow that is in the cloud on the day of rain, so was the appearance of the brightness all around.

Such was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord. And when I saw it, I fell on my face, and I heard the voice of one speaking.

Luke 16:23 - And in Hades, being in torment, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus at his side.

John 11:25 - Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live.

Revelation 3:7 - “And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write: ‘The words of the holy one, the true one, who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, who shuts and no one opens.’”

Teaching Points

1. When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead - Throughout the Bible, this is a common response to seeing the glory of God. When Jesus came as a man, He veiled His glory. Here John saw Him in His true form, full of glory. It was an awesome sight, but it was also terrifying.

Sometimes people have a very wrong view of Jesus. They think that He is timid and weak, perhaps because He allowed Himself to be killed. And people also view God as "the old man upstairs" or a kind of Santa Clause in the sky.

This description of Jesus and John's reaction should put those flawed perspectives to rest.

In the Chronicles of Narnia C.S. Lewis recorded an interesting exchange about the Lion King Aslan (who represents Jesus).

"Then he isn't safe?' said Lucy.

'Safe?' said Mr. Beaver; 'who said anything about safe? Course he isn't safe. But he's good. He's the king I tell you.'"

Seeing a glimpse of Jesus' glory here makes the gentle humility He characterized during His life on earth all the more amazing. We see His power and His divine glory. His authority, holiness, and perfection literally shine forth. And yet He set all of that to the side when He became a man. Taking a much lesser form, He submitted Himself to the Father's will and then gave His life on the cross (Philippians 2:5-11).

Application: We need to have the correct view of Jesus. Understanding His glory, power, and authority will help us have a deeper appreciation of His humility and sacrifice on our behalf.

2. He said, "Fear not." - In this exchange, we are privileged to witness an up close and personal view of Jesus, which sheds a bright light on who He is. Jesus did not condemn John. He did not say, "stay down there." Rather He encouraged and strengthened John. Laying His hand on John, Jesus told him not to fear.

Even though Jesus has all authority, He is the most approachable person in the universe. Time and again during His earthly ministry, He demonstrated this. While others rejected the poor, uneducated, or sinners, Jesus chose them. Willingly, He ate with them and fellowshiped with them.

Luke 5:32 - *I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.*

Many of Jesus' disciples were from the low class. Matthew was a tax collector, despised by his people. Jesus chose him as one of the disciples.

Reflect: Who is the first person to whom Jesus declared that He was the Messiah?

It was the Samaritan woman. Here was a woman who was rejected by the Jews because she was a Samaritan. And she was rejected by her people because she was an adulteress, a sinner. People spurned her to the extent that she had to go by herself to the well in the middle of the scorching day to get water.

And yet Jesus was willing to talk with her, intentionally going through Samaria so that He could share with her. Not only did He talk with her, but He revealed to her that He is the Messiah.

John 4:25-26 - The woman said to him, "I know that Messiah is coming (he who is called Christ). When he comes, he will tell us all things." Jesus said to her, "I who speak to you am he."

What an amazing story. Here is a woman whom nobody wants to talk to. And the Messiah Himself approaches you and tells you a "secret." He is the Messiah. And He welcomes you. He wants a relationship with you.

If that does not show us His heart, what will?

In addition, Jesus reached out to and ministered to many women. The ruling rabbis of Jesus' day did not view women as important enough to teach or educate. Jesus did.

Jesus was approachable. It is remarkable that Jesus is so intimately aware of the evil of sin (having died because of it) and knows every one of our sins, and yet He still says, "fear not." He still reaches out and welcomes us.

That is the Lord we serve. What a privilege!

3. I am the first and the last, the living one - Jesus reiterates that He is the first and the last. Even death cannot stop Him as He arose again. In the book of Revelation, we will see His enemies rise up against Him. There will be times of darkness when it looks like the forces of Satan are winning. But Jesus will have the last say. He defeated death and the grave. In the same way, He will defeat all opposition.

Psalms 2:1-4 - Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord and against his Anointed,

saying, "Let us burst their bonds apart and cast away their cords from us." He who sits in the heavens laughs; the Lord holds them in derision.

4. I have the keys of death and Hades - Hades is the place of the dead. Jesus has authority over death and Hades. It is Jesus who decides who lives and who dies. Our breath was given by Him. And we are sustained by Him. He knows the exact moment when we will leave this earth.

But just as the key locks, so it opens as well. As Jesus was raised, so He raises those who belong to Him. He will rescue us from death and the grave, giving us glorified bodies.

Hebrews 2:14 - Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil.

2 Timothy 1:10 - And which now has been manifested through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.

1 Corinthians 15:55 - "O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?"

Death is a scary thing. But we do not need to fear it because Jesus is on our side. In verse 17, John felt as one dead. Jesus told him not to fear. He has the power over life and death. And He will save all who come to Him.

Application: If you belong to Jesus, do not fear death. But if you have not yet been saved, now is the day of salvation.

4. Write the things that you have seen, those that are, and those that are to take place after this. -

Here is a simple outline of Revelation. Revelation 1 is the vision that John had seen. Revelation 2-3 contains the letters to the churches. The church age is the age John lived in and which continues to now. Those are the things that are. And the subsequent chapters are the things that will be, the revelation of

future events in history which will culminate in Jesus' second coming and His glorious kingdom.

5. Seven stars - Jesus explains the figurative language used here as He often did in the gospels. The seven stars as the "angels of the seven churches." At first glance this is confusion. Did the churches have an angel leader? Was there a guardian angel assigned to each church?

The word for angel used here is "aggeloi," pronounced as "ang'-el-os." Literally, it means messenger. Generally, it is used for angels, but it can be used for any messenger from God. The same word is used in each of the letters to the seven churches. For example, Revelation 2:1 says, "*to the angel of the church in Ephesus.*"

We must then ask ourselves why would Jesus write a letter to an angel at Ephesus. And the answer is that this word in the context refers to a leader of this church. That leader was a messenger who was charged with passing the message/letter to the whole church. They were the stars who were to shine the light to the whole church, who in turn were the lampstands who were to shine the light to the whole world.

6. The seven lampstands are the seven churches - It is not a coincidence that Jesus used a lampstand to figuratively describe the church. Shining the light of Christ is the job of each church and each person in the church.

Matthew 5:14-16 - "*You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.*"

Application: Are you doing it? Are you shining the light of Jesus to your circle of influence? Is your behavior attracting people to Him or repelling them?

Revelation 2:1-7 - The Letter to the Church of Ephesus

Outline

- I. Background (1)
- II. Commendation (2-3)
- III. Criticism (4)
- IV. Counsel (5-6)
- V. Application and Promise (7)

I. Background

Discussion Questions

- Who is this letter from?
- Who is this letter to?
- Since this letter is to the church of Ephesus, how does it apply to us today?
- Who is the angel of the church of Ephesus?
- How does the description of Jesus connect to the description in chapter 1?
- Why do you think Jesus emphasized these specific things about Himself to this specific church?

Teaching Points

1. Interpretations - All of these churches were near Patmos. They were conveniently located on a circular trade route which made it easier for the letters to be circulated and then dispersed throughout the province. These are literal churches that existed in that period in history.

It was normal at that time for churches to pass letters around so that each could benefit from the messages. And from the passage, it is clear that this is what was intended with these letters. Each letter has the phrase "let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches." This indicates that all of the churches would read all of the letters.

Although these were letters to literal, specific churches, the issues (good and bad) present in those churches, exist throughout the church age. Solomon once said that there was nothing new under the sun. As a whole, the 7 letters can be taken to represent the message of Jesus to the whole church. The number 7 indicates completeness. They were written to specific, real churches, and at the same time, the lessons and principles within are timeless and universal. Much like Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, or other New Testament epistles, we can find many similarities between those churches and our situations today.

As we study these letters, we must realize that Jesus is writing to us as well as members of His church. We must consider how they apply to us and our situation. Some local churches may tend to be more like Ephesus, which lost its first love. Or some may tend to be more like Laodicea, which was lukewarm. The same is true for individuals. So as we continue to go through these letters, let us meditate on them. Treat them as if you received a personal letter hand-written by Jesus.

2. Prophetic, historical, or both? - Many scholars have noticed that these letters seem to be prophetic as well as historical, that although they are real letters written to specific churches, they also represent something more universal in application. There are several clues that these letters could be prophetic.

Firstly, there are seven letters. This is the first of four series of sevens. The number seven represents completeness. Could this indicate that the letters are also symbolic in nature?

Secondly, these seven churches were not all the most famous or influential churches in that region. For example, the church of Thyatira was smaller and less well-known than the church of Colossae, which was also nearby. So it may be that these seven churches were chosen specifically because they symbolized

something more about what the church was going to be like moving forward in history.

Thirdly, there is a clear progression in the churches that seems to fit with what we know of church history.

- Ephesus is the first church addressed. And in this first letter, is the only one of the seven that mentions people claiming to be apostles (2:2), which was a problem mostly early in the New Testament period. In addition, the main focus is on losing their first love. This was especially fitting for the end of the apostolic age, which was nearing an end when John wrote.
- Smyrna - After the apostolic age, the church entered a time of persecution, which is reflected in this second letter.
- Pergamum - They started to display some syncretic leanings.
- Thyatira - The longest letter could symbolize the longest age of the church, the Middle Ages. They also struggled with syncretism, which was so common in the Middle Ages. And Jesus said the victor would rule over the nations, as we see the church in this time period which had much political influence. In addition, Jesus said that their latter works are greater than their first, which could be a reference to the Reformation.
- Sardis - By this time, the revival of the reformation was waning and nearing death, much like the church mentioned here.
- Philadelphia - This church is described in a very positive light and could represent the "Golden Age of the church." During this period after the Reformation, the church was strong and faithful.
- Laodicea - We can see a clear similarity between the materialism and self-sufficiency of this church and the culture now which has seeped into the church. Love of money and entertainment are widespread problems. It is blind and naked. Yet Jesus stands at the door, showing how close He is to returning. I will "eat with him and he with me" could be a reference to the near Marriage Supper of the Lamb. Taken this way, there could also be some overlap between the remnant church of Philadelphia and the "fake" church of Laodicea.

There does seem to be a clear progression that generally matches with history. This would only be something that could be understood and seen the closer one came to the end of the age, which would also fit with how Biblical prophecy tends to become clearer the closer you get to it.

While I am not dogmatic that the letters should be interpreted in this way, it does make sense.

Application: If this interpretation is correct, we are indeed in the last part of the church age before Jesus comes. That is both exciting and challenging. It is a reminder that we must take to heart all of the warnings given to the churches, especially those to the church of Laodicea, which is so similar to our situation today. If you listen to what the Spirit says to the churches from beginning to end and obey, then you will not end up like the blind and naked church of Laodicea. So as we move forward let us pay careful attention to the warnings and take them to heart because His return is drawing ever nearer!

3. Structure - Each of the seven letters follows a basic structure:

- A. Addressed the "angel" of the church
- B. A description of Jesus
- C. I know...
- D. Commendation
- E. Criticism
- F. Counsel
- G. A promise to those who overcome

Exceptions: Philadelphia and Smyrna receive no criticism. Laodicea receives no praise.

Application: As we go through these letters, you can outline each letter using the above format.

4. The angel of the church in Ephesus - As mentioned in Revelation 1, the word for angel means "messenger" in Greek. This is a reference to the leader in the church of Ephesus, who would receive this letter and pass it on to the church.

5. Letter from Jesus - Jesus gave John the exact words to write in this letter. It is a letter directly from Him to the church of Ephesus. It is a priceless treasure that we have this record of messages directly from Jesus to the churches, and by extension to us. I have often thought of the question, "If Jesus wrote to my church, what would He say?" While that answer is unclear, we can get a pretty

good idea by compiling these seven letters and comparing those churches to our own today.

Application: Let us treasure these letters, inclining our ears and our hearts to understand and apply the counsel within.

6. Description of Jesus - In each of the seven letters the beginning includes a description of Jesus. These descriptions are taken directly from those which we studied in Revelation 1. Each short description in the letters is a piece of the larger description in chapter 1. One might expect that these would be taken in chronological order, but they aren't.

That would imply that a specific quality of Jesus was shared with each specific church for a reason. In much the same way that you might tell a person who is grieving that God is the "God of all comfort," these attributes of Jesus are directly applicable to the individual church's own situation.

Reflect: Why was this description of Jesus shared with the church of Ephesus?

Here Jesus is described as holding the seven stars in His right hand and walking "among the seven golden lampstands." It reminds the church of Ephesus of two things.

A. Jesus is upholding and supporting them.

B. Jesus knows their works - Jesus sees the good they do. But He is also aware of what they have fallen from. And He sees their hearts, knowing that the original love and passion are gone.

II. Commendation (2-3)

Discussion Questions

- What can you learn about Jesus from the fact that He knows their works?
- Based on verse 1, how does He know? Why is this important for believers to be reminded of?
- What does Jesus commend the church for?

- What are the key positive characteristics of the church?
- Why are these qualities important?
- What does it mean to "toil" for the Lord?
- How can you be more diligent in service to Him?
- How can you grow in discernment?

Teaching Points

1. Endurance - Generally, the Lord's commendation for Ephesus can fit into two categories, endurance, and discernment. Jesus says that He knows their "toil." The word literally means a "cut" or a "beating." It is often translated as "labor." In this context, a good definition is "intense labor united with trouble and toil."

The point is that they worked hard for the gospel. They served the Lord faithfully even in the face of difficulty.

Jesus then mentions "patient endurance" twice. When they encountered obstacles, they didn't give up. There was no quit in them. They did not "grow weary." The believers were stable and committed.

And what is more, they did these things with the right motives. Jesus says that they bore up "for His name's sake." So there was a lot to commend about the church of Ephesus.

On this point, we would do well to listen and seek to emulate that steadfast perseverance.

James 1:12 - Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him.

Galatians 6:9 - And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up.

In the world today many people are motivated by comfort and ease. For many, hard manual labor was something that perhaps our ancestors did. But that is largely a thing of the past. We like our cushy, convenient lives. And many indulge themselves in excessive rest. Spas, massages, retreat centers, and the like are springing up to offer people ways to pamper themselves.

Of course, there is a time and a place for recharging your batteries. At the same time, God gave us a model of 6 days of work and one day of rest. While it is not a strict mandate to always work 6 days a week, we learn a key lesson from this. Working should be significantly more than resting. Now some workaholics also need to hear that resting is necessary sometimes, but far more of us need to be reminded that we need to work hard, toiling for God's kingdom.

Application: Are you toiling for God's kingdom? Or do you do a few small tasks and call it? Do you easily grow weary when you face challenging situations in the church or do you endure through them? When you have free time do you choose to spend it on yourselves or do you invest it in His kingdom? Most likely most of us spend far too much time resting then we do toiling for Him.

2. Discernment - The second area of commendation for Ephesus was in regards to their discernment. They "cannot bear those who are evil" and they "tested those who call themselves apostles and are not, and found them to be false."

Both of these are very good character qualities. The saints were not giving in to the pressures of a wicked culture. Sin was recognized as sin. And there was no tolerance for people who came into the church and tried to sway people with immorality. The problems which ran so deep at Corinth (mixing and embracing sinful culture), were absent at Ephesus.

The church at Ephesus had faithfully obeyed the following admonition given to them by Paul.

Ephesians 5:11 - Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them.

Secondly, the church tested those who claimed to be apostles. John had taught there and in the epistle of 1 John, he repeatedly warned the believer to test the teaching/teacher.

1 John 4:1 - Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world.

At Ephesus, the believers were obeying this instruction as well. Because the church did not tolerate evil living or false teaching, they held to a pure form of belief and practice (James 1:27).

Application: Believers need to be discerning. False teachers abound, especially in the internet age. We should learn to test whatever we read or hear with God's Word (Acts 17:11). And we must be careful that we don't allow the lax standards of morality in our culture to creep in and influence our minds, family, or churches. Unfortunately, this is happening across the world as churches embrace sinful lifestyles in the name of love (when the loving thing is to encourage people to repent of their sin.)

III. Criticism (4)

Discussion Questions

- What was Jesus unhappy with about the church of Ephesus?
- What do you think it means to abandon their first love?
- Is this the emotion/feeling or the action? Why?
- So what should you do if you feel like you have lost your original excitement of having a relationship with and serving God?
- Should a person continue to do ministry if they don't "feel like it?"

Teaching Points

1. You have abandoned the love you had at first - Jesus had some choice words of criticism for this church. They had lost their first love. It may be the most famous line of criticism given to any of the seven churches.

When we compare the criticism and the commendations a very odd picture emerges. We see a church that is doing the right things. But they lack love for God.

We often hear it said that love is action, a decision, and not emotion/feeling. But here in Revelation 2, the church of Ephesus was doing the right actions. They toiled for God. They persevered. They did not grow weary. And they did not tolerate evil. Thus, they

were morally and doctrinally pure. But Jesus says they lost their first love.

Reflect: If love is an action and not an emotion, then how can we understand this rebuke? If they had lost the "feeling of love" then why were they toiling and working for Him?

The church of Ephesus had slipped into a type of "dry orthodoxy." That fervent love for Christ that they had before was being replaced by something else, a paint-by-the-numbers, mechanical approach to their faith. While they loved God's Word and faithfully served Him, their personal relationship with Jesus was lacking.

We can often see this when we compare the enthusiasm of a new believer with those who are "mature" in their faith. New believers are generally very excited. Everything is fresh and new. So thankful for salvation, they love Jesus. They hunger for Him. They talk about Him. They tell others about Him. Somewhere along the way that passion is replaced with a colder and more methodical, "I do it because I should."

Application: We must guard against complacency in our walks with the Lord. Each of us should ask ourselves if we have lost that fresh, passionate love for Jesus. In a marriage relationship, wise couples are intentional about rekindling that love. They plan ways to "mix things up" and "re-light the spark." Should we do less for our relationship with Jesus? Share with your group or write down several ways you can rekindle that first love you had for Jesus.

Real love is not either action or emotion. It is both. It is not cold-hearted, rote, or external. It is warm. The action is motivated by a heart of love. Let us not approach our faith as a "tick the boxes" exercise. But let us have a lively, personal relationship with Jesus that overflows into all parts of our lives as we naturally live it out.

IV. Counsel (5-6)

Discussion Questions

- What counsel does Jesus give this church?

- If the church was already working and toiling (verse 2), then what does Jesus mean to "do the works you did at first?" What works might these be?
- Are there works you used to do for Christ that you don't do anymore? Why?
- What will happen if the church doesn't listen and repent?
- What might the works of the Nicolaitans be?

Teaching Points

1. Jesus' counsel is three-fold: remember, repent, do.

A. Remember - Firstly the Ephesians were instructed to remember how they were at first. Remember their love, excitement, and passion when they first came to Christ. This in turn would motivate them to be renewed to that again.

Application: Remember. Take a moment and think back to how you felt when you first came to Christ. Do you feel that way now? If not, why not?

B. Repent - It is not enough to remember. We must do more than to say, "that was nice, but it is long gone." Jesus tells us to repent. A lack of love for Him is sin.

Matthew 22:36-37 - *"Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?" And he said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.*

If we want to be restored where we were, we need to confess the problem. Admit the sins that have caused it (business, selfishness, apathy, complacency, materialism, etc.). Ask for forgiveness. Petition Him to fill us with that heart of love and passion again.

C. Do the works that you did at first - Here we are reminded that although they were still toiling, their works were not the same as what they had done before they lost their first love. A heart of love will make a difference in your actions. It may be possible to simulate love for some time. As a car can run on fumes for a little while so a believer can do the right action without the heart for a while. But he will run out of fuel. And those same actions will lack the enthusiasm and warmth which should typify our service to Him.

Application: Consider your past service to the Lord. Are there areas where you used to serve and don't anymore? Have you given up some ministry or outreach? If so, prayerfully consider whether God will have you take it up again. There can be good reasons for serving God in different ways. For example, a parent with kids may re-focus some of his time on ministering in his family instead of outside. But if you gave up some outreach because of a lack of heart motivation and a desire for more rest, then it is time to follow Jesus' advice and "do the works that you did at first."

2. The Nicolaitans - Some early church fathers wrote that Nicolas (Acts 6:5) started this sect after going apostate. However, not all early church fathers agree. In any case, these people were heretics who encouraged licentious behavior. Clement of Alexandria said this about them, "They abandoned themselves to pleasure like goats, leading a life of self-indulgence." Hallmarks of their message were license and indulgence.

V. Application and Promise (7)

Discussion Questions

- As we study through these letters, how can we make sure that we really "hear" what the Holy Spirit is speaking to us?
- What can you personally do to be sensitive to the Holy Spirit's leading and conviction while studying these letters?
- To the one who conquers what? How can you be an overcomer?
- What is the reward for the one who conquers?

Teaching Points

1. Are you hearing? - The refrain, "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches" is repeated to every church. It is extremely important in understanding the seven letters. Jesus wants His people to be sensitive to the Holy Spirit's leading. In chapter 1 we learned that there was a blessing for those who read, hear, and keep what is written in this book.

Every believer must approach these letters with the right heart. And the right approach is a personal one. We are not to merely look at these from an academic perspective and argue about if they were intended as prophetic or not. Instead, we are to listen. Under the leadership of the Holy Spirit, we are to examine ourselves.

Psalms 139:23-24 - Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!

Application: Have you prayed and asked God to reveal to you your own areas of weakness as we study through these letters? Take a moment to pray now. Ask Him to show you any blind spots. Ask Him to strengthen you to take the counsel He gives. Ask Him to make you a healthy, growing member of the church.

2. To the one who conquers I will grant to eat the tree of life - In the book of Revelation, we will say that God will one day reverse the curse that came about as a result of sin. One effect of this curse was that people could not eat from the tree of life. But one day all true believers can.

First, we must conquer. Conquer what? In Revelation, we see the battle between good and evil, between God and Satan. We conquer him and everything he throws at us. But we don't do it through our own strength. It is only possible through Christ. Thus a key theme of Revelation is overcoming through Christ.

Revelation 2:8-11 - The Letter to the Church of Smyrna -

Outline

- I. Jesus' Resurrection Gives Us Hope. (8)
- II. Do Not Fear Persecution (9-10a)
- III. The Faithful will be Rewarded (10b-11)

Background -

- Smyrna means myrrh.
- It is the location of modern-day Izmir, Turkey.
- Smyrna was a Roman city. It was the center of idol worship, pagan temples, and a temple to the Roman emperor. Emperor worship was widespread here.
- Only emperor worship was allowed; all other religions (except Judaism) were banned.
- It had an active Jewish population who were hostile to the church.
- The largely Gentile church was considered a threat to the Jews and the Romans.
- Smyrna is one of only two letters Jesus wrote which contain no rebuke or criticisms at all. The primary purpose of this letter was to encourage the people as they faced persecution.

I. Jesus' Resurrection Gives Us Hope. (8)

Discussion Questions

- Why did Jesus include this specific description about Himself in the letter to Smyrna?
- Why are these character qualities important for people who are persecuted to know?

- How would the fact that Jesus conquered death comfort them?

Cross-References

John 11:25 - Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live."

Hebrews 2:14 - Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil,

Teaching Points

1. Each of the letters to the churches is directly from Jesus and includes a piece of the description of Jesus from Revelation 1. For example, the letter to Ephesus includes a description of Jesus holding the seven stars and the seven gold lamp stands. And the letter to Pergamum includes a description of Jesus having a sharp, double-edged sword.

In this letter to Smyrna, the description of Jesus as the First and the Last, the one who died and came to life is repeated. You might expect that the descriptions are repeated in order, but they are not. The letter to Ephesus mentions Jesus as carrying the seven stars and lamp stands, but that is at the very end of the description in Revelation 1.

That means that each description about Jesus was repeated to a specific church. The exact phrase was chosen specifically to encourage and strengthen the people in that church with one aspect of Jesus' character.

2. Jesus is the First and the Last - So Jesus wanted to remind the church of Smyrna that He is the First and the Last, the one who died and came to life.

That knowledge would give them the courage to face the persecutions in front of them.

- Jesus is the First - He established the church. They are built on Jesus, the cornerstone. He is their foundation. That knowledge

could give them confidence and courage when times of testing would come.

- Jesus is the Last - Jesus is the judge. One day each person would face Him and be held accountable. That applies to the saints of Smyrna. The worldly leaders who wanted to persecute them were not their authority or their judge. They would not have the last say. Jesus would have the last say. He holds their eternal destiny safely in His hands. Even if they finally had to give their lives for the gospel, that is not the end. After that, they would meet Jesus. And He would welcome them. On the other hand, their enemies who persecuted them would also meet Jesus. And they would be judged for their very acts of persecution against the church.
- Jesus is the one who died and came to life - Jesus had already been killed by the enemies of God. That is what they were potentially facing. He was killed. But he conquered death. He overcame it. Death was not the end. Neither did death signify His defeat. But the death was swallowed up in victory. His death was a step in the path to His greatest victory, which is resurrection.
- That fact should encourage the believer who faces persecution. If this world is all there is, then persecution would be crushing. Think about how difficult it would be to face continual pain and suffering if this is all there is. And for what?

3. Jesus' resurrection gives us hope -

1 Corinthians 15:19 - If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. ... Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men. But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep.

If Jesus did not rise again from the dead, then neither will we. Our faith would be useless and we should be "pitied more than all men." (1 Corinthians 15:19) How pointless it would be to be persecuted for a dead cause.

But...

That word is always so important in the Bible. Christ has been raised. And that fact gives hope to the persecuted. There is more

than what we see and feel in this life. Jesus' resurrection proved that one day His followers will also be resurrected to eternal life.

That is the hope persecuted saints must cling to. That is the light at the end of the long, dark tunnel. That is what makes the suffering worth it. That is what makes denying Christ in that situation the worst decision one could make and confessing Christ to the end the best possible one.

Application: When you are persecuted, remember this. Jesus overcame. He was raised again. And if you persevere to the end, you will be too. The worst possible afflictions in this life are not worthy to be compared to the eternal weight of glory which God bestows on His people. Cling to that hope. Set that hope ever before you. Focus on that light, that promise, and not on the difficulties. Though the persecutions may seem long and hard, our life now is but a mist when compared with eternity.

II. Do Not Fear Persecution (9-10a)

Discussion Questions

- What is the difference between tribulation and poverty?
- In what way is a poor believer rich? How could you use this principle to encourage those who are facing financial hardship?
- Who are "those who say that they are Jews and are not?"
- What does it mean to be a synagogue of Satan?
- How does this contrast with the fact that believers are a temple of the Holy Spirit?
- What was going to happen to this church soon?
- How would you encourage someone who is facing persecution?
- What is the devil's goal in seeking to throw believers into prison?

Cross-References

2 Timothy 3:12 - Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.

Matthew 5:10 - Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Romans 8:35-37 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered." No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.

Teaching Points

1. I know your tribulation and poverty

In 2:1 it says that Jesus walks among the lampstands, which are the churches. He knows firsthand the difficulties facing the church. This statement "I know" is meant to be an encouragement to all the saints at Smyrna who were facing persecution and indeed all believers who will ever face persecution.

When a believer faces losing a job, imprisonment, torture, or death, he might begin to doubt Christ. He might wonder "where is Jesus?" "Does He see?" "Does He care?" And Jesus comforts with these words, "I know." He hears the prayers of His people.

And no matter what we face, we should take comfort in the fact that He is watching. He is with us. His love sustains us.

Romans 8:35 - Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword?

Nothing can separate us from His love.

And yet, though He knows, He does not always deliver out of persecution. In the New Testament, believers are continually reminded that persecution is to be expected.

1 John 3:13 - Do not be surprised, brothers, that the world hates you.

And we must not think, "It is not fair. He is watching and we are down here suffering." Jesus Himself faced far worse than we ever

will. We are only hated because the world hated Him first (John 15:18). So when Jesus says that He knows, it is not just intellectual knowledge. He has been there. He knows through experience.

2. The martyrdom of Polycarp - The church at Smyrna faced intense persecution. The earliest record we have of a martyrdom outside of the New Testament is at Smyrna. The bishop of the church of Smyrna was Polycarp, one of the early church fathers and a disciple and friend of John. He was 86 years old and dragged from his home. The proconsul tried to force him to deny Christ. He said, "Swear. Reproach Christ, and I will set you free."

Polycarp replied, "And he has done me no wrong. How can I blaspheme my King and my Savior?"

The proconsul did not give up.

"I have wild animals here," the Proconsul said. "I will throw you to them if you do not repent." "Call them," Polycarp replied. "It is unthinkable for me to repent from what is good to turn to what is evil. I will be glad though to be changed from evil to righteousness." "If you despise the animals, I will have you burned." "You threaten me with fire which burns for an hour, and is then extinguished, but you know nothing of the fire of the coming judgment and eternal punishment, reserved for the ungodly. Why are you waiting? Bring on whatever you want."

This story can be found in its entirety at:

<https://christianhistoryinstitute.org/study/module/polycarp>

The crowds then gathered wood for the fire. Polycarp took off his robe and walked onto it. The soldiers grabbed nails to nail him, but Polycarp told them, "he who grants me to endure the fire will enable me also to remain on the pyre unmoved, without the security you desire from nails."

Before the fire was started Polycarp prayed, "I bless you for considering me worthy of this day and hour—of sharing with the martyrs in the cup of your Christ, so as to share in resurrection to everlasting life of soul and body in the Holy Spirit. May I be received among them into your presence today as a rich and acceptable sacrifice.

For this and for everything I praise and glorify you through the eternal and heavenly high priest, Jesus Christ, your beloved Child. Through him and with him, may you be glorified with the Holy Spirit, both now and forever. Amen."

When the fire was set, eye-witnesses say that it formed an arch like a sail around his body and his flesh wasn't consumed. The soldiers seeing this then stabbed him with a sword and he died at 86 years old because he refused to worship Caesar.

Polycarp was one of many who would face persecution in Smyrna.

Smyrna was only 35 miles from Ephesus and also near geographically to the other 5 churches. But the church at Smyrna seemed to suffer worse. Why? We don't the answer. Some believers in some regions face more persecution than others. It is not for us to know why one believer faces persecution and another escapes it. It is for us to believe that Jesus knows, and that He has a reason for allowing it.

Persecution varies throughout the world and at different times. Someone might think that persecution is a thing of the past. But it is still very much going on today.

- Almost 400 Christians are killed for their faith every month. 13 every day.
- 214 churches and Christian properties are destroyed every month (Open Doors).
- 772 forms of violence (beatings, kidnappings, rape, arrest, etc.) are committed against Christians every month (Open Doors).
- Around 40-80 million Christians have been martyred in the course of history. More than half were martyred in the 20th century (Gordon-Conwell Resources).

These are not just statistics. They are real people who are suffering. In India, persecution is common. In 2015, a pastor named Chama Hassa Purty from Sandih village in Jharkhand had just returned home from praying for a sick child. Eight armed men forced their way into his house and shot him multiple times in front of his family. Years later the gang returned and ranted that there were still prayer meetings in this house. This time they shot one of his daughters, who was critically injured.

In Nigeria, Islamic State of West Africa Province members regularly capture and execute believers. In North Korea, teachers ask their students to go home and play "Hide-and-seek" to find a Bible. If they can find one, the parents are then taken and imprisoned.

And many believers around the world face heightened risk from war, worse jobs, or fewer opportunities because of their faith. They face not only direct persecution, but also poverty.

Jesus knows. And He says, "but you are rich." Rich in spirit. This is not a promise for material wealth. It is a reminder of the truth that believers are spiritually rich even when they live in poverty. Those riches included salvation, eternal life, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, God's favor, and deep joy and peace that passes all comprehension.

2. Believers will be slandered -

Believers would not only face persecution from the government, but also from others who claimed to belong to God. These were Jews by birth, but they rejected Christ. John calls them a synagogue of Satan. Jews who converted to Christianity would have been big targets for them.

Persecution is not only something from outside. It can come from people who claim to belong to God. Many strong believers who helped spark the reformation were martyred by the so-called church leaders of their day, people like William Tyndale, whose crime was translating the Bible into English.

Slander and persecution from within can hurt much worse.

3. Jesus says, "Do not fear" -

Jesus knows the persecution the church would face. And He is writing them a personal letter to encourage them. If you want to know what would Jesus say to you when you are persecuted, here is the answer.

He says, "Do not fear."

He doesn't say, "Do not fear. I will deliver you from the persecution." He says, "Do not fear *what you are about to suffer*." They were going to suffer. The devil was going to throw them into prison. They were going to be tested. They were going to have tribulation. He says, "Be faithful unto death." That means that some would even die.

From this we learn an important principle: God does not promise to deliver His saints out of persecution every time. We know that sometimes He does this. He saved Daniel from the lion's den. He saved Daniel's friends from the blazing furnace. But he did not deliver Joseph from his brothers' hands. He did not save Stephen who was stoned to death. Again, we don't know why God allows some to be persecuted and supernaturally delivers others. But we know He has a plan.

We don't know how long the suffering will be, but Jesus limits their suffering to "ten days." It is likely not a literal period of time. But it is a reminder that God places a limit on persecution. It will not go on forever without end.

III. The Faithful will be Rewarded (10b-11)

Discussion Questions

- What counsel does Jesus give to the church?
- What would it look like if a persecuted believer is faithful? What does unfaithfulness look like?
- How can you prepare now so that you can be faithful then?
- Have you faced any persecution for following Christ?
- How did He help you to be faithful in the midst of it?

Cross-References

Luke 16:10-12 - One who is faithful in a very little is also faithful in much, and one who is dishonest in a very little is also dishonest in much. If then you have not been faithful in the unrighteous wealth, who will entrust to you the true riches? And if you have not been faithful in that which is another's, who will give you that which is your own?

1 Peter 5:4 - And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.

2 Timothy 4:8 - Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that Day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing.

Teaching Points

1. Be faithful -

And Jesus speaks to His church with words of exhortation. When you face suffering “do not fear.” Then He says, "Be faithful unto death."

Reflect: How can a person stare at torture in the face and not fear? How does a person remain faithful?

Being faithful means that we hold fast to our faith in Him without giving up. While denying Him to escape persecution would be the height of faithlessness, standing up for His name even when it means death is the height of faithfulness.

That may seem very difficult to do. But history is filled with stories of Christian martyrs who stood the test. He supernaturally filled them with courage and peace in the face of horrible tortures.

While in a sense there is nothing you can do to prepare for that, from another perspective we can. Firstly, when we are faithful to stand up for Him in the face of "small" opposition then this trains us to do the same in more challenging situations.

However, the most important thing to do is to develop a closer relationship with Jesus now because His strength is the only thing that could take you through intense persecution.

2. The rewards

A. I will give to you the crown of life

This is the first of two promises which encourage believers to faithfully and boldly stand firm in the face of suffering.

The same crown of life is referenced in James 1:12. And there it is also given to the one who perseveres in the face of trials.

James 1:12 - Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him.

Reflect: What is this crown of life? Do believers become royalty and get a kingly crown when we go to heaven?

In today's world, we immediately equate crowns with what kings and queens wear. They are normally golden and have sparkling jewels.

But the word used here is "stefanos." It can mean a "laurel wreath" or "reward." In that time the winner of the Olympics would be awarded a "stefanos.". It denotes public honor and recognition for finishing a task well, for winning.

Similarly, this crown of life appears to be the recognition or reward which Jesus gives to believers who persevere in the face of persecution. The crown of life is one of four crowns mentioned in the Bible that Jesus will give to believers who do well. The others include the crown of winning souls, the crown of righteousness (for those who look forward to the second coming), and the crown of glory (for leaders who shepherd well).

There is some debate about whether these crowns are actual crowns or figurative, representing some praise or other reward Jesus gives. I tend to think they are actual crowns based on Revelation 4:10.

Revelation 4:10 - The twenty-four elders fall down before him who is seated on the throne and worship him who lives forever and ever. They cast their crowns before the throne.

In this verse, the crowns appear to be literal. That would indicate that after Jesus gives His saints the crowns, they in turn cast them at His feet in gratitude for His work returning all glory to Him.

Revelation 4:11 - *“Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created.”*

Regardless of if it is a real crown or not, the encouragement is the same. The one who is faithful will face Jesus. He will accept and reward the one who suffers for His name. Jesus is not blind to the sufferings His saints face. He knows. And He rewards the faithful.

B. The who conquers (overcomes) will not be hurt by the second death

The second encouragement Jesus gives to the persecuted is at the very end of the letter. Jesus ends each letter with a promise for the one who overcomes.

And here Jesus Himself tells us the reward given to you if you overcome. And His promise is this: "the one who overcomes will not be hurt by the second death."

The second death is hell.

Jesus promises that the one who is faithful to the end will not be touched by hell. Jesus does not always deliver us out of momentary tribulations. But He does deliver us from hell, by paying the price in our place.

Matthew 10:28 - *And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.*

When you face persecution, you have a choice. Please God or man. If you please man and deny Jesus, then He will deny you. You might avoid some trouble in this world. But you will have far greater trouble at the coming judgment. If you choose to please God, then you may suffer. It may come to the point where you face torture or death. But if you keep the faith, then He will welcome you and reward you.

Illustration

Richard Wurmbrand founded the Voice for the Martyrs. Richard was a pastor in Romania when it was occupied by the Soviet Union.

But he kept preaching at his church. And he refused to sanction the state-run church. He was imprisoned and tortured for his faith for 14 years.

Day after day he was mistreated by his guards. On one occasion, they opened the door to his cell and found him praying. "What are you praying for? Your God has deserted you," the guard said. "I am praying for you," Richard replied.

He was faithful to God even in the face of serious persecution.

There are countless stories like this one of believers who were supernaturally empowered to overcome horrors. Some were able to sing while being burnt alive. Some were able to share the good news with their captors who tormented them. Some were able to pray, "Father forgive them" like Stephen and Jesus before them.

Application

Many of you do not face a lot of persecution. Perhaps you face an unkind remark from a co-worker. Maybe your family members are hostile to your faith. But you probably have not been thrown in prison or tortured. And if you are reading this, you have not yet been martyred.

But Jesus said that "he who is faithful in a little thing is faithful also in much."

Don't be complacent. The world is running quickly away from God. Persecution is increasing in many places. It may very well be in our lifetimes or our children's lifetimes that serious persecution will become an everyday reality. So now is the time to prepare. Now is the time to be faithful. If you are swayed by the hostile remarks of a family member now, then how can you hope to stand when the persecution increases?

We would not be able to stand by ourselves. The only hope is through Christ. And that means we need to draw close to Christ now. We need to depend on Him day by day, being faithful in the little things each day. We need to come to Him in prayer when we face so-called "small" temptations so that when they grow more serious we already have this habit established.

Whether you face major persecution or just peer pressure from family and society you can overcome it through Christ. He conquered it and He will help you to conquer it as well. The key is that you must depend on Him. Come to Him now. Ask Him for strength to be faithful. And if you are faithful amid the persecution, He will give you the crown of life.

Revelation 2:12-17 - The Letter to the Church in Pergamum

Outline

- I. Greeting (12)
- II. Commendation (13)
- III. Criticism (14-15)
- IV. Counsel (16)
- V. Promise (17)

I. Greeting (12)

Discussion Questions

- Who is the one who has the sharp two-edged sword?
- What does this sword represent?
- What will He do with this sword?
- Why was it important for the church in Pergamum specifically to know that Jesus had the sharp two-edged sword?

Cross-References

Ephesians 6:17 - And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God,

Revelation 1:16 - 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.

Teaching Points

1. The angel of the church in Pergamum - The word for “angel” means “messenger” and this refers to a leader of the church in Pergamum.

2. The words of him who has the sharp two-edged sword - Jesus shares a short description of Himself with each church. Each one is part of the more full description of Jesus in chapter 1. And the specific part He shares with each church is highly relevant to that specific church.

Here Jesus mentions the sharp two-edged sword which comes from His mouth. The Word of God is often described in the Bible as a sword. Jesus’ very words are a weapon. His words are powerful. With them, He created the heavens and the earth. His words cut into the heart, revealing motives and exposing sin.

Hebrews 4:12 - For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

Just as His words can create and build up, so they can judge and destroy. With a word, He can cut down His opposition.

Jesus highlighted this aspect of His character to them because they had strayed from His words. Having gone off the path of safety in God’s Word, they had allowed worldly teachings to deceive them. They needed to be reminded again of the truth.

Believers are supposed to be trained in the truth and therefore wield the sword of the Word of God as a weapon. The believers in Pergamum were the ones who should have been sharing God’s truth with the world. But instead, Jesus was getting ready to wield this sword against them. They had not learned how to handle their own weapon. Instead of spreading the truth to the world, they were allowing the world to infiltrate them.

2 Corinthians 10:3-6 - For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ.

Application: God has given us spiritual weapons. One of these is the sword of Spirit, which is the Word of God. Let us be well trained in using this sword. And let us use it to destroy false teaching and strongholds in this world instead of ourselves becoming a target of this double-edged sword from Jesus.

In the world today, many churches have gone astray. They have accepted worldly ideas into the church instead of fighting against them.

Reflect: What are some areas that the church worldwide allows itself to be influenced by culture?

II. Commendation (13)

Discussion Questions

- Why was it encouraging for them to know that Jesus knows where they dwell?
- Why did Jesus say that Satan's throne was there?
- Why did their proximity to idol worship and false gods make it more difficult to serve God faithfully?
- Is Satan's throne also near where you or your church dwell? Why or why not?
- How can we protect ourselves, our families, and our churches from the influence of Satan?
- How did Jesus commend the saints there?
- Who might Antipas be?

Cross-References

Romans 12:2 - Do not be conformed to this world,[c] but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

1 John 5:4-5 - Who is it that overcomes the world except the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God? Who is it that overcomes the world except the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?

1 John 5:19 - We know that we are from God, and the whole world lies in the power of the evil one.

John 16:33 - I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.”

Teaching Points

1. I know where you dwell - We remember that Jesus walked among the seven golden lampstands. He knows everything about the churches. He knows everything about us. Jesus recognized that the place they lived in was difficult to be faithful to Him. They were surrounded by temptations.

The fact that Jesus knows the temptations we face is encouraging. It reminds us that He is with us. And He sympathizes with the struggles we face in living a pure and holy life.

Hebrews 4:15 - *For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.*

You do not face temptation alone. Jesus is by your side and He is ready to help and deliver you if you will turn to Him.

The fact that Jesus knows the temptations we face also removes any excuses for the sin we have. He doesn't say, "I know and it's 'OK' to sin." He knows and still expects us to live a righteous life.

Many people excuse their sin by saying, "You don't understand what I am going through," "You don't understand how hard this is for me," or "I have no choice." But that is wrong. Jesus does understand. He knows exactly what you face. And He still expects you to be victorious.

Application: Instead of giving up when temptation becomes overwhelming and saying, "I can't help it," turn to Jesus. When you turn to Him, He will give you the help that you need to be victorious.

2. Where Satan's throne is - On the acropolis in Pergamum was a giant throne-shaped altar to Zeus. And the god most associated with Pergamum was Asklepios, the god of healing. His snake-like form is still the symbol used for medicine around the world.

The church of Pergamum was established right in the center of Satan's kingdom. Pergamum served as the capital of the Roman province of Asia Minor. And in this city was built the first temple to Caesar. Many pagan cults flourished there. One of these was dedicated to Bacchus, the god of drunkenness.

The church was surrounded by every type of temptation and evil influence you could imagine. And their war was not only against the visible signs of these false religions, but also against Satan's invisible realm of evil spiritual forces. And he and his demons were active in this realm.

Application: Be aware of the evil influences in the world around you. What are some of the demonic and worldly ideas that permeate the culture you live in? How can you guard against these?

3. You hold fast my name and you did not deny my faith - Jesus commends this church. Even amid spiritual opposition and being surrounded by evil influences, they did not give up their faith. The saints did not abandon the church and run to the world. They were willing to be called by Christ's name, even if that meant persecution. And that was proven through Antipas, who gave his life as a martyr for his faith. We are not sure who he is, but he was probably a leader or pastor in the church.

It is exceedingly important that believers keep the faith. In fact, that is the most important thing for a believer. That is what it means to be a believer. When a person abandons the faith and chases the world, he cannot be called a believer at all.

In today's world, we regularly hear reports of professing believers, often well-known ones, who abandon the faith. Some are disillusioned. Some fall into serious sin. Some are convinced by the ideas the world is selling.

Unfortunately, this is the case with many young people in the church. Young generations are fleeing the church in massive numbers. Secular ideas are winning their minds. And they are not

holding fast. Even in the face of very small opposition (in comparison to martyrdom mentioned here), many are quick to compromise and give in.

Reflect: How can the church address this issue and help the younger generation to hold fast? How can parents better prepare their children for the world “where Satan dwells?”

Application: Be faithful. He who is faithful in a little thing is faithful also in much. Dig your roots into the world of God. Continuously develop a personal relationship with Jesus because apart from Him we can do nothing.

III. Criticism (14-15)

Discussion Questions

- What did Jesus criticize the church for? What was their key problem?
- Share a short overview of Balaam.
- What was the teaching of Balaam that had influenced them?
- In what ways does worldly thinking often influence the church?
- How can a church promote sexual purity in a culture that celebrates immorality?
- How can you guard your purity including in your thought life?
- Was it a sin to eat food sacrificed to idols?

Cross-References

2 Peter 2:14-16 - They have eyes full of adultery, insatiable for sin. They entice unsteady souls. They have hearts trained in greed. Accursed children! Forsaking the right way, they have gone astray. They have followed the way of Balaam, the son of Beor, who loved gain from wrongdoing, but was rebuked for his own transgression; a speechless donkey spoke with human voice and restrained the prophet's madness.

Numbers 22 - The story of Balaam.

1 Corinthians 6:18 - Flee from sexual immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body.

1 Thessalonians 4:3-5 - For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality; that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor, not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God.

Teaching Points

1. I have a few things against you - There were many believers in the church. Jesus already said they held fast to His name. But that doesn't mean they were perfect. Some in the church were being influenced by the world.

2. Some there hold to the teaching of Balaam - For the whole story, see Numbers 22-24. Balaam was a prophet of the true God. The king of Moab wanted to hire Balaam to curse Israel. Instead of completely rejecting this, Balaam played around with the idea, trying to find some loophole so that he could still get his payday. He wouldn't directly defy God and curse Israel, but he wanted the money. Balaam knew that a curse against Israel wouldn't work because God had blessed them.

However, if the people fell into sin, then God Himself would punish them for this. His blessing would be stripped away. To prevent this, he came up with a plan to get the people of Israel to fall into sin. Then he taught the plan to Balak, king of Moab.

In short, the plan was to seduce the people of Israel. To do this, Moab sent a group of women to seduce Israel's men. They held parties and feasts. And the sexually immoral unions then led (as they normally do) to idolatry.

Not all of Balaam's role in this is recorded in Numbers. Here Jesus gives a fuller picture. Balaam was supposed to be a servant of God. But he didn't stand up for the truth. Instead, he used his influence to devise schemes against God's people. Using the worldly influences that were already there, Balaam seduced God's people to sin. It wasn't a direct attack by an army. Instead, it was a different kind of attack, a more subtle one.

The Nicolaitans also taught license, which led to sexual immorality as well.

The church at Pergamum was facing the same types of attacks and seduction. Some were tolerating sexual immorality. The world was infiltrating the church. It wasn't a direct, visible onslaught. Satan's method of attack against this church was not primarily aimed at getting people to deny their faith, at least not right away. Satan's long-term plan was to get them sinning and lusting after the world. Once that was accomplished, they would be vulnerable to even more attacks.

Sexual immorality is one of the top methods of temptation Satan uses against the church. And it is sadly often successful. Many well-known church leaders have fallen prey to these attacks.

The text is clear. Jesus is not happy with any type of sexual immorality. He says He is going to "war against them" if they don't repent.

All types of sexual temptation assail the church. Fornication, adultery, divorce, and remarriage for all types of unscriptural reasons, and pornography are all not only prevalent but widely accepted in Western culture.

Application: As believers, we must stand strong against these temptations. We must understand that we are in a war. These are weapons of the enemy. We can't surrender or give in. The battle first takes place in our minds. And every time lustful thoughts pop up, we must attack them. We cannot be complacent because it is war. Take every thought captive to Christ, both the wrong way of thinking which infiltrates the church and our own minds. Do not buy what the world is selling.

The world says for example about pornography, "you are not hurting anyone so it's 'OK.'" You are hurting someone. The pornography industry objectifies and hurts women. It promotes sex trafficking and child trafficking. It destroys lives. It corrupts your mind and hurts your relationships. It will rob you of intimacy in your marriage. And it will prevent you from having a healthy view of and healthy relationships with the opposite sex.

And what is more, it grieves the Holy Spirit.

Ephesians 4:30 - *Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God.*

You must be proactive in fighting the battle for purity.

Philippians 4:8 - *Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.*

Being proactive means guarding your heart. Victory is found at the cross. Jesus knows the temptation you face. And He will help you win. He already won at the cross. Rely on Jesus. Come back to the cross day after day after day. Continuously pray that He will transform your mind and your desires. And He will give victory.

Reflect: What are some practical ways you can guard the purity of yourselves and your family?

IV. Counsel and Warning (16)

Discussion Questions

- What counsel did Jesus give this church?
- What warning does Jesus to them?
- Who is the “them” that Jesus was going to war against?
- How might He use the sword of His mouth to war against them?

Teaching Points

1. Therefore repent - Jesus’ counsel is simple and clear. All people who have allowed themselves to be soiled by the world should repent. Repentance means turning away from that lifestyle. No matter what you have done in the past, God is forgiving. If you turn to Him, He will forgive you. And He will help set you free from the sin which entangles you (1 Corinthians 10:13, Hebrews 12:1-2).

2. If not, I will come to you and war against them with the sword of My mouth - Here is a strong warning for those who don’t repent.

Jesus will come and wage war against them. His words will be the weapons. These are people in the church. They know the Bible. They know the truth. They know the warnings against sexual immorality. And His words which they are so familiar with will be the very ones to convict them for their sin. Scripture itself will be the basis for their punishment because they knew the right thing to do and did it not.

It is a strong warning and one we would do well to heed. You don't want Jesus to come to war against you!

Application: Don't be a friend of the world!

James 4:4 - You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.

When a person gives in to a worldly way of thinking about sex, he is making himself an enemy of God. Repent and come to Jesus for help. He is kind and compassionate. He will help you.

V. Promise (17)

Discussion Questions

- How can you develop an ear that is sensitive to the Spirit?
- What does this church specifically need to conquer?
- How could a person wage war against sexual immorality in their own life?
- What is the "hidden manna?"
- What type of message do you think is written on the white stone?
- What does this personal message show us about Jesus and our relationship with Him?

Cross-References

John 14:26 - But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.

1 John 4:4 - Little children, you are from God and have overcome them, for he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.

Teaching Points

1. He who has an ear to hear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches - Spend some time in prayer. Ask the Holy Spirit to lead you as to how you need to apply this passage. Be sensitive to His leading and make the appropriate changes.

2. To the one who conquers - In this passage, we see that believers need to conquer temptation, specifically sexual immorality. We can only conquer through Christ. There is no other way.

Then we see two promises for those who do conquer.

3. I will give some of the hidden manna -

John 6:31-35 - Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'" Jesus then said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but my Father gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." They said to him, "Sir, give us this bread always." Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.

The hidden manna is likely a reference to Christ Himself as the Bread of Life. The world cannot satisfy a person's hunger. People chase sex as a way to pursue happiness, but it does not satisfy them. Those who pursue it the world's way are left feeling empty, guilty, and ashamed, more desperate and lonely than they were at the beginning.

Jesus is the only one who satisfies. He can fill us up in a way that the world cannot. The void that has existed in people's hearts since the time of Adam and Eve will be filled with His love.

1. I will give him a white stone - The stone is the medium for the name that is given from Jesus to the overcomer. A stone may denote the permanence of this message. The one who receives such a message from Jesus can keep it as a keepsake forever.

Here we see that Jesus longs for a personal relationship with each person. He didn't just die for the world in general, but He died for you and me. Attention is given to each individual because He cares for us as individuals.

What a special day that will be when we receive a customized message from our Lord Himself! And it will be so personal that no one else is allowed to even see or know it.

But only those who overcome receive it.

Application: Next time you are tempted by the world, remember these promises. Jesus will either wage war against you or bless you with the manna (spiritual food) and the white stone (a personal relationship). Which do you want?

Revelation 2:18-29 - The Letter to the Church of Thyatira

Outline

- I. Greeting (18)
- II. Commendation (19)
- III. Criticism (20)
- IV. Warning (22-23)
- V. Counsel (24-25)
- VI. Promise and Reward (26-29)

I. Greeting (18)

Discussion Questions

- What do we learn about Jesus from His eyes that are like a flame of fire? From His feet that are like burnished bronze?
- Why did Jesus specifically mention these two qualities to this specific church?
- How do these character qualities of Jesus influence your life?

Cross-References

Proverbs 15:3 - The eyes of the Lord are in every place, keeping watch on the evil and the good.

Jeremiah 23:24 - "Can a man hide himself in secret places so that I cannot see him? declares the Lord. Do I not fill heaven and earth?" declares the Lord.

Hebrews 4:13 - And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

Teaching Points

1. The angel of the church in Thyatira - The messenger or leader of the church.
2. Who has eyes like a flame of fire and whose feet are like burnished bronze - Jesus describes Himself to each of the seven churches. This description is from Revelation
3. To each church, Jesus shares some of His character qualities that are directly applicable to that church. And to the church of Thyatira Jesus tells them about His eyes and His feet.

Eyes like a flame of fire -

Luke 8:17 - *For nothing is hidden that will not be made manifest, nor is anything secret that will not be known and come to light.*

Jesus sees all and knows all. He has supervision and His gaze penetrates any facade people put up, piercing our innermost thoughts. Nothing is hidden from Him. Instead of thinking that we can keep secrets from Him, we should take "every thought captive" (2 Corinthians 10:5) to Christ.

Application: Think about your own life. What is one "secret" you have that you wouldn't want to be announced in church next Sunday? Take it to Christ. Admit to Him that He knows all. Confess. Bring it to the light. Seek for His help to defeat this temptation and He will help you.

Jesus shares this specifically with this church because many in the church are being seduced into sexual immorality. Sexual immorality is normally something that is committed in the dark, in secret. But Jesus knows. He sees. They cannot keep this or any sinful behavior from Him. In verse 23, Jesus emphasizes this trait again and says "I am he who searches mind and heart." Jesus sees even their mind. Not even a lustful thought escapes His gaze.

Application: It is important for us to protect our minds! Be quick to take all thoughts to Him, confessing those which are impure.

Feet like burnished bronze -

He walks among the churches, refining them wherever He goes. His goal is to sanctify and make holy His bride. And He is active to do so.

Zechariah 13:9 - And I will put this third into the fire, and refine them as one refines silver, and test them as gold is tested. They will call upon my name, and I will answer them. I will say, 'They are my people'; and they will say, 'The Lord is my God.'

This trait was important to the church of Thyatira because they needed that sanctification. They needed to be refined by the Lord. Instead of being refined, they were compromising with the world. The world was soiling them. The answer was Jesus.

II. Commendation (19)

Discussion Questions

- What does Jesus compliment the church of Thyatira for?
- What do we see about their works?
- How do love and works relate to each other?
- Do your latter works exceed your first?

Cross-References

1 Timothy 4:15 - Practice these things, immerse yourself in them, so that all may see your progress.

Teaching Points

1. I know your works - Jesus starts off commending the church of Thyatira for the good that He sees in them. His typical approach is to give commendation and encouragement first. Through this, we are reminded that Jesus' primary goal was to encourage and strengthen the church to do what is right. He was not out to nit-pick and find fault.

And the church of Thyatira had many good qualities, which He commends. Jesus praises their works, love, faith, service, and patient endurance. That covers a lot of territory! We see that the believers there still held fast to their faith. And their faith could be seen in action. They had works and service. And those works were done with the right motivation, love. So in the church of Thyatira, we see many real believers who united faith, work, and love together.

2. Your latter works exceed the first - Jesus also compliments them because their works have been increasing. Many Christians start the race on fire and zealous and then cool off and become more complacent, even lazy. The Ephesians for example had lost their first love. What we see with the saints in Thyatira, is that their service to the Lord was increasing. At least for many in the church, there was strong spiritual growth.

Philippians 1:9 - And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment.

Growth is what every believer should strive for.

1 Timothy 4:10 - For to this end [godliness] we toil and strive, because we have our hope set on the living God, who is the Savior of all people, especially of those who believe.

Application: Are you growing in your Christian walk? Are you more zealous than before or less? Is your service for God more than before or less? What is one practical way you can focus on growth in the next week?

III. Criticism (20-21)

Discussion Questions

- What did Jesus criticize the church for?
- Why might a church tolerate someone like this Jezebel?
- Why do you think John called this woman Jezebel?
- How did the Jezebel of the Old Testament influence the people of Israel?

- How is this similar to what this woman was doing?
- What specific temptations was she seducing the church with?
- How are those similar to temptations we face today?
- How should the church handle sexual immorality among its members?
- What about if a person is spreading teaching that encourages people to be immoral?
- How can you protect yourself from such temptations? Your family? Your church?

Cross-References

Hebrews 13:4 - Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous.

Matthew 5:28 - But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

Acts 15:29 - That you abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols, and from blood, and from what has been strangled, and from sexual immorality. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well. Farewell.”

1 Corinthians 8:4 - Therefore, as to the eating of food offered to idols, we know that “an idol has no real existence,” and that “there is no God but one.”

Teaching Points

1. But - This word is often very important in the Bible. Though the church was doing well in some areas, it had issues. And Jesus highlights one of the big ones here.
2. The woman Jezebel - Most likely this was a name that Jesus gave to a woman in the church who was behaving like the historical Jezebel in the Old Testament.

Jezebel was one of the most notoriously wicked people in the entire Bible. She seduced Israel into gross idolatry (which then assuredly led to other sins such as immorality).

1 Kings 21:25-26 - *There was none who sold himself to do what was evil in the sight of the Lord like Ahab, whom Jezebel his wife incited. He acted very abominably in going after idols, as the Amorites had done, whom the Lord cast out before the people of Israel.)*

Thus, it is unlikely a person in a Christian church would willingly go by this name. Instead, it is likely Jesus called her this to highlight to the church that her influence on it was just as evil as Jezebel's on Israel.

3. You tolerate - Jesus criticized the church of Thyatira for their tolerance. That is important to take note of. In the world today, tolerance (at least for sin) is considered to be a virtue. Jesus clearly does not consider that tolerance for sin is a virtue. And in Revelation 2:2, He commends the church of Ephesus because they did not tolerate those who are evil.

Reflection: Is tolerance ever good? When?

Tolerance can be good. For example, we should tolerate people's different personalities. A parent should be tolerant of a child who needs time to learn and understand his homework. A boss should be tolerant of the occasional mistake.

But the church should not tolerate people who spread false teaching. Jesus here is not primarily criticizing this woman, Jezebel. Her sins are obvious. He is criticizing the church for allowing her to remain and influence people. Jesus said that He was going to throw her "onto a sickbed." The church should have exercised church discipline on this woman before her poison was allowed to spread.

Application: Do not tolerate sin or false teachings. This is true not only for your church, but also in your family. We are called to speak the truth in love. We call sin, "sin." And then we implore the sinner to repent. Do not take pride in tolerating something which God Himself does not tolerate. We are to be holy as He is holy.

4. Who "calls herself a prophetess" - From this, we learn a simple, but important, lesson. Not everyone who calls himself a prophet is one. In today's world, many people like to give themselves this title. God, however, wants us to be discerning.

1 John 4:1 - *Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world.*

We should test the spirits by looking both at their teaching (comparing it to God's Word) and their lifestyle. Some show themselves to be false prophets by teaching things that are contrary to the Word. Others show themselves to be false prophets by claiming to teach the Word and then indulging themselves in the world.

Application: Do not pay overly much attention to titles or positions. Just because a person is famous, writes a book, has a website, or hosts a YouTube channel does not mean that his teaching should be immediately trusted. We need to examine every teaching in light of God's Word (Acts 17:11) and learn to "accurately divide the word of truth." (2 Timothy 2:15)

5. She is teaching and seducing my servants to practice sexual immorality and to eat food sacrificed to idols -

This lady who was being tolerated in the church was actively pushing an agenda. And that agenda was encouraging people to live a lifestyle of sexual immorality. It is likely that she led this type of lifestyle. Most people who teach license in this area do so because they are involved in it.

Ephesians 5:3 - *But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints.*

God has called the bride of Christ, the church, to be holy. We are to be set apart from the world. All types of sexual immorality are to be actively avoided as believers pursue a holy life.

Sexual immorality is one of the top methods of temptation Satan uses against the church. He keeps going back to that well because it works again and again.

There are many types of sexual immorality which are rampant in the world today. Sadly, many of these are also infiltrating the

church. But Jesus does not excuse sinful behavior just because it is widespread.

Application: As believers, we must not give in to culture. God calls us to be different. A wise person once said that an “idle mind is the devil’s playground.” So go on the attack by keeping busy doing the things of God. Fill your mind with God’s Word. Meditate on it. And when a lustful thought pops in, don’t dwell on it. Instead, quickly take it to God and go to Him for help.

Food sacrificed to idols - In Paul’s teachings, we see that since an idol is nothing it is not sinful in and of itself to eat food sacrificed to an idol.

1 Corinthians 8:4 - *Therefore, as to the eating of food offered to idols, we know that “an idol has no real existence,” and that “there is no God but one.”*

However, there are many cases when it is not wise to do so. If our eating causes a brother to stumble then it is wrong (Romans 14:20-21). It can be a bad testimony when we are trying to share the gospel. And those are some of the reasons that the Council at Jerusalem had told the believers they should not eat food sacrificed to idols (Acts 15:29). It was one more area this woman was encouraging the believers in a licentious lifestyle for the sake of pleasure rather than pursuing holiness.

IV. Warning (22-23)

Discussion Questions

- What is Jesus going to do if there is no repentance?
- Who is the "her" in verse 22?
- Who might "her children" refer to in verse 23?
- What does the judgment of Jesus teach us about His character?
- In light of this warning, what should you do?

Cross-References

Romans 2:6-8 - He will render to each one according to his works: to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life; but for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury.

Matthew 16:27 - For the Son of Man is going to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay each person according to what he has done.

Teaching Points

1. I will throw her onto a sickbed - In this context, "her" is this woman who was seducing the church. Jesus is going to throw her "onto a sickbed." That seems to mean that Jesus would inflict her with some sickness or disease as a judgment for her sins. Note that in verse 21 we see that she refused to repent. It looks like her time is up and she has already crossed a line of willful sin from which she has decided not to return.

For the others who were caught up in her sins, Jesus still said there was a chance to escape judgment if they would repent.

From this, we can learn that the patience of God has limits. There are times when He makes up His mind to judge. And there are times when He gives further opportunities to repent before executing judgment. It is a frightening thing to have gone beyond that line and be past the point of receiving more patience and opportunities.

Application: Do not put God to the test. Do not keep pursuing a lifestyle of sin and thinking, "I can repent later." You don't know when God's patience will run out. You don't know when the opportunities to repent will be gone and you will find yourself facing God's judgment with no way out.

2. Those who commit adultery with her I will throw into great tribulation unless they repent of her works - In a literal sense, I believe that this is referring to the specific individuals in the church of Thyatira who cast lots with this lady and joined in the sexual immorality that she was pushing. As such, the great tribulation that they faced is not clear, though it would be some type of serious discipline, perhaps also sickness or health-related.

At the same time, we may take this in a wider sense as well. There are many "Jezebels" in the world and modern culture is filled with sexual immorality. All who choose that instead of Jesus will face His justice. Some will face it in this world. One specific generation will be alive when THE great tribulation comes (that is written about later in Revelation). And even those who escape it in this world will face an eternity of tribulation in hell.

3. I will strike her children dead - Probably this is a reference to "spiritual" children, meaning all the people who come after her and follow her worldly ideological thinking.

4. I am He who searches the mind and the heart - As we saw above in regards to Jesus' eyes of flaming fire, here we see again His omniscience. He knows all. He sees all. Many think that they can keep their sins secret. Some people go to church and look good on the outside, but are engaging in a secret double life of sin and sexual indulgence.

1 John 1:5-7 - This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.

We are called to live in the light as He is in the light.

Application: Wherever you are, remember that Jesus is right there by your side. Whatever you are thinking about, remember that Jesus can see your thoughts. So do not indulge in lustful thoughts, but instead fight the battle of purity at every moment without giving in.

5. I will give to each of you according to your works - So the key point is God's justice. A person engaging in sexual sin may think, "no one sees me; no one will catch me." But in the end, each person doing that will be judged.

Revelation 22:14-15 - Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life and that they may enter the city by the gates. Outside are the dogs and sorcerers and

the sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices falsehood.

Application: Let us have our robes washed by the blood of Jesus and live in the light as He is in the light. If we choose Him rather than the pleasures of this world, we will enter the eternal city with the tree of life. But those who pursue this world will be outside.

V. Counsel (24-25)

Discussion Questions

- What do we learn about the church from the phrase "to the rest of you in Thyatira?"
- What are the "deep things of Satan" Jesus refers to? How does this reference reveal more clearly what Jesus thinks about sexual immorality?
- What counsel does He offer the real believers in this church?
- Practically speaking, what can you do to "hold fast what you have?"

Cross-References

1 Corinthians 16:13 - Be watchful, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong.

James 4:7 - Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.

Teaching Points

1. To the rest of you - Jesus had one piece of counsel for those who were involved in immorality, repent. For all the others, He had another piece of counsel.
2. The deep things of Satan - In this phrase, we can see clearly what Jesus thinks of immorality. And we can see the root where this sin comes from. Behind Jezebel then and the media onslaught today, is a systematic plan of Satan to seduce people away from enjoying the fruits of a right relationship with God. This is one prong in a

many-pronged attack against people whereby Satan tries to keep a clutch on souls and prevent them from joining God's kingdom.

Application: We need to be aware that these temptations come from Satan himself. The world often says not to worry because these things "don't hurt anyone" or are "innocent fun." These are lies and we need to discern them as such.

3. Only hold fast what you have until I come - The faithful believers who were in the church were doing well generally. They had works, service, and love. So they are called to persevere and not give up. And that is important. Finishing the race is a lot harder than starting the race.

Reflection: What are some practical ways you can hold fast?

VI. Promise and Reward (26-29)

Discussion Questions

- What specifically does the believer in Thyatira need to conquer?
- What temptation do you need to conquer?
- What does "the end" refer to?
- What does Jesus promise those who conquer?
- Do you think this means ruling the nations now or later? Why? If later, when?
- What do you think the morning star in verse 28 refers to?
- What is the Spirit saying to you in this passage? What do you need to obey?

Cross-References

2 Peter 1:19 - And we have something more sure, the prophetic word, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts.

Revelation 22:16 - "I, Jesus, have sent my angel to testify to you about these things for the churches. I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star."

Teaching Points

1. The one who conquers - We see this phrase in each of the seven letters. Like in the last letter, the believers in Thyatira needed to conquer temptation in the world, specifically sexual temptation. They needed to conquer the world's (through Satan's) seduction.
2. To him I will give authority over the nations - Note that Jesus says it is to the one who conquers and keeps His works "until the end" who will be given this authority. This indicates that it is not in the normal process of life on earth. It doesn't mean that during your life on earth as a believer you have some type of spiritual authority over the world around you. We are not yet at the end so it is not a reference to our current lives on earth.

Rather the end is when a person faces Christ, either after death or when He comes again. When Jesus comes again, He will set up His millennial kingdom on earth, and believers will be given positions of authority in this kingdom.

1 Corinthians 6:2 - *Or do you not know that the saints will judge the world?*

2 Timothy 2:12 - *If we endure, we will also reign with him.*

Matthew 19:28 - *Jesus said to them, "Truly, I say to you, in the new world, when the Son of Man will sit on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.*

For other references on reigning with Christ see: Daniel 7:27, Revelation 5:9-10, Galatians 4:7, Matthew 25:20-21, and Revelation 20:4.

Application: The world's political system is broken and corrupted. Governments disappoint us. But one day Jesus will set up a kingdom and we can be part of it. So don't be disillusioned by this world. Instead set your eyes on Him and work on building His kingdom. It will be perfect and last forever.

3. And I will give him the morning star -

Revelation 22:16 - I, Jesus, have sent my angel to testify to you about these things for the churches. I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star.

Jesus refers to Himself as the morning star. A morning star is a very bright star, which outshines others. Venus sometimes looks like a morning star in the early dawn just before the sun comes up. Similarly, a morning star can also be a sign of hope, that something great is coming.

The one who overcomes will enjoy a personal relationship with Jesus forever. He will be the light and bring about perfect joy and goodness. Satan appears as an angel of light (2 Corinthians 11:14). And interestingly, he is also called by the name morning star (Isaiah 14:12). Satan has similarities as well as he outshone the other angels prior to his rebellion. Now his light is corrupted. He makes big promises and tells you how happy you will be. But at the end of that tunnel is only sin, shame, and sadness.

The world can never satisfy. Jesus does.

4. He who has an ear let Him hear what the Spirit says to the churches -

Application: Spend some time in prayer and ask the Holy Spirit to lead you in how to apply what you have learned in this passage.

Revelation 3:1-6 - The Letter to the Church of Sardis -

Outline

- I. Greeting (1a)
- II. Criticism (1b)
- III. Counsel (2-3)
- IV. Commendation (4)
- V. Promise and Reward (5)
- VI. Hear (6)

I. Greeting (1a)

Discussion Questions

- What does the description of Jesus as having seven spirits and seven stars mean?
- Who are what are these spirits? These stars?
- Why does Jesus give this specific description of Himself to this specific church?

Cross-References

Revelation 1:20 – 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, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches.

Revelation 2:1 – To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: ‘The words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand, who walks among the seven golden lampstands.

Revelation 5:6 – And between the throne and the four living creatures and among the elders I saw a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain, with seven horns and with seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth.

Teaching Points

1. The angel of the church in Sardis - The leader or messenger of the church.
2. Him who has the seven spirits and the seven stars -

There are various interpretations of what the seven spirits of God refer to. The most likely explanation is it refers to the Holy Spirit.

The seven stars - These stars are defined in Revelation 1:20 as being the "angels of the seven churches." The word for angel is "messenger." So the seven stars are the seven messengers, or leaders of these churches. It is a reminder that Jesus holds the leaders of the church in His hand, supporting, sustaining, and strengthening them.

3. Jesus' description of Himself shows the specific need of the church in Sardis - The problem with the church in Sardis is that it was largely dead. Thus it was important for them to know that Jesus would send the Holy Spirit to revive and regenerate them (Titus 3:5) if they were willing. And if they would rely on Jesus, He would help and strengthen them. Many churches are dead because blind traditions or rules are followed instead of a dependence on Jesus. A church without the Holy Spirit is not a church at all. The church of Sardis needed a spiritual revival.

Jesus' description as having the seven spirits of God and the seven stars was a clear reminder that He could bring about that revival. If they would wake up and turn to Him, He could give them spiritual life.

Application: The solution to a dead, robotic Christianity is Jesus. He sends the life-giving Spirit. There is no other place to get spiritual life. Nothing else brings revival. Programs and music don't bring revival. Jesus does. If you need a spiritual revival, come to Jesus.

II. Criticism (1b)

Discussion Questions

- Why was it important for the church of Sardis to hear that Jesus knows their works?
- What criticism does Jesus give this church?
- What does it mean that they are dead? How can a church be dead?
- What would cause a church to die?
- Could there be some individual believers within a church body that is mostly dead?
- Did this church look dead?
- What warning should we take from this?
- How can we ensure that we are alive spiritually?

Cross-References

Psalm 115:17 – The dead do not praise the Lord, nor do any who go down into silence.

Romans 5:12 – Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned.

1 Corinthians 15:22 – For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive.

Romans 12:1 – I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.

John 11:25-26 – Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?”

Teaching Points

1. I know your works - Once again, we see this phrase repeated. Jesus repeats this same phrase to every church. It is a double-

edged sword. It means He is well aware of and appreciates the good, but He also knows the bad. We can keep no secrets from Him.

Application: Whatever you are doing, remind yourself that He knows. That awareness itself will help keep you on the right track.

2. You have the reputation of being alive, but you are dead - For most churches, Jesus started with a commendation and then moved to criticism. But here Jesus starts off with the problem of this church. And it is a big one. They are dead spiritually. To be dead clearly means to be without Christ.

Ephesians 2:1 - *And you were dead in the trespasses and sins.*

The church's problem is that they aren't a church at all! Most people in the church were not real believers. In verse 4, Jesus says that there were a "few" who were. Most were just going through the motions.

That is a serious problem! We see that they had a reputation for being alive. In other words, they thought they were saved. And others looked at them and thought they were saved. On the outside, they looked good. They did the things that Christians do. They said the things that Christians say. Jesus knew the truth. And the truth is they were spiritually dead. Although they were in church and active, they were on the way to hell.

There is nothing worse than thinking you are in and then hearing from Jesus, "depart from Me; I never knew you."

Matthew 7:21-23 - *Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.'*

Reflect: Why do many people think they are saved, but aren't? How can we test ourselves and make sure that we are alive spiritually?

Some things do not prove or disprove salvation. Here are some things that do not show a person is saved and alive in Christ:

- Attending church
- Taking communion
- Baptism
- Tithing
- Singing worship songs
- Prayer
- Calling oneself a Christian
- Reading the Bible.

And here are some things that are evidence of genuine belief:

- Walking in the light (1 John 1:6-7)
- Confessing sin (1 John 1:8-2:1)
- Keeping His commandments (1 John 2:3-4)
- Loving the brethren (1 John 2:9-11)
- Pursue holiness (1 John 3:3-4)
- Having the Holy Spirit (1 John 4:13, 5:10-11)
- Having good fruit (Matthew 7:17)
- Loving God (John 14:15, 1 John 5:3)

(This list is from the John MacArthur Study Bible).

To be alive, we must objectively have real faith (John 5:24). And if that faith is real, it will be followed with action (James 2:14-26).

Some churches are composed of primarily spiritually dead people. One can visit Europe and see huge church buildings. Services are still held in some of them. People show up for Christmas and Easter. Many people in those countries call themselves Christians. Western countries have the reputation of being Christian.

But there is very little life in many of these churches. There is a sad, lifeless, dead Christianity. And many congregations around the world are similar to this.

Application: Evaluate your church and your own life. If your church is mostly dead, then you probably need to find one that is alive! And if you are just going through motions, come to Christ for real spiritual life.

III. Counsel (2-3)

Discussion Questions

- What advice did Jesus offer this church?
- How does a church or an individual believer wake up?
- What can church leaders do to wake up and keep their congregation awake spiritually?
- What does Jesus say is the way to wake up?
- What would happen if the church doesn't wake up?
- What application can you personally make from this?

Cross-References

Genesis 2:7 – Then the Lord God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature.

John 10:10 – The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.

John 15:5 – I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.

Luke 13:6-9 – And he told this parable: “A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard, and he came seeking fruit on it and found none. And he said to the vinedresser, ‘Look, for three years now I have come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and I find none. Cut it down. Why should it use up the ground?’ And he answered him, ‘Sir, let it alone this year also, until I dig around it and put on manure. Then if it should bear fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down.’”

Matthew 24:42-44 – Therefore, stay awake, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. But know this, that if the master of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into. Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.

Teaching Points

1. Wake up and strengthen what remains and is about to die - There was a bit of life left in the church. There were a few believers. But they seemed to be decreasing in number and perhaps also in spiritual zeal. Before long the church would die out unless there was revival.

Many congregations and some entire denominations are like this. Death of a church or denomination is often slow. It generally starts with compromise. Poor teaching and a lack of hunger for the Word are also major factors. Leaders start going through the motions. And the congregation follows. Few new people join. The congregation ages. Because there is no power in the preaching and life of the church, people drift away from the Lord. The gospel isn't preached so transformation doesn't happen.

What is left is a few people who are Christian in name trying to sustain something of the past. Sometimes there are also a few real Christians mixed in. But if revival doesn't happen, they can't save the church. The result is that it dies off. Without reproduction, there is nothing new. What is left is a bunch of empty facilities. And finally, these are sold off.

We see this happening all over the West, especially in Europe. Hundreds of church buildings are being sold and converted into inns, clubs, bars, and even mosques.

What is Jesus' counsel?

Wake up! Strengthen what remains!

Believers need to wake up. They need to strengthen themselves by coming back to the Word. They need to soak in the true gospel. Then they need to preach it boldly with the power of the Spirit. Through them, revival can still happen. But if the believers do not wake up and zealously seek and proclaim the truth, the entire thing will die with them. They will leave nothing behind for future generations.

And that is very sad. It is a sad thing to die and leave no lasting impact on the world for Christ.

Now the city of Sardis is in ruins. There is no church and no city there at all. The Christian movement there did die out.

Application: How can you strengthen what remains? What can you do to make an impact for Christ that will last into the next generation?

The only way to get strength is from Jesus (John 15:5). We must come to Him for spiritual nourishment. Apart from Him, we can do nothing. That is the root problem of many churches and individual believers. No amount of programs can replace our innate need for Christ. He is the bread of life. He is the living water. He is the resurrection and the life.

2. I have not found your works complete – Here we see a connection between their spiritual life and their works. Real faith will result in real works. Because they weren't alive, they didn't do the work God was calling them to do. A nominal believer may do something which looks good (for example some charity work), but he will not do the most important thing, sharing the true gospel.

3. Remember and repent - The people at the church of Sardis had heard the gospel. They knew the truth. But somewhere along the way, they had forgotten it and been distracted. Image became more important than substance. The counsel was simple, remember and repent. They needed to remember the gospel. Salvation from sin is in Christ alone. We are saved by grace through faith and not of works (Ephesians 2:8-9). And in remembering that, they then needed to repent.

Galatians 3:3 - Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?

4. Warning -

Revelation 3:3 - If you will not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come against you.

This seems to be a reference to judgment. The church of Sardis would be judged. And that judgment would come without warning. God is gracious and patient. He gives many opportunities to repent. However, those opportunities are limited. At some point, the line will be crossed and there will be no more chances.

This is true for every person. We don't know when our very last opportunity will be, but He knows. So for the church of Sardis, He gave them more time, which demonstrates His mercy toward them. But that time is limited. They would be wise to repent while they still could.

Application: We don't know how much time we have. And we don't know how many opportunities to repent God will give us. Prudence demands that we come to Him for salvation and that we repent as soon as possible. Do not put God to the test. Now is the day of salvation (2 Corinthians 6:2).

IV. Commendation (4)

Discussion Questions

- Was there anything good in this church?
- What does it mean to soil one's garments?
- Based on this verse, what should a believer do who finds himself surrounded by a dead church?
- How can we walk with Him?

Cross-References

Revelation 6:11 – Then they were each given a white robe and told to rest a little longer, until the number of their fellow servants and their brothers should be complete, who were to be killed as they themselves had been.

Revelation 19:8 – It was granted her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure” – for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints.

Teaching Points

1. You still have a few - Not everyone in the church was dead. Some were living holy lives. Jesus was pleased with them and promises that they would walk with Him in white. He commends them as being worthy.

From this, we can learn about God's character. He is fair. He doesn't judge the righteous along with the wicked. He doesn't condemn the entire group if the entire group is not guilty. God judges people individually.

We see this in Abraham's interaction with God about the judgment on Sodom and Gomorrah. God spared the only righteous in the city (Lot and his family).

In the same way, you will not be judged for your parents' sins. And a parent will not be judged for his child's sins. (Deuteronomy 24:16)

That truth is encouraging. You may be a member of a church or of a family that is not walking with the Lord. It may be discouraging to see that you are the only one or one of only a few who are serving the Lord. Perhaps the sins of those around you bother you, and they should. And you know that God is not happy and consequences are going to follow.

God knows your works. If you are faithful in the midst of that situation, He knows. He will be pleased. And He will reward you. You will not be condemned for the sins of others, even those closest to you.

V. Promise and Reward (5)

Discussion Questions

- What specifically do the believers in Sardis need to conquer?
- Where will the white garments come from?
- What is the book of life mentioned here?
- What does it mean that their name will not be blotted out from the book of life?
- Will someone's name be blotted out from this book?
- What other promise does Jesus make to the one who conquers?

Cross-References

Revelation 20:15 – And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

Revelation 21:27 – But nothing unclean will ever enter it, nor anyone who does what is detestable or false, but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life.

Philippians 4:3 – Yes, I ask you also, true companion, help these women, who have labored side by side with me in the gospel together with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life.

Teaching Points

1. The one who conquers - This phrase appears in each letter. The saints in Sardis lived among a dead and lifeless "Christian" culture. They needed to conquer the temptation of falling into apathy, losing their zeal, and just following tradition rather than Christ.

2. Will be clothed thus in white garments - God is the one who provides the garments (Matthew 22:1-14). He is the only one who can make us suitable for entering into His kingdom. We cannot make ourselves acceptable through any amount of self-effort.

This was part of the problem of the church of Sardis. They looked good. They had some works. They followed some traditions. But they did not come to the source to get their white robes. In the end, they tried to clothe themselves. And God would not accept that.

Application: Come to the Lord for salvation. There is salvation in no one and nothing else (Acts 4:12).

3. I will never blot his name out of the book of life - The book of life is the book every believer's name is written in. This is the record of who has eternal life. According to Revelation 13:8, the names of believers are written there before the foundation of the world. Thus, there is no more important record than this. If your name is written in it, you will go to heaven. If your name is not there, you won't.

The question arises from this verse, can a person lose their salvation? Is it possible that a person's name could be in this book and then blotted out?

The verse means that if you conquer, God will not erase your name from the book. You will be safe. You are protected. You are secure.

That is an important promise. God is not arbitrary. He will not just decide to blot out your name. Those who persevere will remain in the book.

Does that mean that someone who does not persevere, will be removed from the book? It actually does not mean that.

Revelation 13:8 - And all who dwell on earth will worship it, everyone whose name has not been written before the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who was slain.

We see in this verse that those whose names are not in the book of life will worship the beast, but those whose names are written there will not. Because their names are in the book of life, God will give them the strength to resist. They will not worship the beast. God will keep those people from folly. He will cause them to persevere. Being in the book means you will not deny the faith finally. To have your name in the book means God will protect you from apostasy.

If your name is in the book, you will conquer. If you conquer, your name will stay in the book. God is the one who puts your name there before the world begins. And He is the one who gives strength to stay the course. This is a promise that God will never delete the names of those who remain faithful to Him.

In the Word, we often see these two sides of the coin. God is sovereign. He saves. He secures your salvation. He enables you to persevere and conquer. At the same time, you have a responsibility too. You must conquer. You must persevere. And the true believers will.

For more on this, you can read this interview with John Piper at:

<https://www.desiringgod.org/interviews/can-i-be-blotted-from-the-book-of-life>

Application: Do not take perseverance lightly. Never think to yourself, "I professed faith, so I am safe. I am in." Real warnings in Scripture are meant to keep us vigilant. God secures us. But we must not be foolhardy or presumptuous. Trust in Him. And at the same time, press on.

4. I will confess his name before my Father - Jesus will personally declare that those saints who conquer are His. What a precious promise.

VI. Hear (6)

Discussion Questions

- What is the Holy Spirit saying to you personally in this letter?

Application: What is the Holy Spirit leading you to do in response to this letter?

Revelation 3:7-13 - The Letter to the Church of Philadelphia

Outline

- I. Greeting (7)
- II. Commendation (8-10)
- III. Counsel (11)
- IV. Promise and Reward (12)
- V. Hear (13)

I. Greeting (7)

Discussion Questions

- How is Jesus described in this passage?
- What is the key of David?
- What does Jesus do with this key?
- What does this teach us about Jesus' character?
- Why was this specific description of Jesus important for this specific church to hear?

Cross-References

Revelation 1:18 - And the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades.

Teaching Points

1. The words of the holy one, the true one - Unlike most of the descriptions of Jesus shared with each church, this one is not a direct quote from Revelation 1. Rather, it is a summary of Jesus' character revealed there. In Revelation 1, Jesus was revealed as

having a shining face and white hair. Both of those show Jesus' holiness.

2. Who has the key of David - The key of David is also referenced in Isaiah 22:22.

Isaiah 22:22 - And I will place on his shoulder the key of the house of David. He shall open, and none shall shut; and he shall shut, and none shall open.

The key represents the authority the key holder has over a specific domain. One could say figuratively that Steve Jobs held the key to Apple or Elon Musk held the key to Tesla. Those were their companies. They were in charge. Final decisions were made by them. Leaders with the key have the authority to fire or hire employees according to their own discretion.

Here Jesus is described as having the key of David. Jesus was the final fulfillment of the Davidic covenant. The kingdom promised to David's descendants belongs to Jesus. He is the King. Jesus will reign on David's throne over the whole earth. This will be literally fulfilled during the millennial reign. And from that time forth Jesus will then reign forever over the new Jerusalem.

Reflect: Who can enter this kingdom? Who is allowed to be part of it?

Jesus has the key. He is the decision-maker. He is the authority. He is the king. He decides.

3. Who opens and no one will shut and shuts and no one opens - Jesus is the only way for a person to come into the kingdom (John 14:6).

John 10:9 - I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture.

Jesus described Himself as being the door. He is the door and He holds the key. These are two ways of saying the same thing. It means that we must enter through Jesus. Many people believe in a type of universalism. They think that as long as you are sincere in your belief and a relatively good person, in the end, you will make it. The idea is that all roads lead to heaven.

Jesus emphatically rejects that idea. He holds the key. Buddha doesn't have one. Muhammad doesn't have one. That truth is both a comfort and a warning. It comforts true believers because it reminds us that when Jesus welcomes you in and opens the door to you, no one can close it.

For the saints living in the end times, this is especially encouraging. Even if the world government persecutes and kills you, they can't take away your salvation. Jesus does not give them the key (the authority) to do so. If you are faithful, Jesus will hold the door open for you. By His grace, you will be welcomed into His kingdom.

At the same time, it is a warning. You cannot open this door by yourself. Your own merits cannot save you. The authority is in Jesus' hands. If He decides against you, there is no appeal. Once shut on you (when all of your chances run out), it will not be opened again.

In the time of Noah, God Himself shut the door of the ark (Genesis 7:16). When the door shut, the opportunity for salvation from the flood was over. The last chance had run out. No amount of banging or weeping could get the door to open.

Application: It is important to know that Jesus opens and shuts the door. You don't know when the door will shut and your chances will run out. So don't put the Lord to the test. Today is the day of salvation. Come to Him while the door is open.

Secondly, don't fear man. No one can shut the door on you except Jesus.

II. Commendation (8-10)

Discussion Questions

- What is this open door that Jesus sets in front of them?
- What did Jesus commend this church for?
- Since they had little power, how could faithfully keep His word as they did?
- When we are weak, how can we remain faithful?

- Who are those of the synagogue of Satan who say that they are Jews?
- When do you think God will make these "fake Jews" bow down at their feet?
- What does this show about Jesus' relationship to this church?
- What may verse 10 refer to?
- How would this church be kept from the hour of trial that is coming on the world?

Cross-References

John 10:9 - I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture.

Matthew 7:13-14 "Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few.

Luke 6:10-12 - "One who is faithful in a very little is also faithful in much, and one who is dishonest in a very little is also dishonest in much. If then you have not been faithful in the unrighteous wealth, who will entrust to you the true riches? And if you have not been faithful in that which is another's, who will give you that which is your own?"

Proverbs 3:3-4 - Let not steadfast love and faithfulness forsake you; bind them around your neck; write them on the tablet of your heart. So you will find favor and good success in the sight of God and man.

Luke 3:8 - Bear fruits in keeping with repentance. And do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham.

Teaching Points

1. I know your works - Jesus says this phrase to each church. And the church of Philadelphia is one of only two (along with Smyrna) that received no criticism from Jesus.

2. I have set before you an open door, which no one is able to shut - The statement here is very similar to Jesus' description of Himself in verse 7. He alone could provide salvation.

From the context, it appears that most in the church of Philadelphia had come through this door. The emphasis on the fact that no one else could shut it likely points to the fact that they faced persecution or opposition from the culture around them. Certainly, Satan wanted to keep them from entering the door. And he would have used worldly systems to try to accomplish that plan.

Jesus comforts the church by reminding them that He set the door in front of them. He kept it open by His power. The very gates of hell could not overpower Him (Matthew 16:17-19).

3. You have but little power and yet you have kept my word and not denied my name -

Jesus does not commend them that they are strong. Neither is that a criticism that they are not strong. No man is strong. Every person is weak of ourselves. It is also important for us to see that even the church of Philadelphia, which was not criticized at all, was weak. It wasn't due to their own wisdom, skills, or intelligence that they could follow God faithfully.

2 Corinthians 12:9 - But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

2 Corinthians 4:7 - But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us.

2 Corinthians 2:16 – And who is adequate for such a task as this?

God intentionally uses normal people as vessels of the gospel to show that it is His power that saves (Romans 1:16) and not ours. He does not want boasters in heaven bragging about their spiritual prowess (Ephesians 2:8-9).

It is not wealth, status, worldly logic, or arguments that save. He changes hearts. We are like a jar of clay that is holding the most expensive diamond in the world. The common is contrasted with

the exquisite. It keeps us humble and reminds us to rely on Him. Because it is all Him, He gets all the glory.

In these letters to the churches, we have seen again and again that God asks us to "conquer" the world and temptation. You cannot conquer by your own power, for you have little. You can only overcome through Christ. The power is from Him. The victory is for Him. The glory is to Him.

Application: God calls us to keep His word. It is possible, but not through your willpower. You must learn to depend on Christ. What are some practical ways you can learn to depend on Jesus in your Christian walk and when facing temptation?

4. Those of the synagogue of Satan who say that they are Jews and are not - These were people who were Jewish by blood. A real Jew is not merely ethnically Jewish. A real Jew professes Jesus and gives His heart to God, being renewed in His heart.

Romans 2:28-29 - For no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical. But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter. His praise is not from man but from God.

Satan used even those who were Jewish by blood to persecute the church and fight his battle against God. We see this in the case of Judas, a Jew who was indwelt by Satan and betrayed Jesus. The Pharisees and religious leaders who opposed Jesus were also tools of Satan. And the church of Philadelphia also faced more Jews in this category.

No one needs to rely on their family, bloodline, or culture for salvation. John the Baptist told the Jews of his day that they wrongly relied on the fact that they were Jewish. He told them that God could make Jews spawn from the very rocks under their feet (Luke 3:8). Since God can make Jews come up out of a rock there is nothing there to be prideful about.

And "Christians" often think in the same way. Some believe they are Christians because they were born into a Christian family. Others believe they are Christians because they live in a "Christian" country. In some countries, people's religion is recorded on their

ID when they are born. They may be labeled as "Christian" simply because their parents are.

Application: Salvation is through faith by grace. God makes no distinction between skin color, bloodline, or ethnicity. Do not rely on the fact that you live in a place with a lot of Christians or that your parents are. God has no grandchildren. You must have your own relationship with Jesus. Do you?

5. I will make them come and bow down before your feet -

We see a similar promise in Isaiah 60:14.

Isaiah 60:14 - The sons of those who afflicted you shall come bending low to you, and all who despised you shall bow down at your feet; they shall call you the City of the Lord, the Zion of the Holy One of Israel.

Those who opposed the saints of Philadelphia would be dealt with by Jesus. He would make everything right. One day these very people who tormented them would have to bow to them to show their respect and their apology.

When will this happen?

The text does not give the answer. Perhaps it will occur at the final judgment before the guilty face their sentence and are condemned to hell.

Application: Live for the long term. Have an eternal perspective. It may appear that the enemies of God are victorious or prosperous in the short term. But in the end, He will set everything right (Psalm 73:17). They will receive what they deserve. So live for God and be faithful to Him without compromise.

6. They will learn that I have loved you - What a beautiful statement. It doesn't matter what others think of you. What matters, is what Jesus thinks of you. His opinion is the one that counts because He holds the key. And He loves you.

Application: When you are mistreated and unloved by those around you, remember that Jesus loves you. He does not stop loving you just because people do. Let that promise comfort you.

7. Because you have kept my word, I will keep you from the hour of trial that is coming on the whole world -

What does this statement mean? Is it a promise of a pre-tribulation rapture?

This is a widely debated verse. Those who believe in a pre-tribulation rapture of the church generally use this verse as one of the pillars of their argument. They point to the fact that this hour of trial is coming on the whole world, and that therefore it refers to the tribulation. And they argue that "keep you from" means that the church will be taken away so that they do not experience this hour of trial at all.

Those who do not believe in a pre-tribulation rapture, point to the fact that the phrase "keep you from" in Greek (the word "ek") can mean to "keep you through" or "preserve you in" the trial. Therefore, they believe that this promise means that God will protect believers from succumbing to the trial.

John Piper for example says, "God's promise to keep us from the hour of trial probably doesn't mean that we are taken out of the world, but rather that God will keep us from the faith-destroying effects of the hour of trial. He will guard us. He will protect our faith."

They also point to other uses of the Greek word like in 3 Timothy 3:11.

2 Timothy 3:11 - My persecutions and sufferings that happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, and at Lystra—which persecutions I endured; yet from them all the Lord rescued me.

And from them [ek], the Lord rescued me. In this case, Paul was not removed from the persecutions. Instead, he was given the strength to endure through them.

Like many things in Revelation, your interpretation of this verse will depend on the lens you view end times events from. If you believe in pre-trib, you will claim this verse in support of it. And if you believe in post-trib, you will view this verse as a promise that

God will give you the strength to face the persecution of that tribulation.

This verse should not be used as final proof of either view, because it is not 100% clear what it means.

Certainly, believers should not be surprised to face trials.

1 Peter 4:12 - Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you.

I was raised in a church that believed in a pre-tribulation rapture of the church. But does the Bible really teach two comings? Over the years, I am finding it increasingly difficult to see that plainly taught in the Scripture. I hope it is true, but would not be surprised if God so ordains that the church does go through the tribulation (and if you read through Revelation, it is clear many believers do).

What comfort can we take from this verse?

If you are faithful, God will either keep you from the trial (sometimes) or preserve you in it (more often). He will not allow those trials to wreck your faith. Thus, it is a very similar promise to the one in Revelation 3:5 that He will not blot out your name from the book of life if you conquer.

Application: Be faithful to God. Keep His word. When you do that, He will give you the strength to sustain you through any challenges and trials you may face.

III. Counsel (11)

Discussion Questions

- Knowing that Jesus' return is imminent, what should they do? What should you do?
- What crown does this refer to?
- How can you make sure that you will receive this crown?

Cross-References

John 14:3 - And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also.

Revelation 12:12-13 - “Behold, I am coming soon, bringing my recompense with me, to repay everyone for what he has done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end.”

John 9:4 - We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming, when no one can work.

Teaching Points

1. I am coming soon - Many Bible passages describe us being in the last days or the last hour.

1 John 2:18 – Children, it is the last hour, and as you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come. Therefore we know that it is the last hour.

The last days is a period of time encompassing the whole church age in between Jesus’ first and second coming. We don’t know how long these “last days” will last, but they are typified by increasing evil and rebellion toward God. Because God didn’t set any specific time period for the last days, they could end at any time.

We must remember that to God a day is as a thousand years and thousand years as a day (2 Peter 3:8). The events in the book of Revelation are fixed. God knows the exact hour when they will occur. And history is speeding toward this epic climax. For our part, God designed it to be unknown and imminent so that every generation would live with that expectancy and be ready.

Jesus is coming soon. His return is imminent.

Application: We should be ready. The time is getting ever closer. Let us work while it remains day for the night is coming when no man can work. (John 9:4)

2. Hold fast what you have so that no one may seize your crown - The saints in this church were doing well. So Jesus' counsel to them was simple, hold fast. Keep doing what they were doing.

Finish the good fight. Don't give up. Don't quit. Don't let go of the faith. Press on.

Throughout Scripture, we are encouraged with these admonitions.

Application: What are some practical ways to hold fast?

IV. Promise and Reward (12)

Discussion Questions

- What did the saints in this church need to conquer specifically?
- What does it mean to be a pillar in the temple of God?
- How is having God's name written on them significant?
- What does this promise show us about the relationship of believers with God?
- How do these promises encourage you personally?

Cross-References

Psalm 100:3 - Know that the Lord, he is God! It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.

Romans 14:8 - For if we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord. So then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's.

Teaching Points

1. The one who conquers - This church faced opposition from the Jews. In addition, they faced temptation from within themselves to stop holding fast. Any believer can grow tired or become complacent. And that may cause a believer to give up. But Christ enables His saints to persevere and hold fast to the end.

2. I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God -

This promise is similar to the principle in Ephesians 2:19-22.

Ephesians 2:19-22 - So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.

A pillar is something integral and important. It serves the function of supporting the whole building. And Jesus also says that "he will never go out of it." So this promise means that the believer who conquers will have an enduring and important role in God's temple. This promise is also related to the beginning of this letter where Jesus says He has the key and opens the door. Therefore, the believer who remains faithful will be in His kingdom. And we will not only be in it, but we will have an important role to help or support others in it.

Every believer has great value in His sight. And every believer has an important function. We serve a role now in the church and we still will in the eternal kingdom.

3. I will write on Him the name of my God -

Jesus says three things will be written on the one who conquers, the name of God, the name of the city of God (the new Jerusalem), and the name of Jesus Himself.

Writing His name on the saints is a reminder of His ownership of them. He is our Master and we are His subjects. It also shows His protection. As our king, He will protect us, preserve us, and watch over us. And writing the name of the holy city shows us that we belong to it.

A simple way to say this is that believers are members of God's family and His kingdom.

Reflect: How does this truth affect you?

It gives us security and comfort (John 10:27-30).

V. Hear (13)

Discussion Questions

- What is the Holy Spirit saying to you personally in this letter?

Application: What is the Holy Spirit leading you to do in response to this letter?

Revelation 3:14-22 - The Letter to the Church of Laodicea

Outline

- I. Greeting (14)
- II. Criticism (15-17)
- III. Counsel (18-19)
- IV. Invitation (20)
- V. Promise and Reward (21)
- VI. Hear (22)

Background

Like the other churches, it was in the Roman province of Asia (modern-day Turkey). It was located at the crossroads of two major trade routes. It was built on the river Lycus. Its original name was "City of Zeus." Now the modern-day Turkish city of Denizli is in the same location and has about 640,000 people. The city was prosperous. And the people loved their leisure and games. Many theaters, stadiums, baths, and amphitheatres have been found.

It was only a few kilometers away from Colossae and the church in Laodicea was likely started in part by Epaphras who ministered in Colossae. Paul asked that the letter to Colossians also be read out loud in the Laodicean church (Colossians 4:16).

I. Greeting (14)

Discussion Questions

- How does Jesus describe Himself?
- Why were these specific character qualities important specifically for the church of Laodicea to know?
- How do these qualities of Jesus affect you and your relationship with Him?

Cross-References

2 Timothy 2:13 – If we are faithless, he remains faithful— for he cannot deny himself.

Hebrews 10:23 – Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful.

Teaching Points

1. Jesus' description of Himself -

Each of Jesus' letters to the churches begins with a description of His character. It highlights His authority and divinity reminding the listener who is speaking. The way He describes Himself to each church is different. He emphasizes certain aspects of His character which are especially important for that specific church to pay attention to. For most of the churches, He takes one piece of the description of Himself from Revelation 1. But for Laodicea, He doesn't do this. It gives us a subtle hint that His interaction with the church of Laodicea is going to be different from His interactions with the other churches.

Revelation 3:14 - "And to the angel of the church in Laodicea write: 'The words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of God's creation.'

He describes Himself in three ways.

2. The Amen - Amen is transliterated from Hebrew into English. We use this word at the end of prayers, but what does it mean? It is very closely connected with the idea of truth and reliability. The meaning can slightly change depending on the context.

Interestingly, Jesus often used this word at the beginning of sentences rather than the end. Wherever in English, you see Him saying, "truly, truly, I say to you" the word in Hebrew He is using is

"Amen, Amen, I say to you." The word denotes the complete truth and veracity of the pronouncement. When God says, "Amen" it means "this is true." When we say "amen," we mean "let it be so."

His description as the "Amen" is important. It means that He is the truth. Everything He was going to say was completely accurate. Jesus' letter to the Laodiceans was harsh and painful. Some may have questioned His perspective or even argued with His interpretation of their situation. But He is the Amen. There is no room for any argument or varying perspectives.

3. Faithful and true witness - This description closely mirrors the first, that He is the "Amen." Not only does it emphasize the truth of what He was going to share, but it also reminds them of His motives. He is faithful. He is saying these things for their good because He is a faithful friend.

Proverbs 27:6 - The wounds of a friend are faithful.

4. The beginning of God's creation - Jesus is the source of everything that is created.

John 1:3 - All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made.

The description is also important for the Laodicean church. He made everything. He knows everything. He is the ultimate authority. As Creator, His pronouncement about their condition is authoritative.

In all things, Jesus' verdict will stand. There can be no negotiation or compromise. The clear application is we had better listen to His criticisms and follow His advice!

II. Criticism (15-17)

Discussion Questions

- Why was it important for the church of Laodicea to know that Jesus knows their works?
- What is Jesus' criticism of this church?

- Why do you think He doesn't offer any encouragement or commendation at all?
- Do you think they are real believers or not? Why?
- What does He mean that they are lukewarm and neither cold nor hot?
- What was their true spiritual condition?
- What important principles can you learn from Jesus' criticism?
- What application can you make?

Cross-References

2 Timothy 2:21 – Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from what is dishonorable, he will be a vessel for honorable use, set apart as holy, useful to the master of the house, ready for every good work.

1 Peter 3:3-4 – Do not let your adorning be external—the braiding of hair and the putting on of gold jewelry, or the clothing you wear— but let your adorning be the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God's sight is very precious.

Teaching Points

1 I know your works - To five of the seven churches, Jesus wrote, "I know your works." To the other two He said, "I know your tribulation" and "I know where you dwell."

Jesus was intimately familiar with the Laodicean church. For most of the churches, this was in part comforting. He knew their love and steadfastness. He offered words of encouragement, comfort, and assurance. But he did not like what he saw in the Laodicean church. This is the only church to which Jesus gives no affirmation. He offers zero words of encouragement or praise.

Why?

Jesus clearly makes it a point to comment on the good in the churches. We must come to the simple conclusion that there is nothing good or praiseworthy in this church.

If you look at Jesus' description of them, it is sad. He was disgusted by them. Their behavior and attitude repulsed him.

Let's look at His specific criticisms.

2. Lukewarm - The first and most famous one is that they are lukewarm. That certainly doesn't seem to be a good thing. To our modern ears that seems to be saying that they lacked passion or zeal. They were apathetic or lethargic. That would certainly be a valid criticism. But to fully understand what Jesus is saying we need to understand the historical context of this city. Then we will see that it is even more scathing than we think.

Laodicea was about five miles (8KM) away from a sister city of Hierapolis. Hierapolis was famous for its hot springs (which are still there). These springs were used as a natural spa since the 2nd century B.C. Romans loved their spa, leisurely soaking in the hot water. Great baths were built. The springs were used by doctors as well because of the healing properties of the mineral-rich water. Thus the hot water of this nearby city was highly coveted.

On the other side of Laodicea, only 10 miles (15KM) away, was the city of Colossae. That is the location of the church of Colossae, to whom the letter of Colossians was sent. Colossae had cold water coming down from the mountains. It provided cool refreshment on a hot day.

Colossae and Hierapolis boasted attractive waters. Each was useful in its own way.

On the other hand, the city of Laodicea had no such advantage. Aqueducts brought water in from around 6 miles away (9 Km). By the time it arrived, it was lukewarm. Visitors to the city would sometimes react by spitting the water out. It was tepid, worthless, without any redeeming quality. The water of Laodicea was just like the church of Laodicea, with no redeeming qualities at all, disgusting. The Laodiceans would have instantly understood what Jesus meant here. They had likely complained about their poor water many times. It was the worst feature of the city. And now Jesus compared them to the water they drank.

So when Jesus is saying, "I wish you were either hot or cold," some think that means "I wish you were either on fire for the Lord or hostile to Him." No, Jesus doesn't wish that people are hostile. He does wish that the Laodicean church would have redeeming

qualities, fruit indicative of a close relationship with Jesus. He wishes they would be useful, and valuable. But they are not. They are disgusting to Him and rejecting them, He spits them out.

Application: God calls us to be useful. He has designed us for a purpose. Are you fulfilling your purpose?

3. You say, "I am rich, I have prospered and I need nothing." -

Laodicea is a self-sufficient church. The materialistic church. The city of Laodicea was quite wealthy. It was located at a crossroads of two major trade routes. Two major industries thrived there. First, it produced rich, black wool. It was very fine and prized around the world. Native Laodiceans were generally clothed in this luxurious, black wool.

Secondly, it was renowned for medicine and was home to a famous medicinal school. Their most popular product was an eye salve, which was supposed to be able to cure various types of eye diseases.

The riches generated from these industries spurred a banking industry, which further multiplied their wealth. The banking center was home to a gold and currency exchange. And many came there to receive loans.

In AD 60 an earthquake shattered the city. Rome offered to send funds for rebuilding. But Laodicea was so rich and self-sufficient that they declined outside help and rebuilt from their own store of wealth.

The city was famously self-sufficient. And that same attitude clearly spread to the church. The people were well off and they knew it. They became prideful and focused on their worldly wealth. Successful in the eyes of the world, they were the classic self-made man. It was a church that said, "We don't need God. We are doing fine ourselves." They had pushed Him out and excluded Him from His own church.

What kind of a church does this? Is it even a church at all?

It was a church in name only. But the power of God was absent from their lives. Perhaps going to church was like a social club for

them. A place to look good, feel good about themselves, see their friends, and swap stories of their successes.

Sadly, there are many churches like this in the world today. Many scholars have drawn parallels between these seven churches and different eras in the historical church. Scholars that hold that point of view point out that the church of Laodicea bears a striking resemblance to the modern church, especially in the West.

In the last hundred years, the Western church has been a prosperous one. People are well off. And many are materialistic and self-sufficient. Many churches are like social clubs. People get dressed up and go to church. They meet their rich friends. They listen to a pep talk. They go to lunches. They play golf. They expand their facilities. In their riches, they have forgotten God.

It is considered rude to ask real questions like "what is God doing in your life?" or "What are you going to obey from the sermon?"

In many churches, if you ask these questions, there would be a long awkward pause. People would be extremely uncomfortable. And they would be offended. You are crossing an unspoken line. Jesus isn't really someone they talk about or need. That is too personal.

The fact is, that many people love the gifts of God more than they love God Himself. They put Him into a box and He is not welcome to come out and intrude in their nice, successful lives.

Matthew 19:24 - Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God."

That was the problem for the rich at Laodicea.

They say to the Creator, "I don't need you." It is no wonder that Jesus is disgusted by them and says, "I will spit you out of my mouth."

We have seen how they describe themselves. Let's see how Jesus describes them.

He said they are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked.

Wow. What a terrible reproof. And the reproof is for people who were in a church, respectable, good-looking people. They looked good in their own eyes, but not in the eyes of God. He viewed them for what they were. It's also interesting that His rebuke directly attacks their areas of misplaced pride.

4. Poor - The Laodiceans were rich in the eyes of the world. They had banking. They had trade. They had industry. But it was all for naught. They didn't have riches where it counted. Spiritually they were bankrupt.

Ephesians 1:7-8 - In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight.

The Laodiceans had not experienced the riches of God's grace and forgiveness because they had not come to Him asking for it. Instead of seeking the riches of grace from God, they sought the riches of this world.

1 Timothy 6:18 - They are to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share.

Neither were they rich in good works. A faithful follower of Jesus can be prosperous financially. But if he is, he should use it generously for serving God. And there is no evidence that the Laodiceans did.

Their story is like the rich fool in Luke who stored up treasures for himself his whole life.

Luke 12:20 - But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?'

Remember that Laodicea was a banking center. People came to them for loans. But they should have been coming to God for His riches.

5. Blind - People came from far and wide to purchase eye salve from the Laodiceans. Therefore, they thought that not only could they see well, but they could help open the eyes of others as well. It was a case of the blind leading the blind. They should have come to

Jesus to have their own eyes opened. But they did not even know that they were blind.

6. Naked - The Laodiceans prided themselves on their luxurious tactile industry. If you were to visit ancient Laodicea, you would see them wearing the rich, black wool which they sold to nobles and the wealthy far and wide. God was not impressed in the least. He saw right through their beautiful clothes to their heart condition.

The Laodiceans were like the emperor who wore no clothes. The emperor strutted through the streets showing off his luxurious new clothes with its bright patterns. He believed he was the most finely clothed person in the kingdom and he was quite proud of it. In reality, he was naked. He was shaming himself in front of his entire kingdom.

That is like the Laodiceans in God's sight. Strutting around in their fine wool, God sees them in the condition they are, naked.

In the parable of the wedding feast, Jesus mentioned that every person must wear the clothes given by the king. One person attempted to wear his own clothing and was thrown out. No person can come to God depending on himself. If you say that you need nothing, you cannot get in. You must be clothed in the clothes that He provides.

Who is needier than a person who is blind, naked, and poor? That is about as needy as you can possibly get.

Reflect: Were there believers in this church?

It doesn't look like it. And if there were any, they were a small minority. These were people who attended church. They thought they were in. But they were wrong. If nothing changed, they would be in for a rude awakening at the judgment.

Application - Evaluate your spiritual condition. Going to church as the Laodiceans did does not save. Calling yourself a Christian does not save. Do not trust in your riches. Do not value materials and worldly success over a proper relationship with God. Not everyone who says, "Lord, Lord" shall enter the kingdom of heaven. We must realize that without Christ we are blind, naked, wretched,

and poor. Thus we must humbly come before Him and repent, asking Him to clothe us, open our eyes, and make us rich spiritually.

And that is the counsel that Jesus gives to them.

III. Counsel (18-20)

Discussion Questions

- What counsel does Jesus give this church?
- Where could they get real riches and white clothes?
- How did their attitude need to change to follow Jesus' counsel?
- What do we learn about Jesus' character in verse 19?
- How can we guard ourselves against self-sufficiency?
- How can we grow in depending on God rather than on ourselves?

Cross-References

Matthew 6:19-21 – Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

1 Timothy 6:17-19 – As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy. They are to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, thus storing up treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is truly life.

Teaching Points

Revelation 3:18-19 - I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire, so that you may be rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself and the shame of your nakedness may not be seen,

and salve to anoint your eyes, so that you may see. Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, so be zealous and repent.

1. There is still hope - Even with having received such a terrible rebuke from Jesus, there is still good news for the Laodiceans. Jesus says in verse 19 that He loves them. He doesn't immediately cast them aside and condemn them because of their hypocrisy. Instead, He tells them that there is still hope. If they will heed His words, repent, and take action, He will be there for them waiting with open arms just like in the story of the prodigal son.

Jesus gives three specific pieces of counsel.

2. Buy from me gold refined by fire - The Laodiceans were used to visiting the banking center to make deposits and exchange gold. It was time they stopped focusing on worldly wealth and turned to the Lord. He is the only one who could give them spiritual riches. What is the gold refined by fire? I believe it is the spiritual counterpart to their earthly gold which they stored up. Simply put, it is eternal life. Eternal life will last. It will stand the test of time. It can never be burned up, never rust, and never be stolen away.

Jesus' point is clear. Stop spending all your time at the bank counting your money and start visiting His bank. The wealth He offers, lasts.

Application: Jesus said in Matthew 6:21, "where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." There are three tests we can apply to ourselves to evaluate what is important to us.

What do you spend your time thinking about?

What do you spend your time doing?

What do you spend your money on?

These three questions will reveal what is important to you. If you spend your time thinking about how to make money, working as much overtime as possible to get more of it, and then spending it all on yourself and your own desires, then you probably love money.

We live in a very materialistic culture. When faced with career decisions, most people simply look at which one pays the most and then choose that.

Brothers and sisters, let us not get sucked into the materialism of the world. Take a moment and look around you. Look at the most expensive things in your home. Which of the things you see right now is going to last? The only thing you can see that will last is people, and even their bodies will not. The only thing around us that will last is souls. So why invest your time and money into all of these things that don't last?

You need to think about how to apply this. How are you going to stop being materialistic? It might mean you need to change your job. It might mean you need to say "no" to overtime. It might mean you need to be more generous with what you have. It might mean stopping spending all your spare time on investing in this world. Instead, get gold from the Lord. Invest in eternity.

3. [Buy] white garments so that you may clothe yourself - As mentioned before, the Laodiceans prided themselves on their luxurious, black wool clothing. It may have impressed most people, but it did not impress Jesus. Imagine facing Jesus and He asks, "why should I let you into heaven?" The answer is, "look at my fine clothes." It's laughable, isn't it? The only clothes that will be accepted are those which He provides.

Our very best deeds are as filthy rags in His sight. We don't have garments good enough for the occasion. Because ours are not sufficient, we must come to Him and will clothe us in His righteousness.

Revelation 3:5 - The one who conquers will be clothed thus in white garments, and I will never blot his name out of the book of life.

Revelation 4:4 - Around the throne were twenty-four thrones, and seated on the thrones were twenty-four elders, clothed in white garments, with golden crowns on their heads.

Here are just a couple of the many references to white clothes in Revelation.

Application: Are you wearing clothes from our Savior? The Laodiceans prided themselves on their clothing. Perhaps you pride yourself on something else. Maybe it is your good lucks or your athletic ability. Maybe it is your successful career. Perhaps it is

your reputation or even your Bible knowledge. We must stop strutting this stuff around and instead humbly receive and appreciate white robes from His hands.

4. [Buy] from me salve to anoint your eyes that you may see - The third counsel from Jesus hit the third industry they took pride in, their medicine center for eye salve. The salve they produced and sold could not open their eyes spiritually. Jesus could. He is the light of the world.

Today many people make the same mistake. Huge amounts of time and effort are spent on the physical body. Health shakes, fitness gyms, exercise apps, longevity treatments, spas, and more are all the rage. Most people focusing on these things do not realize that their physical bodies will die and they will not be ready for eternity.

The wise person would come to the Lord and depend on Him for spiritual life, for a glorified body that will last for all of eternity. Keep fit, it's good. But don't let that take precedence over a right relationship with the Lord. Ask yourself, do you spend more time on health and fitness physically, or on developing a better relationship with God.

IV. Invitation (20)

Discussion Questions

- What door does Jesus describe in verse 20?
- Is He referring to salvation?
- What does He mean that He will eat with them?

Teaching Points

Revelation 3:20 - Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me.

1. Jesus' invitation - They had excluded Him. Having taken His name and called themselves Christians, they wanted nothing else from Him. They didn't need Him. They were doing fine on their own. But Jesus extends an invitation to the church of Laodicea.

He wanted to be part of their lives. He wanted a relationship with them. He says, "I am knocking. I want to come in." Notice that it says "anyone" who hears His voice could open the door. Perhaps most people would reject this message and this warning. But every individual has His own decision. It is a personal decision. No one can make it for you.

Perhaps your entire family, entire country, or entire so-called church reject Christ. You can accept Him. Open the door. Invite Him in.

2. I will eat with him and he with Me - Then it says that "I will eat with him, and he with me." Eating signifies a close, personal relationship. It shows fellowship. You won't normally eat with just anyone off the street. We eat with our friends, our families.

Jesus wants that relationship with you.

Application: Do you have that relationship with Him already? If not, today is the day. If you do, then how can that relationship become even more personal?

V. Promise and Reward (21)

Discussion Questions

- What did this church specifically need to overcome?
- How does this relate to us in this day and age?
- What does it mean to sit with Jesus on His throne?

Teaching Points

1. He then says that the one who conquers (overcomes) will sit with Him on His throne. True believers will join Him in heaven and even rule with Him. It's clear in this passage that we need to overcome the allures of this world: materialism, pride, pleasure, and the love of money. These things vie for our affections and seek to pull us away from our love for Christ. Through Jesus, we can overcome.

VI. Hear (22)

He who has an ear let Him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

Are we hearing what He is saying to us? Many who are in the church think they are OK. They are called Christians, taking the name of Christ. But they live as if He doesn't. They keep Him in a little box which they can pull out from time to time when they feel they need to. The rest of the time they enjoy the pleasures of the world. They are self-sufficient and materialistic.

Could that be describing you? I know one thing for sure. It would be a terrifying thing to face Jesus one day and hear Him say, "you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked."

He is standing at the door knocking. He wants a real relationship with you. He wants to come in. He wants to transform you. He wants to be part of your life. Will you let Him in?

Perhaps you have invited Him into your life, or most of it. But perhaps there is some part of your life where He is not welcome. You are keeping Him out because you think you can handle it, or maybe because you are enjoying the sin. Will you let Him in?

Application: Spend some time in prayer. Invite Him into every part of your life. Surrender yourself to Him. Humble yourself in His presence and come before the throne of grace. Ask Him to clothe you in white. Ask Him to give you sight. Ask Him to help you overcome the attractions of this world.

Revelation 4

Outline

- I. John is Transported to Heaven (1-2)
- II. The Heavenly Scene (3-7)
- III. Heavenly Praise for the King (8-11)

I. John is transported to heaven (1-2)

Teaching Points

1. I looked and behold a door standing open in heaven! - The door was a visible sign to John that he could go up and see what was taking place there. Obviously, this is unusual. With only the exceptions of Enoch and Elijah, people could only enter heaven after death. John had the amazing opportunity to visit heaven and report what he saw to all of us!

2. Come up here - John then received a personal invitation to "come up." It is not clear if he physically went up into heaven transported by the Spirit or if it was a vision that just felt real. Either way is the same result.

Some believe that this invitation is also symbolic of the rapture. As the letters to the churches concluded, this transition could indicate that the rapture then happens before the events of Revelation. In this view, John being transported to heaven is symbolic of the whole church being raptured.

3. I will show you what must soon take place after this - This statement reminds us of the theme in Revelation.

Revelation 1:19 - *Write therefore the things that you have seen, those that are and those that are to take place after this.*

The purpose of the book of Revelation was for John to record these three things. The things he had seen were the visions of Jesus in chapter 1. The “things that are” is the church age in chapters 2-3. The “things that are to take place after this” is the rest of the book of Revelation, covering chapters 4-22. Thus, chapters four and five are a transition between the age of the church as shown in the seven letters to the churches, and the seven-year tribulation, which would culminate in Jesus' return.

4. A throne stood in heaven and one seated on the throne - The very first thing John sees is a throne and God on the throne. That is very important. It reminds him and the reader that God is sovereign. He is reigning as king of the universe. Everything that is going to happen in the rest of the book is allowed or orchestrated by Him.

And that is one of the key lessons of the book of Revelation. God is on His throne. He has a plan for history. He is bringing everything in the universe to His own perfect planned conclusion. The cosmos is not random chaos. But it is under His divine control.

Application: This is a comforting truth. Because we know God is on His throne, we should have faith in Him. Our security is not found in insurance, wealth, or health. It is in our relationship to the one on the throne. The most important thing for each of us is to have a relationship with Him through Christ.

II. The heavenly scene (3-7)

Teaching Points

1. Description of the One on the throne - John describes Him as having the appearance of jasper and carnelian. Both of these are bright red, shiny stones. John further describes the scene as an emerald-like rainbow around the throne. Emeralds are precious, green jewels.

So what does this tell us?

It was an amazing scene. John saw a shiny, bedazzling, bright, colorful manifestation of God's glory.

Exodus 33:20 - *But," he said, "you cannot see my face, for man shall not see me and live."*

Was this actually God "in the flesh?" We must remember that God is a Spirit. He can appear as He wishes. No man can see God as He is in His full glory. Therefore we can conclude that this was how God chose to reveal Himself to John. The image portrayed His glory, holiness, power, and riches.

We should also note that John uses imprecise words saying that He "has the appearance of." In other words, it looked something like that. Our vocabulary was invented to describe things within our realm of experience and sense. This was another realm altogether so our vocabulary is insufficient to perfectly represent it. And that is why John says His appearance was like those things, not His appearance was those things.

God is glorious. To use a theological term, He is transcendent. That means that He is very different from us and we can never fully understand Him as we are created by Him. At the same time, He is immanent. That means that He made Himself known to us, at least in part. He desires to be known by His creation. And that is a great privilege for us. One day, like John, we too will be in the presence of God and know Him in a much deeper and personal way than we do now.

2. Around the throne were twenty-four elders -

Reflect: Who are these elders and what are they doing there?

The number twenty-four

The number twenty-four is twelve doubled. It could represent the totality of leadership of the church (twelve apostles doubled). Or it could represent both the twelve tribes of Israel and the twelve apostles. Since Israel is not yet redeemed at this point in Revelation, the first choice would seem to make more logical sense. There is a lot of speculation, but one cannot be dogmatic since the text is not clear.

What is clear, is that these were people (not angels). The term "elder" is never used in the Bible for angels.

The term "elder"

An "elder" is a term used in the Bible for someone who has a position of leadership over God's people. It is used for the Jews in the Old Testament (Exodus 24, Numbers 11) and for shepherds over the church (1 Timothy 3).

Clothed in white

These elders represent the leaders of the church throughout history. We can conclude that they are leaders of the church rather than Old Testament leaders because they have white garments. White garments are often used in the New Testament to represent the atoning work of Christ in the sinner's life, His righteousness imputed to us. Even in Revelation, these white clothes are often promised to believers in the church who overcome the world.

Revelation 3:5 - The one who conquers will be clothed thus in white garments, and I will never blot his name out of the book of life.

Wearing crowns

Another clue that these are church-age leaders is the crown that they are wearing. Crowns were promised to believers who were faithful to obey the Lord while on earth.

Revelation 2:10 - Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life.

The term for "crown" here is "stefanos." This was the word used for the victor's wreath given to the victorious athlete in a competition.

One specific crown is promised to shepherds of the church who rule well.

1 Peter 5:4 - And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory. It could be that this crown John sees on their heads is this very crown.

Sitting on thrones

Another thing that we see about these elders, is that they are sitting on thrones. That means that they are ruling with Christ, just as He promised to believers in the church. We can see just a few verses with that promise below.

Revelation 2:26-27 - The one who conquers and who keeps my works until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron, as when earthen pots are broken in pieces, even as I myself have received authority from my Father.

Matthew 19:28 - Jesus said to them, "Truly, I say to you, in the new world, when the Son of Man will sit on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

2 Timothy 2:12 - If we endure, we will also reign with him; if we deny him, he also will deny us.

Here we see a glimpse of God's promises toward the church fulfilled. They are clothed in white, sitting on thrones, wearing their crown of rewards, in the very presence of God. Everything which God promised to us will be fulfilled.

Application: In a world that is often busy and filled with temptations and trials, it is helpful to keep a long-term perspective. Seeing the end motivates us to keep our eyes on Jesus and run the race He has set before us with endurance. Let this image of the throne room in heaven encourage you to press on for the Lord and not give up.

3. Does this scene indicate a pre-tribulation rapture? - Some scholars point out that in this scene in Revelation 4 the church (represented by the 24 elders) is in heaven already. Stephen Armstrong from Verse by Verse Ministries even commented that the fact they are wearing crowns shows us that they were already in their resurrected bodies (you can't put a crown on a spirit) and that happens at the rapture.

There could be other explanations for the things we see in Revelation 4 and these are not definitive arguments, but they do make logical sense.

Application: Whenever the rapture is, we need to be ready. We should be ready simply by living for God each day. We read the Word. We pray. We teach our children to do the same. We share the good news. We live holy lives. That is what God calls us to do.

4. Flashes of lightning from the throne - It is an awesome scene. God's very presence seems to super-charge the atmosphere so that it reacts to Him. Such displays only serve to further give glory to the one who sits on the throne.

5. Seven torches of fire, which are the seven spirits of God - Like the other references to the "seven spirits of God" in Revelation this likely represents the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is not something that can be divided into parts. Rather, the number seven indicates His wholeness, perfectness, or completeness. When John saw this scene, the Holy Spirit manifested His divine presence there at that time.

The Holy Spirit also is not an actual torch of fire. He is a Spirit. He is unseen. But He manifested Himself in a way that John could understand and relate to. Fire is a powerful, purifying force. It also enlightens. And that is the role of the Holy Spirit.

John 16:8 - And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment.

John 16:13 - When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth.

As we see, key roles of the Holy Spirit include convicting (to encourage repentance) and illumination.

6. A sea of glass like crystal - John says that he saw, "as it were a sea of glass." Again, he does not say it was a sea of glass, but that it resembled it in some way. Finite human language could not clearly reflect what he saw there. He mentions the same sea of glass in Revelation 15:2 and there says that looked as though it was "mingled with fire."

John does not say what this sea was for. One day we will be able to see it ourselves with glorified bodies and minds. For now, it is another reminder of how heaven is very different from the earth.

7. Four living creatures - These "four living creatures" are seen throughout the book of Revelation: 5:6-14, 6:1-8, 14:3, 15:7, and 19:4. These are real, actual beings. Most likely they are a type of angel, a specially created order made by God for a specific purpose.

Ezekiel and Isaiah also had heavenly visions and described a very similar scene of what were almost certainly the same beings.

Ezekiel 1:5-11 - And from the midst of it came the likeness of four living creatures. And this was their appearance: they had a human likeness, but each had four faces, and each of them had four wings. Their legs were straight, and the soles of their feet were like the sole of a calf's foot. And they sparkled like burnished bronze. Under their wings on their four sides they had human hands. And the four had their faces and their wings thus: their wings touched one another. Each one of them went straight forward, without turning as they went. As for the likeness of their faces, each had a human face. The four had the face of a lion on the right side, the four had the face of an ox on the left side, and the four had the face of an eagle. Such were their faces. And their wings were spread out above. Each creature had two wings, each of which touched the wing of another, while two covered their bodies.

Isaiah 6:2-3 - Above him stood the seraphim. Each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one called to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!"

We see that these are very unique beings.

Reflect: What purpose did these beings serve?

In almost every place in Scripture where we see these beings, we see that they are facilitating the worship of God. They are declaring His holiness and worshipping Him. They bring attention to His attributes and loudly proclaim His glory and power.

God has organized the angels into different groups, each with its own function. He does the same with believers in the church, gifting each one according to the role He wants them to fulfill. The

fact that there is such a group of full-time worshipers reminds us how important it is to worship God.

Reflect: What might their faces: lion, ox, eagle, man show us about them?

III. Heavenly praise for the King (8-11)

Teaching Points

1. When the living creatures give glory to the one on the throne, the elders do the same - The four beings are leading the heavenly host to worship the Lord. When they worship Him, the elders follow.

2. They cast their crowns before the throne - Whatever honor, reward, and recognition are given to the saints, it is then returned to God who made all good things possible. God calls and saves believers. In turn, we are to obey Him faithfully. Those who do are rewarded with crowns. Then they give those crowns back to Him.

Everything good that we can accomplish is only made possible through Him. Of ourselves, our good deeds are as filthy rags.

Application - God gives us opportunities, resources, and gifts, which He wants us to use for building His kingdom. We are to be good stewards of these gifts and use them for His glory and not for ourselves. What skills or spiritual gifts has God given you? Are you using these for Him?

Application #2 - God deserves all the glory, honor, and praise. Whatever reward we have will be turned back to praise in heaven. Therefore, we should live the same way on earth now. Whenever we have any successes, we should turn these into testimonies of the Lord's goodness. Whenever we receive recognition or praise on earth, we should deflect it back to Him who made it possible.

3. Worship - The focal point of the heavenly scene we see in this chapter is the throne and the One who is seated on the throne. In heaven where He rules, He is being properly recognized for who He is.

Remember that chapter four brings us into the things that take place "after this." In this chapter, we see a glimpse of what the church will be doing after our time on earth. And that is worshipping God. Is that the only thing we will be doing? Most likely not. But it is what we need to know now that we will be doing.

Reflect: Why does God let us see our heavenly role as worshipers now?

I believe these scenes in heaven are meant to remind us that our primary role is to worship God. If that is our role in heaven, it is also our role now.

Romans 12:1 - I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.

Application: How can you focus more on worshipping God in the next week?

Revelation 5

Outline

- I. The Scroll with Seven Seals (1-4)
- II. The Lamb is Worthy to Open the Scroll (5-7)
- III. The Lamb is Worshiped (8-14)

I. The Little Scroll with Seven Seals (1-4)

Discussion Questions

- Who held this scroll?
- What are your observations about the scroll?
- What can you see about the importance of this scroll based on the focus it receives in heaven?
- Why was nobody worthy to open the scroll (the angels in heaven for example have no sin)?
- Why was John so disappointed?
- What does this teach us about the importance of studying and learning?

Cross-References

Proverbs 25:2 - It is the glory of God to conceal things, but the glory of kings is to search things out.

Revelation 4:11 - Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created.

Teaching Points

1. Then I saw... a scroll - The focus shifts. The scroll in the hand of God draws the attention of everyone in heaven. If this were a scene in a movie, the camera would focus on the scroll and slowly zoom in. The curiosity of John (and all of the audience) is pricked.

- What is this scroll?
- What is the message?
- Why is it so important?
- What will the contents show?

The importance of this scroll is clear. Whatever the message within, it is critical. All those present desire to understand it.

2. The seven seals - A seal was used for several purposes.

A. To show the authority of the one issuing the decree - Every emperor of the ancient world would have a royal seal, often a ring. He would use this on official correspondence or laws to signify that his authority stood behind whatever was written.

B. A seal would also keep something closed and private until the right time to open it - Wax seals were designed to clearly show when the seal had been broken. The item, often a letter, could not be opened without breaking the seal. Thus no one was allowed to tamper with it or get a sneak peek before the intended recipient. A seal safeguarded an item from tampering until its proper time.

These seals show us God's authority behind the content of the scrolls. It is His royal decree about what is going to take place. They also show us that the contents were secret and unknown until the proper time for its opening arrived. Not even the angels knew the contents of this scroll. And that explains why everyone gives such rapt attention to the scroll. They all want to know what it contains and the contents have been secret until this point in time.

Daniel 12:4 - But you, Daniel, shut up the words and seal the book, until the time of the end. Many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall increase."

Daniel was given a special glimpse into the contents, but he was not allowed to share those things. John, however, was authorized to share the content of his vision to prepare the church and the world for what is to come.

The number seven shows the completeness of the judgments within. Each separate seal unlocks a specific portion of the contents.

The seals remind us that the judgments contained within are ordained by God and will only happen according to His perfect timing after everything else in His plan for the world has already been fulfilled.

3. A mighty angel asks who is worthy to open the scroll - This mighty angel is not named. But evidently, He is something of a heavenly messenger or herald to make announcements to the heavenly host.

He shouts out asking "who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?"

No one was found who was worthy.

Reflect: What qualities were necessary for the one opening the seals to possess?

The scroll contains God's righteous judgments on a corrupt world. Therefore the one opening it must be qualified to execute these judgments. He must be holy and righteous, without sin. In addition, He must have authority as the divine judge.

John 5:22 - For not even the Father judges anyone, but He has given all judgment to the Son.

Acts 17:31 - Because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead.

Jesus is the one who has this divine authority. He already conquered death and the grave and even experienced God's judgment firsthand. No one else can perform this role.

4. I began to weep loudly because no one was able to open the scroll -

As the search was going on, there was a period of time before Jesus stepped up. That heightened the desire of the audience to see the scroll opened and also served as a clear contrast, showing more publicly that Jesus alone was worthy

During this time, we can see the desire to know the contents of the scroll increasing exponentially. John is moved to tears because of his great sorrow that no one could open the scroll. From this, we see an important characteristic of John. He has a great desire to learn and know more about God and His plan. There is an intense hunger to know the things of God. When that hunger is not satisfied, it affects him on an emotional level.

Application: Do you hunger for God's word? When you encounter something you don't understand, do you eagerly seek to learn more about it or just let it go?

II. The Lamb is Worthy to Open the Scroll (5-7)

Discussion Questions

- Who told John who would be able to open the scroll?
- What does this show us about the knowledge level of the elders around the throne?
- Who is the Lion of the tribe of Judah? Why is He called that?
- Why is He called the Root of David?
- Why is He worthy?
- What are your observations about the Lamb?
- What does the fact that He is worshiped (and receives that worship) show us about Him?

Cross-References

Proverbs 15:3 - The eyes of the Lord are in every place, keeping watch on the evil and the good.

2 Chronicles 16:9 - For the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to give strong support to those whose heart is blameless toward him. You have done foolishly in this, for from now on you will have wars.”

Teaching Points

1. One of the elders said to me - From this short exchange we can get a bit of insight into heaven. Here are a few things we learn from this:

- Conversations occur between people. You will be able to talk and communicate with others. It is not only singing and playing harps all the time.
- The elder knew more about the situation than John did. This would indicate that when you are in heaven, you are always learning. You know more than those who just arrived.
- The elder is teaching John. This would indicate that there will still be a role for people teaching other people as all believers continually learn and grow together into a better understanding of our Lord.

2. The Lion of the Tribe of Judah -

In the Old Testament, God compares Himself to a lion a couple of times.

Hosea 5:14 - For I will be like a lion to Ephraim, and like a young lion to the house of Judah. I, even I, will tear and go away; I will carry off, and no one shall rescue.

Amos 3:8 - The lion has roared; who will not fear? The Lord God has spoken; who can but prophesy?"

A lion is fierce. You would be afraid to meet one in the wild. God compares His judgments to a lion.

Genesis 49:9 - Judah is a lion's cub; from the prey, my son, you have gone up. He stooped down; he crouched as a lion and as a lioness; who dares rouse him?

In Jacob's prophecy about Judah, he also compares Judah to a lion.

Jesus is the Lion of Judah. The first time He came as a Lamb. He was meek and humble. He was a servant. He was our perfect and spotless sacrifice. But in opening the seals, He reveals Himself to be a lion. Jesus will not always be the meek and long-suffering lamb. He is going to judge the world for its sin. And that is a scary thing for those who have scoffed and ridiculed Him.

Think about that for a moment. Imagine a cruel person who picks on a lamb. The lamb is silent and takes it for a while. This encourages the person to be even crueler. So he mocks and tortures the lamb. Then in an instant, the lamb transforms into a huge lion. The scoffing bully would rightly fear for his life.

Application: Don't be afraid when opponents of God seem to triumph in the short term. Don't worry when they are emboldened in their corruption because of God's perceived silence. Don't fear when they bully and intimidate you. The Lion of Judah is on your side and when He roars it will be all the louder because of the time He has kept it in.

3. The Root of David -

The root is something that comes before the tree. The root comes first and then the trunk and then the branches. So although Jesus was descended from David, He also preceded David. This is a Messianic title, which highlights Jesus' divinity.

Jesus emphasized the same point when He told the Jews that He existed before Abraham.

John 8:58 - Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am."

In this metaphor David/Jesse is the tree, Jesus is the root, and the church is grafted in as branches to the nation of Israel.

Isaiah 11:10 - In that day the root of Jesse, who shall stand as a signal for the peoples—of him shall the nations inquire, and his resting place shall be glorious.

Romans 11:17 - But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, although a wild olive shoot, were grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing root of the olive tree.

4. I saw a Lamb standing as though it had been slain - In chapter four we saw God and the Holy Spirit present in the throne room. Now we see Jesus, so all three members of the Trinity are present. Even in heaven, Jesus appears as a Lamb that was slain, forever reminding everyone of His loving sacrifice for His creation. It wasn't just something He did in the past. Rather, it will always be

an integral part of His identity as well as the reason for His exaltation.

5. Seven horns - Just as Jesus is not literally a lamb (or a lion or a root), so these horns should not be taken literally. Rather they represent certain qualities that Jesus possesses. Horns are something in the Bible that generally represent power and authority. The fact that Jesus appears with seven horns here shows us that the Lamb (the meek sacrifice) has complete power and authority over all.

6. Seven eyes which are the seven spirits - These symbols indicate Jesus' omniscience. He is fully aware of everything that goes on at all times everywhere. Not a speck of dust or an atom moves without His knowledge.

As we have seen in previous passages, the seven spirits seem to refer to the Holy Spirit. Jesus' ministry is closely connected with the Holy Spirit. They are not independent of each other.

Application: Jesus sees all and knows all. When you are tempted, remember He is watching. When you are discouraged, take comfort that He knows and sympathizes.

7. He went and took the scroll - All eyes are on Jesus! He authoritatively walks and takes the scroll, knowing that the time has come!

III. The Lamb is Worshiped (8-14)

Discussion Questions

- Why do you think John calls this a "new" song?
- What can you learn about praise and worship from this song?
- What does "ransom" mean?
- What can you learn about the heart of Jesus in this passage?
- After salvation, what does Christ transform us into?
- As a priest in God's kingdom, what is your role?
- What do you observe about the number of angels from verse 11?

- Since John was in heaven, and there will still be unbelievers on earth, how can we understand the statement that he heard every creature "in heaven and on earth and under the earth" praising Jesus?

Cross-References

Daniel 7:14 - And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed.

Revelation 14:6 - Then I saw another angel flying directly overhead, with an eternal gospel to proclaim to those who dwell on earth, to every nation and tribe and language and people.

Matthew 24:14 - And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.

Teaching Points

1. Four living creatures and twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb - In chapter 4 we saw the heavenly host worshiping the Father. Now we see them worshiping the Son. It is one of the clearest passages in Scripture showing us Jesus' divinity and His equality with the Father.

2. Each holding a harp and golden bowls full of incense -

Revelation contains many images that are foreshadowed in the Old Testament tabernacle and temple. And this is one of them. They are holding golden censers (Revelation 8:2) full of incense, which is the prayers of the saints.

A censer is a small container used to hold coals. Incense is then put onto the coals. As they burn, a cloud of incense rises. We see this description in Leviticus 16.

Leviticus 16:12-13 - And he shall take a censer full of coals of fire from the altar before the Lord, and two handfuls of sweet incense beaten small, and he shall bring it inside the veil and put the incense on the fire before the Lord, that the cloud of the incense

may cover the mercy seat that is over the testimony, so that he does not die.

What we see here is that the incense comes before the Lord together with our prayers. Our prayers are like incense to Him.

Psalm 141:2 - Let my prayer be counted as incense before you, and the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice!

So why is prayer described as incense? Incense is fragrant, much like perfume. Our prayers are pleasing to the Lord, like a waft of pleasing aroma. What are your favorite smells? One of mine is vanilla. I love to smell the vanilla from baked goods. It's pleasant. Similarly, God delights in the prayers of His children.

And during this time on earth, His children are suffering. They are being intensely persecuted and martyred. But God is not distant. He is there. He cares. He is listening to our prayers.

The harps remind us again of the saints' role as worshipers.

3. You were slain and by your blood you ransomed people for God - All of the saints in heaven are there because of Jesus' sacrifice. He purchased them with His blood.

4. Every tribe and language and people and nation - Here we see the heart of God. He is going to have representatives from every people group on earth in heaven. It will be a glorious scene to see the people of the world, with different languages, different skin tones, different backgrounds, and different cultures all coming together united in purpose and giving Glory to the King of Kings.

Application: What are you doing to contribute to this goal? How are you involved in fulfilling the Great Commission? What more can you do?

5. The number of angels mentioned in Revelation 5:11 is innumerable, a huge number.

6. He is worthy - The last few verses in this passage conclude with worship for the Lamb. He is worthy to receive glory, praise, and honor. Hundreds of millions of angels are worshiping Him. Saints for all eternity will be worshiping Him.

Application: What is one specific way you can give Him glory in the coming week?

Revelation 6

Outline

- I. First Seal (1-2)
- II. Second Seal (3-4)
- III. Third Seal (5-6)
- IV. Fourth Seal (7-8)
- V. Fifth Seal (9-11)
- VI. Sixth Seal (12-17)

I. First Seal (1-2)

Discussion Questions

- What effect do you see between what is happening in heaven and on earth?
- Are the horses literal or symbolic?
- What does the white horse represent?
- Who do you think the rider is?
- What do the bow and crown represent?
- What do you see about the motive of this man?

Cross-References

Daniel 7:24-25 - As for the ten horns,
out of this kingdom ten kings shall arise,
and another shall arise after them;
he shall be different from the former ones,
and shall put down three kings.
He shall speak words against the Most High,
and shall wear out the saints of the Most High,
and shall think to change the times and the law;
and they shall be given into his hand
for a time, times, and half a time.

Daniel 9:24-27 - "Seventy weeks are decreed about your people and your holy city, to finish the transgression, to put an end to sin, and to atone for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal both vision and prophet, and to anoint a most holy place. Know therefore and understand that from the going out of the word to restore and build Jerusalem to the coming of an anointed one, a prince, there shall be seven weeks. Then for sixty-two weeks it shall be built again with squares and moat, but in a troubled time. And after the sixty-two weeks, an anointed one shall be cut off and shall have nothing. And the people of the prince who is to come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary. Its end shall come with a flood, and to the end there shall be war. Desolations are decreed. And he shall make a strong covenant with many for one week, and for half of the week he shall put an end to sacrifice and offering. And on the wing of abominations shall come one who makes desolate, until the decreed end is poured out on the desolator."

2 Thessalonians 2:3-4 - Let no one deceive you in any way. For that day will not come, unless the rebellion comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God.

Teaching Points

1. Introduction to the tribulation period - The final events before Jesus' 2nd coming will occur over seven years. Daniel 9:24-27 lays out seventy "weeks." Each of these "weeks" refers to a seven-year period of time. The first seven "weeks" covered the period between the edict to "restore and build Jerusalem" given by Artaxerxes to Ezra (Ezra 7:11-26). The next sixty-two weeks cover the time when Jerusalem will be rebuilt, but shall be in a "troubled time." It is the time from Ezra/Nehemiah to the time when the Anointed One "shall be cut off and shall have nothing," pointing to Jesus' crucifixion. It was at this point that the mystery of the church age began.

The time when God primarily dealt with the world through Israel was put on hold (like an intermission in a movie), and He reached out to the Gentiles across the world. At a future point in time, the last of the seventy "weeks" will begin when the abomination of desolation (the antichrists) makes a seven-year covenant with

Israel. This will begin the seven-year tribulation, which will culminate with the "great and terrible day of the Lord." (Joel 2:31).

Note that this time is decreed by God and will accomplish several very specific things. It is only when these things are accomplished that Jesus will return. These things listed are:

- To finish the transgression
- To put an end to sin
- To atone for iniquity
- To bring in everlasting righteousness
- To seal both vision and prophet
- To anoint a most holy place

The tribulation is also known by other names in Scripture including: The Great Tribulation (Matthew 24:21), "Time of Trouble," (Daniel 12:1), "Jacob's Trouble" (Jeremiah 30:7), "Great and Terrible/Awesome Day of the Lord" (Joel 2:31).

2. The Lamb opened one of the seven seals - Each seal is opened by Jesus. For the first four seals, John is told to "Come!"

3. A white horse, bow, and crown - The rider masquerades as someone who brings peace, a noble savior. Most scholars agree that the rider is the Antichrist. Satan loves to imitate. So the Antichrist will likely come as a messiah figure. He will come promising peace and safety. The disasters befalling the world at the time will likely set the stage for him to step out with all of the answers, quickly gaining power.

But here we see his true intentions. It is not to help or save. It is to conquer and rule. The next seals show that war, famine, and death will follow. Thus, Antichrist will not actually bring about the utopia he will boast of. Instead, his desire to rule and conquer will be part of the spark to set off the subsequent worldwide disasters.

4. Was given to him - This phrase "was given to him" occurs multiple times in this passage (2, 4, 8). A theological term for this concept is "divine passive." These horsemen are sinning. They are doing the works of the devil. However, ultimately God is sovereign over them. He allows them a certain leeway (like a dog on a leash) to accomplish His own perfect purposes. If God did not allow them

to act, then they wouldn't. And they haven't yet for that very reason, because of God's restraint.

II. Second Seal (3-4)

Discussion Questions

- What does the second seal unleash?
- What does the red horse represent?
- What do you learn from the phrase "its rider was permitted?"
- Is the rider doing the slaying? Is this a supernatural judgment?

Cross-References

James 4:1-2 - What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask.

Teaching Points

1. Its rider was permitted - Again, we see that God is sovereign and allows these events to unfold in order to bring about His end-time plans.

Application: The world is not at this point of chaos yet, but it is still often chaotic. It will be a comfort to us to remember that the insane things we see happening are permitted by God. And though He is not the author of sin, He will use the willful choices of people to accomplish His greater purposes.

2. The red horse and rider - The effect of this seal will be catastrophic war (a great sword). The peace that was promised by the first rider never materializes. Instead, there will be war. People will turn against each other.

War is something that has always existed (tracing back to Cain killing Able). However, the seal judgments will bring about a more global and intensified version of it, which is far more destructive than what had ever been experienced in the world to that point.

III. Third Seal (5-6)

Discussion Questions

- What do the black horse and its rider represent?
- How does this judgment connect with the previous one?
- Is it supernatural?
- What might the scales represent?
- What is the point of listing the costs of these items in verse 6?

Cross-References

Luke 21:11 - There will be great earthquakes, and in various places famines and pestilences. And there will be terrors and great signs from heaven.

Matthew 24:7 - For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be famines and earthquakes in various places.

Teaching Points

1. A black horse and its rider had a pair of scales - The third seal is famine. Famine often follows closely on the heels of war. War disrupts agriculture and supply chains. Victorious armies may also steal or destroy crops. And countries that rely on export or import are often unable to trade to get the food that they need.

Historically, the invading army would often besiege a walled town. The inhabitants would be stuck inside the walls without any way to get supplies. The laws of supply and demand would cause food prices to skyrocket.

The pair of scales is for weighing food and cost.

2. Skyrocketing food prices - During the famine the cost of food will go up exponentially. It will take someone's entire day's earnings (a denarius) just to feed himself, to say nothing of the cost to feed his family. Everyone will suffer, but like in most disasters, the poor will face the brunt of it. They simply won't be able to

afford food to eat. This will cause even more social unrest and panic.

IV. Fourth Seal (7-8)

Discussion Questions

- What does the pale horse represent?
- Who gave them this authority?
- How many people die from this judgment?
- Should we take the number of "over a fourth" literally?

Cross-References

Psalm 115:3 - Our God is in the heavens; he does all that he pleases.

Job 42:2 - I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted.

Teaching Points

1. The pale horse and Death - The fourth horseman represents death. Here we see that in addition to war and famine, there is also pestilence. Historically plague often follows war as there are mass movements of people in unsanitary conditions. The biological capability of nations nowadays to fight with viruses should also be noted. Some of this pestilence could be the result of man-made biological warfare.

2. Wild beasts - Many people will die, perhaps even entire cities. As people die or become misplaced, animals will start to move beyond their typical territory. That will set the stage for more conflicts with wild animals that will cause even more death.

3. They were given authority over a fourth of the earth - The cumulative effect of the first four seal judgments is that over one-fourth of the world's population will be wiped out. The number "one-fourth" is likely literal. It is precise and it is also a different number than is given later for future judgments.

To put this in perspective, one-fourth of the earth's population is almost 2 billion people. That is about twenty-five times more than the total number of people who died as a result of WWI and WWII (including civilians, disease, famine, etc.).

Application: These are sobering statistics. What would God have us do? We should faithfully share the gospel to invite people to repent before it is too late.

V. Fifth Seal (9-11)

Discussion Questions

- What does the fifth seal represent?
- Who are these martyrs?
- Why were they martyred?
- Who killed them?
- What can we learn from this about the situation for believers during the tribulation?
- Why were they given a white robe (see Revelation 3:5)?
- What was their petition to God? What was His answer?
- Are you ready to be a martyr? How can you prepare for intense persecution such as this?

Cross-References

1 Peter 4:14-16 - If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. But let none of you suffer as a murderer or a thief or an evildoer or as a meddler. Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name.

Matthew 5:10 - Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Teaching Points

1. Martyrs - The fifth seal reveals the martyrs who have died. They were killed because they believed in the word of God and witnessed of Christ. As a tool of Satan, the antichrist will make war against any and all believers. Believers may well be the only ones who

would dare to stand up against him. Evil dictators often use scapegoats to deflect attention from their own policy failures. So it is logical that the worse the worldwide catastrophes get, the more the antichrist will stir up persecution against the saints to draw attention away from his failures.

2. Does this indicate that the rapture has not yet occurred - This seal judgment indicates that believers will be martyred during the tribulation period. Those who believe in a post-tribulation rapture argue that this is evidence that the church is still on earth during the tribulation. Those who believe in a pre-tribulation rapture argue that these are new believers who have turned to Jesus after the rapture and put them in a category which they call "tribulation saints."

3. The martyred are under the alter - It signifies that they are safe under God's protection. The enemy cannot touch them anymore. As Paul said in 2 Corinthians 5:8, "absent from the body is to be present with the Lord."

4. They cried out to God - We see their praise for God. And we see that they ask God to exercise His just judgments upon those who wrongly persecuted them. At the same time, they address Him as "Sovereign Lord," recognizing that He is in control and holds all-time in His hands.

5. They were each given a white robe -

Revelation 3:5 - The one who conquers will be clothed thus in white garments, and I will never blot his name out of the book of life. I will confess his name before my Father and before his angels.

Here is the fulfillment of this promise. God's people may suffer. They must suffer terrible torment and death at the hands of God's enemies. During those times of trials, it is a comfort to look forward to the end result. And that is shown clearly here. God's people are safe and protected by Him. They are redeemed by the blood of Christ. He gives them the clothes of righteousness that they need to be residents of heaven.

6. They were told to rest a little longer -

God has a plan to defeat His enemies and bring about justice for those who have been martyred. Until that time comes, He calls on His children to trust Him and wait.

Application: No matter what trials you are facing, waiting on the Lord can be extremely difficult. One of the reasons God allows these to us in the first place is to teach us to trust Him patiently. Know that God is sovereign. He has a perfect timetable for accomplishing His perfect plans in your life. Resolve to trust in Him completely until that time is fulfilled.

7. Until the number of their fellow servants is complete - Still more saints were going to be martyred.

VI. Sixth Seal (12-17)

Discussion Questions

- What happens at the sixth seal judgment? How is this different than the previous judgments?
- What other prophecies in Scripture may relate to this judgment?
- Did they know this was God?
- How did people respond when they saw such a clear sign that this was God's hand behind the judgment?
- What kind of people reacted this way?
- What does this show us about the people's hearts?
- Who can stand on the day of wrath?
- What application can you make from this passage? How do these future events affect your life now?

Cross-References

Acts 2:20 - The sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the day of the Lord comes, the great and magnificent day.

Joel 2:31 - The sun shall be turned to darkness, and the moon to blood, before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes.

Matthew 24:29 - Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken.

Teaching Points

1. The first supernatural seal - Notice that the 6th seal is the first one that is clearly supernatural. For the first 5, these are brought about by human activity. God is behind the scenes and is working things out according to His plan. At the same time, an unbeliever could easily attempt to explain away these things as "coincidence" or man-made.

The sixth seal is different. It is cosmic in scale. There is a great earthquake. The sun was blackened and the moon looked like blood. Mountains and islands are leveled. It is unmistakably a supernatural event. Mankind will no longer be able to explain away what they are seeing as coincidence. They must come to the clear conclusion that God is the author of these things. And though they clearly recognize it is God's wrath, they don't repent.

2. The divine judgments -

- Great earthquake - The earthquake is immense in scope. Every island and mountain are affected. Like the flood in Genesis 6, this is worldwide.
- The sun became black - The terror people will experience at this judgment is hard to imagine. It will seem as if it is the end of the world.
- The moon became like blood - Another cosmic sign will be the blood-red moon.
- The stars of the sky fell to the earth - Likely this is a reference to meteor showers that will hit across the planet.
- The sky vanished like a scroll that is rolled up - This one is not as easy to understand since we don't have any experiences to compare it with. (See Isaiah 34:4)

Some people equate these things with the second coming of Christ. We should note that in Joel 2:31 these things happen "before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes." These signs will occur during that time period, but perhaps not on the day of His second coming.

3. People's response - Everyone will be affected, from the rich and powerful, to the poor. When they see these signs, they clearly understand that God is behind them. However, they don't repent. They don't beg for forgiveness. Instead, they hide and desperately desire to kill themselves.

Reflect: A lot of people say they don't believe in God because they don't see Him. Here they will no longer be able to deny His existence. And they will know that He is angry with them. So why don't they repent and beg for mercy? What does this show us about the nature of the human heart?

4. The wrath of the Lamb - God is angry. For a long time, God's judgment was held at bay by His mercy and patience. His mercy is like a dam with water collecting behind it getting higher and higher. When the dam of mercy is removed, the judgment will be released like a torrent.

5. Who can stand? - Many will ask the question, "who can stand?" when these things are happening.

Reflect: Let's look at this question. Who will be able to stand?

Revelation 7

Outline

- I. Sealing of the 144,00 (1-8)
- II. The Great Multitude Before the Throne (9-17)

I. Sealing of the 144,00 (1-8)

Discussion Questions

- What are the "four winds" that the angels are holding back?
- What does it mean that "no wind might blow on earth or sea or against any tree?"
- How does verse 2 shed more light on this situation?
- Why are the angels doing this?
- What is the reference to harming earth and sea? Is there anything in the context, before or after this, that can explain this?
- Who will be sealed?
- What is the significance of the sealing? Why is it on the forehead? Do you think it will be visible?
- How will this comfort believers during this time?
- What does this passage show us about the nation of Israel during this time?
- Which tribe is not mentioned? Why?

Cross-References

Ephesians 1:13 - In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit.

2 Corinthians 1:22 - And who has also put his seal on us and given us his Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee.

John 6:27 - Do not labor for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you. For on him God the Father has set his seal.

Teaching Points

1. Overview - Chapters 6 and 8 describe the judgments that God is going to send against the world. Sandwiched in-between is this chapter, which highlights God's mercy toward those who belong to Him. We are reminded again and again that God's justice is not without mercy.

2. Holding back the four winds - The Bible often uses the term "four winds" to describe something global, coming from the "four corners" of the earth, North, South, East, and West. In this passage, the winds seem to refer to God's judgment on the world. In verse 1 the winds (judgment) are being held back from harming the earth. And in verse 3 the angels are commanded to wait to release judgment upon the earth until God seals His followers.

If you move forward to Revelation 8:6 the trumpet judgments are initiated. The first four of these target the earth's ecosystem, including the seas, trees, and grass. Each one of these begins when an angel blows the trumpet.

So we can conclude that chapter 7 portrays an interval. The judgments are put on hold for some time while God's people are sealed and protected.

Even in the midst of judgment, God is showing mercy. His judgment is not wild, chaotic, or random. It is released precisely according to the time and amount of God's choosing. Unlike a parent who loses his temper and abuses a child, God is in complete control. His judgments are firm. But at the same time, He shows grace and mercy, allowing for repentance.

If God did not hold back His wrath, then the earth would have been destroyed long ago!

Application: Firstly, we should be thankful to Him for His mercy. We should make sure that we receive His offer while there is time. Secondly, we should learn from Him by maintaining control of our emotions. Parents should not unleash upon their children. If for

example, you are angry and have lost control, then go to a quiet place first for a while to calm down. Only after you gain control of your emotions and can discipline your child in a measured way according to Biblical principles, should you proceed.

3. Sealing of the 144,000 - Throughout the New Testament, we see that God seals believers (Ephesians 1:13, 2 Corinthians 1:22, John 6:27). This is an invisible mark signifying the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. It shows that we belong to God and that we are under His protection.

Later in Revelation, we will see that the Antichrist will also require his followers to take a mark of loyalty, called the mark of the beast. This will prove that they belong to him. It will be a visible symbol of their allegiance.

The seal for the 144,000 is also likely a visible mark. Revelation 7:3 says that they will be sealed "on their foreheads." This is different terminology from the more generic sealing seen elsewhere in the New Testament. Specifically mentioning the forehead would be odd if it just means that the Holy Spirit indwells them or that they are under God's protection. Another reason to suspect that it is visible is that the mark of the beast will be visible. The ranks will be clearly defined. Satan will have his army of followers loyal to him and all can see and know who they are. And God will have a group of followers who are loyal to Him.

The forehead is the most visible place on the body. It is easily seen by other people. In Deuteronomy 6 believers are commanded to write God's Words on their foreheads and their hands. Words written on their hands could be checked easily by the wearer like a watch. But words written on the forehead were designed to quickly identify the person as a follower of God to others he encountered.

Therefore, it seems that these 144,000 are sealed visibly to quickly identify them as followers of God. As the sealed, they will likely have special protection from God's judgments (like the Israelites in Egypt). That is reinforced by the context, which shows us that the angels wait to bring judgment until after these believers are sealed. In addition, they would likely have special protection from the Antichrist's wrath. This is an educated guess considering that if they did not have special protection their visible mark would mean quick executions.

4. Their mission - We see that "after this" in verse 9 there is a great multitude of believers before the throne from all tribes and nations. That multitude does not specifically represent people from all times. Verse 14 tells us that these came out of the great tribulation. They lived during the seven years of the tribulation.

The great multitude of believers appears to be the effect of the ministry of the 144,000. These 144,000 likely have the mission to evangelize the world. And this public witness is why they need a mark of protection from God.

From the second half of the chapter, it is clear that their mission is extremely fruitful. Huge numbers will come to faith in Christ.

5. First fruits of the turning of the nation of Israel - Throughout Scripture, it is prophesied that the Jews will finally accept Jesus as the Messiah as a nation and come back to Him.

Zechariah 12:10 - And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and pleas for mercy, so that, when they look on me, on him whom they have pierced, they shall mourn for him, as one mourns for an only child, and weep bitterly over him, as one weeps over a firstborn.

*Romans 11:25-27 - Lest you be wise in your own sight, I do not want you to be unaware of this mystery, brothers: a partial hardening has come upon Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. And in this way all Israel will be saved, as it is written,
"The Deliverer will come from Zion,
he will banish ungodliness from Jacob";
"and this will be my covenant with them
when I take away their sins."*

Luke 13:34-35 - O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! Behold, your house is forsaken. And I tell you, you will not see me until you say, Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!"

The 144,000 are a kind of "first fruits" of this eventual turning of the nation of Israel to Jesus. By the very end of the tribulation, the nation as a whole (not every individual) will repent and trust in Christ.

6. 12,000 from each tribe - While the majority of the people from the ten northern tribes were exiled by the Assyrians and then lost, some of their descendants lived in the Southern Kingdom.

For example, Anna is listed as being from the tribe of Asher in Luke 2:36. This is almost 700 years after the Northern Kingdom was destroyed. Jesus was from the tribe of Judah. Paul was a Benjamite. John the Baptist was a Levite. For many, their lineage back to one of the other tribes is extremely difficult to trace at this point. However, God knows those who are His and He can keep track. We can note that most likely those from the Northern Tribes are not 100% purely belonging to that tribe, but would have mixed marriages in their ancestry so may descend from more than one tribe.

II. The Great Multitude Before the Throne

(9-17)

Discussion Questions

- What do we learn in this passage about God's end vision?
- How does seeing God's end vision affect your life now?
- Knowing that He desires people from every nation and tribe, what should you do?
- Who will be before the throne? What will they have faced?
- What will they be doing?
- How does this chapter contrast with the judgments in chapters 6 and 8?
- Knowing that you will be worshiping then, what should you do now?
- What protections are offered to the believers there?

Cross-References

Deuteronomy 4:5-6 – See, I have taught you decrees and laws as the Lord my God commanded me, so that you may follow them in the land you are entering to take possession of it. Observe them carefully, for this will show your wisdom and understanding to the nations, who will hear about all these decrees and say, “Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.”

Psalms 18:49 – Therefore I will praise you, Lord, among the nations; I will sing the praises of your name.

Psalms 96:3 – Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous deeds among all peoples.

Ezekiel 5:5 – “This is what the Sovereign Lord says: This is Jerusalem, which I have set in the center of the nations, with countries all around her.

Luke 2:32 - A LIGHT OF REVELATION TO THE GENTILES, And the glory of Your people Israel.

Teaching Points

1. A great multitude - There will be a great soul harvest even during the tribulation. While God will be judging the world for its rebellion, these same judgments serve as warnings to repent before it is too late. The witnesses all over the world along with the supernatural signs which were prophesied millennia ahead, will all serve to reap a huge harvest among those who finally decide to follow Jesus. The multitude of saved souls is so great that it says here "no one could number" it.

2. There will be representatives from every people group on earth -

Matthew 24:14 - This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all the nations, and then the end will come.

Throughout Scripture, we see God's desire to see people saved from every people group on the planet. It will not be a kingdom composed only of one or several favored countries.

The "tribes and peoples" mean that only will the large nations be represented. But minority people groups from within those nations

will also be included. Every group of people with their own language will have at least one representative.

Scriptures like these serve as the motivation for many movements of missionaries around the world. They rightly target unreached peoples with little or no access to the gospel.

Application: Consider how you can support this movement. What can you personally do to help see the gospel advance into every corner of the world?

3. They will be clothed in white (11, 14) - Every person will be there only because they have been righteous through the blood of the Lamb. No one will be there due to his own merit.

4. They will be worshiping - God created us to worship Him. That is what we are designed to do. The chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. He will receive the worship that He deserves and we will joyfully give it.

5. These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation - This reference to the great tribulation is strong evidence that people will have the opportunity to believe in Christ during this seven-year period. Large numbers will do so. At the same time, the tribulation is not over yet. The fact that huge numbers of believers from it are in heaven shows the sheer magnitude of persecution toward the saints, which results in a countless number of martyrs.

6. They have washed their robes and made them white - God is the one who makes people righteous. Yet people also have a responsibility to respond to His calling. And here they are recognized because they have done so.

7. Protection and promise - Many blessings will be bestowed on believers. Although they were martyred and faced horrible torment during their last days on earth, it will be worth it when they enter God's kingdom for eternity.

Romans 8:18 - For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.

- They are before the throne of God - They will be with Him forever.
- They will serve Him - It will be our honor to serve Him face to face.
- He will shelter them - No one will be able to hurt the saints anymore.
- They will never hunger or thirst - He will provide for all their needs.
- The sun shall not strike them - No more natural disasters will bother us.
- The Lamb will be their shepherd - We can directly follow Jesus and He will lead us.
- He will guide them to springs of living water - He will give us eternal life.
- God will wipe away every tear from their eyes - Believers will have perfect joy forever.

8. **Application:** invite more people to join this grand celebration -

Spurgeon - Someone asked ‘Will the heathen who have never heard the Gospel be saved?’ It is more a question with me whether we — who have the Gospel and fail to give it to those who have not — can be saved.

Our job is not to judge those people. God will judge them. But the fact that so many people have not heard, should drive us to do everything we can to give them an opportunity to hear. That means going out. That means taking initiative. A fisherman cannot catch any fish unless he throws a hook/net into the water. You cannot catch any fish unless you first share the gospel.

Matthew 9:36-38 – When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.”

This passage has been very meaningful in my own life. Many years ago (almost 20 now) my family moved overseas for a one-year commitment to be workers for the Lord here. Halfway through that year, I was contemplating this verse. And as I was thinking about the need for workers, I thought, “why not me?” And I would ask the same to you, “why not you?” You can and you should be a

worker in this harvest. There is a great harvest field here. But the workers are still far too few.

Many believers are not workers in the harvest at all. They go to church week after week, sit there, listen, and go home without ever helping. They are content to leave the “work” for the trained “professionals.” Let the pastor or missionary do that. That is their job. Is it? Yes, it is. But is also yours. This is the role that God has given to every single believer.

Elton Trueblood - Evangelism is not a professional job for a few trained men, but is instead the unrelenting responsibility of every person who belongs to the company of Jesus.

We see in Matthew 9 that Jesus had compassion for the people. Do you feel compassion for the lost around you? Every day you go to work, you pass thousands of people on the subway or buses. They are likely listening to music, playing games on their phones, or watching shows on their electronic devices. They get up early and go to work. There they stay and work long hours slaving away. They strive for more wealth, a higher position, and a greater sense of achievement. And yet just like the Jews millennia before they are like “sheep without a shepherd.” Do you feel compassion for the lost around you? That’s good, but if that is the end of it, then it is useless. Jesus’ compassion drove Him to act. His entire life was spent helping these very people.

Reflection: Now that we have seen God’s vision for the world and how we can be part of it, let us take a few minutes to personally reflect on what God wants us to do. What should you do with this list? Instead of telling you what to do with it, I would like you to spend a couple of minutes of silent prayer on your own asking God for His leading. After prayer/reflecting, write down any applications you think God would want you to do. Is there anything you need to obey? What should you do with this list?

Revelation 8

Outline

- I. The Seventh Seal and Golden Censor (1-5)
- II. The First Four Trumpet Judgments (6-13)

Seal Judgments Review

Today we come to Revelation 8 and the final seal judgment. Before we go further, I just want to zoom out and take a look at the big picture again. Revelation gives us its theme in the very first sentence of the book. It is the Revelation of Jesus Christ. The focus of the book is not the seals, the beasts, the Antichrist, or the mark of the beast. The focus is Jesus. These things are preludes to the big event when Jesus is revealed to the world. So let us keep our focus on Him as we continue studying Revelation.

We have seen the first six seal judgments. And Jesus is the one opening them.

Seal judgments include: deception, war, famine, pestilence, martyrdom, and cosmic signs. It is easy to get bogged down in the details and debate various points of eschatology.

More important is to consider what unites us. These are the things that all believers should hold to.

- Jesus is coming again.
- There is a bodily resurrection, of the saved to eternal life and of the wicked to punishment.
- Heaven and hell are literal places.
- One day every person will stand before God in judgment.
- God has a plan for history and He is bringing His plan to conclusion.

Let us be humble. That doesn't mean we should not hold a viewpoint. We should accurately divide the Word of truth. We are

seeking the truth. And we do so humbly, realizing that we are not infallible. But His Word is, so let us seek to understand it.

Before we get into Revelation 8, I want to highlight two things about the sequence of the seal and trumpet judgments.

Notice that the 6th seal is the first one that is clearly supernatural. For the first 5, these are brought about by human activity. God is behind the scenes and is working things out according to His plan. At the same time, an unbeliever could easily attempt to explain away these things as "coincidence" or man-made. But the sixth seal cannot be explained away. It will affect the planet on a cosmic scale. Those who witness it will recognize that it is God's wrath, and still refuse to repent.

This then leads into the seventh seal. Humankind's unrepentance in the face of divine judgment means that more judgment is on the way. Let's now zoom in to the text to see the seventh seal.

I. The Seventh Seal and Golden Censor (1-5)

Discussion Questions

- Why do you think there is about half an hour of silence in heaven when the seventh seal is broken?
- Why does John say "about" half an hour?
- What does it mean that our prayers are like incense to God?
- How does knowing your prayers are like incense to God affect your prayer life?
- How are the prayers answered?
- What are some Biblical examples where prayers were answered, but the answer was not seen right away?
- What is the seventh seal?

Cross-References

Exodus 37:29 - He made the holy anointing oil also, and the pure fragrant incense, blended as by the perfumer.

Psalm 4:4 - Tremble and do not sin; when you are on your beds, search your hearts and be silent.

Teaching Points

1. The Lamb opens the seventh seal - Firstly, we see that Jesus is once again the one opening the seal. He is identified as a Lamb. It reminds us that although He is now executing judgment, He is also gentle. Salvation is possible through His sacrifice. So those who face judgment are doing so by their own choice.

2. Silence in Heaven for about half an hour - When this seal is opened there is about half an hour of silence. This does not mean that time passes in heaven the same as it does on earth. John is writing from his perspective.

The silence shows the awesome and terrible nature of what is to come. It also increases the anticipation and focuses everyone's attention on what will unfold. It may also be that the silence showed the solemnity and seriousness of what was going to happen.

3. Angels preparing for trumpet judgments - The angels then prepare to initiate the next set of judgments. We will talk more about this in a moment.

4. Golden censer / Prayers of the saints - Revelation contains many images that are foreshadowed in the Old Testament tabernacle and temple. And this is one of them. There is an angel with a golden censer and he offers incense together with the prayers of the saints on the golden altar before the throne.

A censer is a small container used to hold coals. Incense is then put onto the coals. As they burn a cloud of incense rises. We see this description in Leviticus 16.

Leviticus 16:12-13 - And he shall take a censer full of coals of fire from the altar before the Lord, and two handfuls of sweet incense beaten small, and he shall bring it inside the veil and put the incense on the fire before the Lord, that the cloud of the incense may cover the mercy seat that is over the testimony, so that he does not die.

What we see here is that the incense comes before the Lord together with our prayers. Our prayers are like incense to Him.

Psalm 141:2 - *Let my prayer be counted as incense before you, and the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice!*

One purpose when God's people face tribulation is to teach us to pray. There is nothing like total desperation to drive a person to pray.

What is interesting here, is that we see a direct response from heaven to the prayers. The same censer which presented the incense with the prayers is now filled with burning coals, which are cast upon the earth. From the earth's perspective, these appear as thunder, lightning, and another earthquake.

The lesson is simple. God listens. He responds. The prayers go up to heaven and the answer is returned.

Application: Let us be people of prayer. When things around us get worse, it is not the time to complain or give up. It is time to go to our knees and redouble our prayers. No matter how imperfect or incomplete our prayers are, they are pleasant to Him, because they mean that His children know that they need Him.

5. The seventh seal contains the seven trumpets (Russian doll) -

Here the seventh seal judgment links to the seven trumpet judgments. Opening the seventh seal reveals the 7 trumpets which are within. If you remember, the seals sealed shut a scroll. As Jesus broke the seal, the contents of the scroll were then opened, revealing the judgments within. Thus, the 7th seal opens the portion of the scroll containing the 7 trumpets.

We can envision this as something like Russian dolls. And you can imagine when the seventh one is opened that there are seven more inside.

We will see that the judgments are increasing in intensity as it moves from the seals to the trumpets. Whereas most of the seal judgments were the result of human activity, these are clearly divine and supernatural. The first four target the earth and its ecosystem. The next three are even worse. They are described as "Woes" and the inhabitants of the earth are directly targeted. After that, the bowl judgments grow even worse.

II. The First Four Trumpet Judgments (6-13)

Discussion Questions

- What do these four judgments target?
- Why do you think God targets the earth before people?
- Are these judgments more or less intense than the seal judgments? What can you learn about God's character from this?
- Should we take these judgments as literal or symbolic?
- What is "Wormwood?"
- How do you think the world may explain away these disasters at that time?
- How do the judgments shape your view of sin? And of God?
- How can you become less attached to this world?

Cross-References

Proverbs 21:15 - When justice is done, it is a joy to the righteous but terror to evildoers.

Romans 12:19 - Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord."

Isaiah 30:18 - Therefore the Lord waits to be gracious to you, and therefore he exalts himself to show mercy to you. For the Lord is a God of justice; blessed are all those who wait for him.

Teaching Points

1. Literal or not? - As we start looking at the individual trumpets, we need to ask an important question. Are these literal or not? How you answer that question is probably defined by the overall view you take toward the whole book of Revelation. "Is this literal or not?" is a question many ask throughout the book. And different takes on that question is largely responsible for the different views of Revelation.

In the following trumpets we see, hail, fire, blood, a third of trees burnt, all grass burnt, a third of the sea becoming blood, a third of

living sea creatures dead, a third of freshwater becoming bitter, and more.

Are these things symbolic, or real?

I believe we should interpret these things in a literal way.

We should consider first if the Bible uses language like this elsewhere, and if it was literal or symbolic then. And when we look at that, we will see that it makes a strong case this should be taken literally.

A. Egypt - Exodus 7:17-18 - *Thus says the Lord, "By this you shall know that I am the Lord: behold, with the staff that is in my hand I will strike the water that is in the Nile, and it shall turn into blood. The fish in the Nile shall die, and the Nile will stink, and the Egyptians will grow weary of drinking water from the Nile."*

Here God said He was going to turn the water to blood and that the animals in it would die. What happened? He turned it to blood and the animals in it died. It was literal.

Exodus 8:2 - *I will plague all your country with frogs.*

God said He was going to bring frogs. And frogs came. Not symbolic ones. Noisy, ugly, annoying ones.

Then the dust became gnats. Actual gnats.

Exodus 8:21 - *And the houses of the Egyptians shall be filled with swarms of flies, and also the ground on which they stand.*

Then God said He would send flies and He sent flies.

We don't have time to look at all of them, but I will highlight two of the last ones.

Exodus 9:18 - *Behold, about this time tomorrow I will cause very heavy hail to fall, such as never has been in Egypt from the day it was founded until now.*

God promised to send hail. Then He sent hail. They were literal bricks of ice from the sky which devastated the land. If He said hail

then and it was hail and He says hail here, then why should the hail be symbolic of something else?

Exodus 10:21 - Then the Lord said to Moses, "Stretch out your hand toward heaven, that there may be darkness over the land of Egypt, a darkness to be felt."

God said there was going to be darkness. Then there was actual darkness. Not a symbolic one.

But this is not only the case with Egypt. We saw God intervening in the world with supernatural judgment many times.

Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed by real fire.

In the time of Joshua, hail was rained down on their enemies and the sun stopped. Real cosmic events.

The sons of Korah were swallowed up by the ground in judgment. Aaron's first two sons were devoured by fire in judgment.

All of these things have something in common. They are literal descriptions of real events. I believe that here in Revelation when God is pronouncing these judgments, these are also real, literal judgments.

In a Bible interpretation course, I heard a phrase, I will never forget, "When the common sense makes sense, seek no other sense." That means that the Bible should be read in a straightforward way. Unless it is clearly symbolic, then it should be understood in a real sense. That is not to say that there are no symbols in Revelation. There are. But the simplest and most common understanding of hail, blood, and fire, is that it is hail, blood, and fire.

And examining all of Scripture, we see God has acted that way again in judgment. It is reasonable that in the final supernatural, cosmic judgments seen in Revelation that He will do so again, and in an even more spectacular fashion.

If it is symbolic, then it becomes much harder to interpret. Then you would have to try to match hail, fire, blood, burning, the

mountain thrown into the sea, and all of these things to something else. And that is very difficult to do.

Now, why is this important?

I believe that God tells ahead of time clearly what will happen so that when it happens, there will be no denying it. People will know that God has spoken. And people will know that He fulfilled it. They will know that God is God. And that fits with how God works.

Amos 3:7 - For the Lord God does nothing without revealing his secret to his servants the prophets.

The vaguer a prophecy is, the less powerful the impact when it is fulfilled. Nostradamus was vague and people are still trying to fit his prophecies into events that happen. And sometimes they seem to make some sense. You can generally find some correlation if you are looking hard enough for it.

Some also try to fit the events of Revelation onto things that have happened already, but it can be challenging. But God does not need to be vague. The simplest explanation is that since we cannot find a very clear correlation in history for these things, they have not happened yet.

I believe that God wants it to be clear so that when it happens people KNOW, they KNOW it is God. Every last vestige of excuse will be ripped away. No other explanations will make any sense, except that God said it, and then God did it. That fact in itself will give Him great glory.

2. First Trumpet - The first angel blew his trumpet and... Each trumpet blast is followed by a specific judgment. The trumpet is a warning of what is to come.

The first trumpet judgment brings hail and fire and blood thrown upon the earth. One-third of the earth is burned up, one-third of trees, and all green grass. The judgments now are worse than the seals. Huge numbers of people are affected. We don't know if this is a contiguous land area or if it takes place throughout the globe. But at least some of the effects are felt around the globe.

3. Second Trumpet - John describes the next trumpet judgment as something like a mountain being thrown into the sea. Here we see divine judgment on the oceans. One-third of them are turned to blood and one-third of the sea creatures die. It reminds us of the judgment on the Nile in Egypt. Because John uses imprecise language, "something like a mountain," it actually suggests this is to be taken literally. He was trying to describe something he was seeing, that he had never experienced before.

Some people try to speculate on what this will be or compare it to things we know of like meteors, nuclear bombs, etc. It is not necessary. The point is not exactly what this thing is. The point is that it is coming and it is coming specifically as an act of judgment.

Note that even ships are affected. Blood is a different density than water. So ships would float higher. That would cause many to capsize.

Can you imagine the horror of flying in an airplane over a stretch of ocean and only seeing blood as far as the eye can see? This is completely frightening if you are not on good terms with the Judge. All of these things make the fear induced by Covid pale in comparison.

3. Third Trumpet - The next judgment is on fresh water. Every part of the earth's ecosystem is being targeted. A giant object falls to the earth from space. It is something like a comet in that it is ablaze as it comes through the earth's atmosphere. One-third of fresh water in the world turns bitter. Its poison kills those who drink it. Such a change to the earth's water supply would completely devastate many countries, businesses, the world's economy, and lives.

4. Fourth Trumpet - The next judgment is on the celestial lights. We see the continued pattern of thirds. A third of the oceans and fresh waters have been destroyed. And now we see that a third of the sun, moon, and stars were each struck that "third of the day might be kept from shining." Very possibly that means that the time of day is cut short by one-third so that the sun shines for eight hours instead of twelve. That would cause temperatures to plummet around the world, causing something like a nuclear winter. Many would die from the frigid temperatures. Others would be forced to spend all of their time just trying to keep warm

and survive. All would know, that the time of God's wrath has come. He is not happy and it shows.

I am reminded of the song "It's a Wonderful World" by George Weiss.

[Verse 1]

I see trees of green, red roses too
I see them bloom for me and you
And I think to myself
What a wonderful world

[Verse 2]

I see skies of blue and clouds of white
The bright blessed days, the dark sacred nights
And I think to myself
What a wonderful world

But here we see it's not a wonderful world anymore. The beautiful green grass is all gone.

Here we see the world becoming more inhospitable and barren. And it reminds us of how far people's sin has taken them from God. In Eden, people lived in a paradise made just for them. As sin runs its full course, the very world He gave us is being taken away. It's turning from a paradise into a wasteland as judgment against mankind's willful and repeated rebellion.

Brothers and sisters, that is where sin and rebellion lead. Satan makes big promises. Enjoy yourself. Follow your own desires. You can create a wonderful world for yourself where you are king. It is a lie. An illusion. We cannot have a wonderful world outside of God's will. This is where sin fully pursued finally leads, to divine judgment.

5. What Does This Teach Us About God?

The world is being laid waste. How could God do this? What does this teach us about God?

A. He is Just - Firstly, we see God's justice. The unbeliever might look at this and say, "God is cruel." That is certainly what Satan wants you to think. But it is not the case. God's original creation

was "very good." That was the paradise that He gave people. But people rebelled and messed it up. And the rebellion that began with Adam and Eve continues and is getting worse. It is that rebellion in the face of all of God's goodness that brings the world to this point.

People often ask, "If God is good then why does He allow suffering? Why doesn't He just end sin?" Well, he will. That is what is happening in the book of Revelation. God is going to end sin once and for all. But you cannot end sin without judging the sinner. So first the sinners are judged. And then sin will be finally ended.

God is the "I AM WHO I AM," not who people expect or want Him to be. And who He is, is just. The destruction in Revelation is not the result of a capricious God. It is instead an example of the Biblical principle, "you reap what you sow." Mankind is responsible. And I want you to see and understand something. When the sixth seal judgment occurred it was the first seal with many clear, cosmic signs. When people were confronted so clearly with the truth that God is real and that God is unhappy with them, what did they do? Did they repent? No, they hid from Him. And they wanted to kill themselves rather than turn to the Lord.

B. He is Merciful - God's mercy and God's justice are often seen side by side. This is true here as well. God tells the world what will happen ahead of time so that when it does, they will know without any doubt that He is true and real. As we saw in the last chapter there are believers coming to Christ and in chapter 11 there are witnesses telling of Him. So these judgments, while painful, also serve as a wake-up call to the lost. Time is quickly running out. Turn to God and repent before it is too late.

The message for mankind is always the same. Repent now. Today is the day of salvation. Don't wait.

Application: Don't grow attached to this world -

1 John 2:15,17 - Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.

The world is going to end. It is headed for judgment. The things we see don't last. The things most people pursue; pleasure, money, and fame, do not last. The pleasures of this world are fleeting. The security offered in this world is temporary.

Always ask yourself the question, "Is the work I am doing going to make a difference for eternity?"

Reflect: In light of what is coming, what should we do?

Some say believers will go through the tribulation and some think we will be raptured first. I have heard of at least five different rapture theories with different timings. Personally, I believe the church will be raptured before the tribulation, what is known as pre-trib. However, I am not 100% sure and I hold that view "loosely" in the sense that I know I could be wrong. The Bible teaches the rapture, but the timing is not quite as clear.

The interesting thing is that whichever you believe, the application is the same.

Get close to Jesus. Rely on Jesus. Build your relationship with Him. He is the only hope. Either He will save you out of it. Or He will preserve and strengthen you through it, giving you the courage and perseverance to face these things. Either way, He is our salvation. As it says in Revelation 6:17, "Who is able to stand these things?" The only ones who can stand are those who are saved by the Lamb.

Revelation 9

Outline

- I. The Fifth Trumpet (1-12)
- II. The Sixth Trumpet (13-21)

I. The Fifth Trumpet (1-12)

Discussion Questions

- What or who is the star fallen from heaven?
- Who allowed the key to be given to this being? Why?
- What came out of the bottomless pit?
- What do you think these locusts are?
- What does it mean that they "were given" power? What did they have the power to do? What were they not allowed to do?
- Who will be protected?
- Why would the people attacked by them want to die?
- What can you learn from these creatures from the description of their appearance?
- Who is their leader?
- What motivates them to torture mankind? What can we learn about demons from this?

Cross-References

Luke 10:18 - And he said to them, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven.

Isaiah 14:12-14 - How you are fallen from heaven,
O Day Star, son of Dawn!
How you are cut down to the ground,
you who laid the nations low!
You said in your heart,

I will ascend to heaven;
above the stars of God
I will set my throne on high;
I will sit on the mount of assembly
in the far reaches of the north;
I will ascend above the heights of the clouds;
I will make myself like the Most High.

Revelation 20:1-3 - Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding in his hand the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain. And he seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years, and threw him into the pit, and shut it and sealed it over him, so that he might not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years were ended. After that he must be released for a little while.

Genesis 6:2 - The sons of God saw that the daughters of man were attractive. And they took as their wives any they chose.

Teaching Points

1. I saw a star fallen from heaven to earth - Clearly this is a being and not an actual star. This being is referred to as "he" and "him." Suggestions as to the identity of this figure include a good or bad angel or Satan.

Since he is described as "fallen," this would indicate that the being is an evil angel. At least two other texts describe Satan himself in a very similar fashion as being like a star that fell from heaven (a). In Luke 10:18, Jesus says that He witnessed this, thus establishing His authority over and pre-existence to Satan.

Thus, the most likely interpretation of this is that Satan himself is given the key to open this bottomless pit.

2. He was given a key - Satan is not the ruler of the abyss. He is not in charge. Neither did he lock the inhabitants within. The fact that he was given a key shows us that he is not the authority himself. Instead, he is under authority. God, Himself is the one in charge and the one who allowed him to have the key. It was given to him at a specific time for a specific purpose.

Here we see the chess game between God and Satan. Satan has a massive ego. He believes that he can outwit God. He believes that he can come up with cunning plans and strategies to defeat the Creator. But his actions serve to accomplish God's greater purposes.

Satan does not ask God, "what do you want me to do with this key?" and then happily obeys God's instructions. Rather, he acts according to his own depraved nature, wanting to unleash destruction and evil upon the earth. All of the time, God is one step ahead. He knows exactly what Satan is going to do and allows it for specific reasons to bring His plan to completion.

From this, we are reminded again that God is sovereign. Anything that resembles a short-term victory for Satan is being used by God for His ultimate victory. Jesus' death on the cross is a classic example of this. Satan possessed Judas and had him betray Jesus to death. It looked like a victory for Satan, but was the final nail in his coffin.

Application: When you look at the world around you, it often looks bleak. Many times, it seems that Satan is winning. Do not be discouraged. Remember that God is allowing these things to happen according to His sovereign will. He has greater purposes that we can see and will bring everything to its perfect conclusion.

3. The bottomless pit - It can also be translated as the "abyss." In this passage, it is clearly the abode of a certain group of demons. How can we understand this?

Currently, there are demons loose upon the earth. Jesus' ministry made this clear. He demons out of many people. These were demons that roamed the earth. At the same time, certain demons are locked in the abyss.

When Jesus was casting a legion of demons out of a possessed man, they begged him not to put them into the abyss.

Luke 8:31 - *And they begged him not to command them to depart into the abyss.*

Thus, we see that even while some demons are roaming the earth, others are locked in this abyss, the bottomless pit.

Here are some other references to this.

Jude 1:6 - And the angels who did not stay within their own position of authority, but left their proper dwelling, he has kept in eternal chains under gloomy darkness until the judgment of the great day.

2 Peter 2:4-6 - For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to chains of gloomy darkness to be kept until the judgment; if he did not spare the ancient world, but preserved Noah, a herald of righteousness, with seven others, when he brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly; if by turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to ashes he condemned them to extinction, making them an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly.

Certain demons were so egregiously evil in stepping beyond God's boundaries that He would no longer tolerate them to be loose on the earth. They ignored His design and committed great evils. Therefore, instead of waiting to judge them at the final judgment He pre-emptively had them chained in the abyss to await their judgment. God's mercy was at work. He did not allow these demons to influence the world. Satan himself will be locked there during the millennium so that he will not be able to deceive the world during that time (Revelation 20:1-3).

However, both of these references show that one day they will be let out. And it will be at the time of judgment. Revelation 9 appears to be this time. First, He will use them to judge the world. Shortly after this, they will be judged.

On one hand, we should be comforted in knowing that the demons are under His authority. Many of the very worst of these are locked away for the time being. That is God's mercy toward us. On the other hand, it is a somber thing to recognize that one day in the future God will allow these demons out. When He does, they will go on a rampage.

4. Smoke and locusts from the shaft - A great amount of smoke will rise and darken the sun, demonstrating the worldwide catastrophe this will be. It is not just a minor local event, which will affect a few. The demon horde unleashed will spread throughout the earth.

They will be unleashed like locusts. In the Bible, locusts are almost always used by God as judgment. They are a plague, descending upon and destroying everything in their path. That is what these demons will be like. It will not be actual locusts, but something far worse and more destructive.

5. They were given power and told not to harm - Verses 3-5 establishes the limits placed on the demonic horde. Once again, we are reminded that God is sovereign. Even in the midst of such horrible judgment, he shows mercy by limiting the impact of these demons. Without God's clear boundaries, they would assuredly do far worse. Four limits are placed upon them.

- They were told not to harm grass, green plant, or tree. The first four trumpet judgments targeted the earth and its ecosystem. The fifth and sixth trumpet judgments will target people. Specifically, they will not have the power to destroy the earth. Such demons could severely affect the habitability of the earth, but God will not allow them to.
- They are not allowed to harm anyone with the seal of God. His seal is divine protection for His people. How priceless that seal is! At the same time, it will be very clear to all who are on the earth that this is a judgment upon those who rebel against God. His faithful are not affected. The clear distinction is an object lesson. It both encourages the saints and also is an appeal to the wicked to repent.
- They are allowed to torment them only for five months. The torment would not last forever. Here again, is God's mercy at work. This is like a taste of hell. God allows them to experience some of the agonies of hell for a short term (in comparison with eternity) to encourage them to repent so that they will not experience it forever. For those who do, these five months of torture will be the best thing that ever happened to them.
- They are not allowed to kill them. God wants them to go through the entire five months. That period will give them ample opportunity to reflect upon their lives and consider turning to the Lord.

Everything that happens in our lives is allowed by God.

Application: Firstly, don't complain! Second, don't lose hope. Third, look for the lessons inside of the trials that you face because God allows them for a reason.

6. People will seek death, but will not be able to find it - We don't see repentance. We don't see people seeking the Lord. Instead, they are seeking death. They want to stop the agony. Again, it is God's mercy that keeps them from doing so. Though they will want to commit suicide, they will be unable to. Though many will be cursing God, little will they know that death will usher them immediately into a far worse state with no more second chances. Death is not the end, but after death comes judgment (Hebrews 9:27). Many today also seek comfort in death, but will not find it. The only comfort is in Christ.

7. The appearance of the demons - Firstly, we should note that John's descriptions are meant only to give us an idea and are not exact. He repeatedly says that they are "like" this or that. In other words, they are beyond human description. His efforts give us an idea.

So what are they like?

In short, terrible. Horrible. Monstrosities. While demons do not normally have a body, here they can take the form of one (or are given a body by God). They are ugly and ferocious. We see that they have some type of authority by the crowns on their heads. And they have great power to inflict damage. They have one purpose, carnage. They pack a terrible bite like a lion and a sting like a scorpion.

You can imagine that people will desperately try to shield themselves from the bite of these foul beasts. Yet that will be extremely difficult. They are small and quick and can fly and run. It is unlikely many will be able to escape their sting for long. And once they are stung, it starts the clock on five months of agony. No human medicine will be able to stop it.

8. Their leader Abaddon - This demonic leader is not mentioned by name elsewhere in Scripture. He is most likely one of the chief "powers" under Satan (Ephesians 6:12). Since he is the leader of this group of demon rogues, we can assume that he likely spearheaded their evil plans which resulted in their imprisonment. So like the others, he has had lots of time to stew and plan his revenge. He will be ready to storm out of the pit and unleash another wave of destruction.

Abaddon is their king, which is another proof that these are not literal locusts.

Proverbs 30:27 - *The locusts have no king, yet they all advance in ranks.*

Demons are not just some mythical fantasy or a nameless force of evil. They are real beings, which rebelled against God. And Abaddon is one of their top leaders.

9. The first woe has passed; behold, two woes are still to come - It's not over. There are two more trumpet judgments to come.

II. The Sixth Trumpet (13-21)

Discussion Questions

- What happens at the sixth trumpet?
- Who are these four angels and what are they going to do?
- What plagues would be unleashed?
- Should we take these beasts as literal or symbolic? Why?
- How did most people respond to this judgment?
- What do verses 20-21 show you about God's purpose for allowing these judgments?

Teaching Points

1. Release the four angels who are bound at the river Euphrates - Little is known about these four angels. Plainly they are fallen angels or they would not be bound. Perhaps their binding is related to the binding of the other fallen angels in the bottomless pit.

In any case, God is restraining them until the exact time, year, month, day, and hour that they were prepared for.

They are bound in or near the Euphrates, which is a river often associated with Babylon. This region was the cradle of human civilization from the time of the Garden of Eden.

2. To kill a third of mankind - As the previous trumpets targeted one-third of different aspects of the world's ecosystem, so this judgment will target one-third of people. It will come after the five months of torture by the demon swarm. It is interesting to note that for the fifth trumpet judgment, the demons were not permitted to kill people. God will give them a certain amount of time to reflect and hopefully repent. Only after that time passes with no effect on most people's hearts, will the next judgment be unleashed.

Although the judgments are serious and terrifying, we still see over and over again God's mercy in giving ample opportunities for repentance, right up until the very end.

3. The mounted troops - John reports the number of mounted troops as 200,000,000.

What are these troops? Are they world armies or another demonic horde of a different shape?

Some equate these descriptions with technologically advanced armies. Others believe that they represent the power of a demonic army following the four fallen angels.

It is difficult to be dogmatic. Of more concern, is the effect on the earth. They will unleash three plagues: fire, smoke, and sulfur. These three plagues will kill one-third of mankind

4. God's purpose - So why would God do this? Why would he allow demon hordes to be unleashed on the world, bringing torture and death?

God is angry and in these judgments we see His wrath towards sin along with His justice. At the same time, verses 20-21 reveal a deeper purpose.

Revelation 9:20-21 - The rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands nor give up worshiping demons and idols of gold and silver and bronze and stone and wood, which cannot see or hear or walk, nor did they repent of their murders or their sorceries or their sexual immorality or their thefts.

Two times in these verses we see that the people did not repent. Even though these judgments came, they kept on chasing after sin. Evidently, God sends these plagues as a warning toward humankind. He warns them that continued rebellion will be dealt with harshly.

He literally gives them a taste of hell, showing them what eternal destiny has in store for them if they will not repent and acknowledge Him. Although it is extremely painful, it is a great gift.

It is much like the ghost from Christmas future in the Christmas Carol did for Ebenezer Scrooge. But when Scrooge saw what would become of him, he changed his ways.

Imagine if a person who smokes is allowed to feel the agonizing pain of lung cancer for a week. Would he stop smoking? The sad truth is many would not.

And sadly, Scrooge is a work of fiction. In Revelation 9, we see that most people will not repent.

Likely this does not indicate that zero people will repent. Rather "the rest of mankind" refers to people as a group. The vast majority will not turn to God or receive His mercy. Based on what we learned in Revelation 7, it is likely that many will, but they will be in the minority.

Throughout the Bible, God's justice and grace are displayed side by side over and over again. Even in Revelation at the end of the world, God's grace is manifest through His judgments. These are meant to serve as a divine wake-up call to repent before it is too late.

Application: Do not wait to repent of unconfessed sin. Do not live for yourselves now and declare that later you will turn to God after you have enjoyed the good life today.

The longer one walks in sin the harder his heart becomes and the more difficult it is to confess.

2 Corinthians 6:2 - Behold, now is the favorable time; behold, now is the day of salvation.

5. Hard hearts of mankind -

Reflect: Why would people brazenly continue in rebellion against God even in the face of such torture and clear signs of God's displeasure?

Jeremiah 17:9 - *The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?*

Perhaps nowhere in Scripture is the total depravity of mankind more apparent than in these chapters in Revelation. Plague after plague, judgment after judgment, warning after warning, and people still refuse to submit to God.

They willfully choose to worship demons, probably the very demons that torture and kill them! They willfully worship idols when God's existence and supremacy cannot be plainer. And they continue on in their sins.

I believe that the end of verse 21 is the secret to why they continue to reject God. They do so because they love their sin. God is light. He is good. He hates sin. And they know He doesn't tolerate it. So the choice is to turn to God and *away* from their sin or reject God and *continue* in their sin. And they love their sin so much, that they are willing to face God's judgments and continue in it. Deliberately and with eyes wide open, they choose sin instead of a loving Savior.

Application: It is easy to look at their choice and think how foolish it is. But what about us? Do we choose sin instead of God? Do we willfully continue in behavior we know God hates? What sin is keeping you from a close fellowship with God? Spend some time in prayer and reflection. Let the lesson for us today be to repent now. Let us not harden our hearts and continue in willful sin. Instead let us humbly confess, coming to Him for the strength to overcome.

Revelation 10

Outline

- I. The Mighty Angel Shouts (1-4)
- II. The Angel Swears No More Delay (5-7)
- III. John Eats the Scroll (8-11)

I. The Mighty Angel Shouts (1-4)

Discussion Questions

- What are your observations about this angel?
- What is this little scroll?
- What do you think the seven thunders refer to?
- Why do you think John was not allowed to write down what he heard?
- If he couldn't write it down, then why did God allow him to see it?
- What does the fact of this "secret" tell us about what we know of God's plans?

Cross-References

Daniel 12:1-9 - This passage contains a similar encounter between Daniel and a mighty angel who asks him to seal up some of the contents of what he has seen.

Psalms 18:13 - The LORD also thundered in the heavens, and the Most High uttered his voice, hailstones and coals of fire.

Revelation 4:5 - From the throne came flashes of lightning, and rumblings and peals of thunder, and before the throne were burning seven torches of fire, which are the seven spirits of God.

Teaching Points

1. The interlude - In this chapter, there is an interlude between the 6th and 7th trumpet judgments. The 5th, 6th, and 7th trumpets were described as three terrible woes. The first two were unleashed already and contained terrible demonic attacks directly against unsealed people. The 7th trumpet will contain all of the bowl judgments, which escalate in intensity from what we have seen so far.

Here is another "calm before the storm" moment similar to the one between the 6th and 7th seals when there was about half an hour of silence in heaven (Revelation 8:1).

2. Another mighty angel - The identity of this angel is not given. However, it is distinct from many of the other angels. More time and effort are given to describe this angel. It is evident that he is very powerful. He has a rainbow over his head. His face is like the sun. And his legs are like pillars of fire.

These descriptions (especially regarding his face and legs) are similar to the descriptions of Jesus in Revelation 1. And no other place in Scripture can we see so many clear descriptions of an angel. This has led some to conclude that this is Jesus.

But John describes this being as "another mighty angel." (See Revelation 5:2) It is hardly a description you would expect for Jesus, the Son of God. He is not "another" anything. He is altogether unique. Jesus is different from and greater than angels (Hebrews 1). If the author wanted us to know this was Christ, he would not have called this being an angel.

Most likely this is one of the highest angels in God's created order, perhaps Michael, though we cannot be sure. Also, the meaning of "Gabriel" is "Mighty One."

The way he is described shows that this angel comes directly from the presence of God. He is on a divine mission and carries divine authority.

3. The rainbow - It was established to show God's covenant with his people, that he would never again destroy the world by water. Here it seems to show that God is going to finally judge the world again (though in keeping His promise, not with water). The time

He waited from Genesis 6 until this point in history shows us His remarkable patience.

4. He had a little scroll open in his hand - It is an interesting picture. On the one hand, you have a towering angel so large he can simultaneously stand on sea and land. And in his massive hands is a little scroll.

The contrast there reminds us how much power is packed into the written word of God. God's words can be written on something very small. At the same time, His words are powerful and change the course of history and the universe.

We cannot be sure what the little scroll is. It could be the same scroll mentioned in Revelation 5:1. It could also contain something in God's plan that He was about to enact between the sixth and seventh trumpets.

5. The seven thunders - In the Bible, thunder is often a reference to God's voice, which comes forth like thunder from the heavens. And seven is the number representing God. Thus, it seems that when this angel calls out, God Himself answers from heaven with His thundering voice.

Psalms 18:13 - The LORD also thundered in the heavens, and the Most High uttered his voice, hailstones and coals of fire.

Alternatively, it could be that the seven thunders represent seven mystery judgments (hence the fact that John was commanded to seal up what he had witnessed).

6. Seal up what the seven thunders have said - Revelation 10 is a very mysterious chapter. Something remarkable and amazing is happening, evidenced by the fact that God revealed it to John. At the same time, we don't know what that is.

To paraphrase, God says, "I am going to do something amazing, but I am not going to tell you what that is."

Reflect: What is the purpose of that?

Though it may seem odd to us, when we consider this we can learn some important lessons.

A. God's plans (past, present, and future) are far more than we will ever know. We only know a very small fraction about God and about what He is doing. Just because we cannot see God at work does not mean that He is not.

B. Knowing that should make us humble. It is easy for people to become prideful and judge God based on what they think He is, is not, or should be doing. Why doesn't God send a missionary to that lost tribe in South America? Why does God let corrupt politicians get re-elected?

God simply does not tell us everything He is doing. We know what we need to know.

We could spend a lot of time speculating on things like the identity of the angel, the contents of the little book, the message revealed by the seven thunders, or the way we will pass our time once we get to heaven. The fact is, none of these things are important for us to know right now.

2 Peter 1:3 - His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence.

If the Bible does not speak on the issue, we need not spend lots of time speculating about it. Firstly, we will never come to the answer through such speculation (since we can only know the truth that God has revealed). Secondly, we don't need to know it. If it was, He would have told it to us.

Application: Redirect the energy and time you spend speculating/researching unanswerable questions to learning and applying the simple truths taught in Scripture.

II. The Angel Swears No More Delay (5-7)

Discussion Questions

- What does this passage teach us about God? About angels?
- What does the angel swear?

- What does his promise that there would be "no more delay" refer to?
- What is the trumpet call in verse 7?
- Why is it important that God announced these things to his prophets ahead of time?

Cross-References

Leviticus 19:12 - You shall not swear by my name falsely, and so profane the name of your God: I am the Lord.

Habakkuk 2:3 - For still the vision awaits its appointed time; it hastens to the end—it will not lie. If it seems slow, wait for it; it will surely come; it will not delay.

Teaching Points

1. The angel swears by God - In the Scriptures, swearing is a very serious thing. In many places, we are warned not to swear lightly or rashly, but to think through it very carefully before making promises. This solemn oath shows that the angel means what he says.
2. There will be no more delay - It seems that this angel is somehow tasked with bringing about the next stage in God's plan for the world. Then next judgments would begin after the seventh trumpet is blown and the bowl judgments are poured out upon the earth.

Since he is tasked by God, the angel means business. He is quickly going to set God's plans into motion. Throughout the book of Revelation, we see that once it is God's time to act, He is swift. Most of the cataclysmic world events in Revelation would be the story of the century or the millennium even by themselves. And we see over a score of them happen in only seven years.

2 Peter 3:9-10 - The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed.

God is not slow as we consider it. Rather now we see His patience.

Application: Do not mistake God's patience for indecision. Neither should you look at the world and think, "Jesus is not coming. Everything is the same every day." When it is time, His end-time plans will happen swiftly. If a fire breaks out in your home it is too late to go buy a fire hydrant. The time to do that is before the fire comes. And the time to come to Christ is now. Don't wait until it is too late.

3. Just as He announced to His servants the prophets - God graciously reveals to us what we need to know about what He is going to do so that we can be ready.

Amos 3:7 - For the Lord God does nothing without revealing his secret to his servants the prophets.

III. John Eats the Scroll (8-11)

Discussion Questions

- Whose is the voice from heaven?
- Why would the angel ask John to eat the scroll?
- What other times in Scripture do we see similar events?
- Why would it be sweet in the mouth and bitter in the stomach?

Cross-References

Ezekiel 3:3 - And he said to me, "Son of man, feed your belly with this scroll that I give you and fill your stomach with it." Then I ate it, and it was in my mouth as sweet as honey.

Matthew 5:6 - "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

Matthew 4:4 - But he answered, "It is written, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God."

Teaching Points

1. Take and eat the scroll - The voice from heaven tells John to do something strange, eat the scroll.

It is not the only place in Scripture where such an instruction is given (Ezekiel 3:3). It reminds us that man does not live on bread alone (Matthew 4:4). God's words are food for our souls. We are to consume His words. When we meditate on them, we are changed from the inside out.

In John's case, eating the scroll allowed him to physically taste how the contents would affect people.

2. It will make your stomach bitter, but in your mouth, it will be sweet - When John ate the scroll, he found that this was the case. Hearing God's words is a great blessing. Prophecy is attractive in that we can know the future. And most people are very interested in knowing the future. If you ask someone, "do you want to know the future?" they will probably answer affirmatively.

In this case, though, they warned of doom to come. Judgment and wrath were coming upon the world. Revelation is a hard pill to swallow in some ways. Billions of souls are lost due to their continued rebellion against God. It would be a disaster for the unbeliever and extremely painful for believers (many of whom would be martyred.)

3. You must again prophesy - Many of the prophecies are hard (bitter). Nonetheless, they will be necessary. Knowing the judgment to come could encourage people to seek His mercy now.

Revelation 11

Outline

- I. The Two Witnesses (1-6)
- II. The Two Witnesses Are Killed and Rise Again (7-14)
- III. The Seventh Trumpet (15-19)

I. The Two Witnesses (1-6)

Discussion Questions

- Why was John told to measure the temple and those who worship?
- What does it mean to measure those who worship?
- What would happen to the holy city?
- What time markers can you see in this passage?
- What are your observations about the two witnesses?
- How could they survive such public preaching for three and a half years during the tyrannical rule of the antichrist?
- What do olive trees and lampstands symbolize?
- What can we learn from these two witnesses?
- How can you be a lampstand in your society?

Cross-References

1 Corinthians 6:19-20 - Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.

Daniel 9:3 - Then I turned my face to the Lord God, seeking him by prayer and pleas for mercy with fasting and sackcloth and ashes.

Jeremiah 11:6 - The Lord once called you 'a green olive tree, beautiful with good fruit.' But with the roar of a great tempest he will set fire to it, and its branches will be consumed.

Zechariah 4:12-14 And a second time I answered and said to him, "What are these two branches of the olive trees, which are beside the two golden pipes from which the golden oil is poured out?" He said to me, "Do you not know what these are?" I said, "No, my lord." Then he said, "These are the two anointed ones who stand by the Lord of the whole earth."

Teaching Points

1. John is told to measure the temple, altar, and worshipers - John is given a "measuring rod like a staff" and is commanded to measure the temple, altar, and worshipers. He does not record any of his measurements.

Reflect: Is this a literal measurement or is it figurative?

It appears that God is looking deeper than just physical measurements for several reasons:

- No measurements were recorded. John did not give any physical measurements for these things, probably because God is interested in the spiritual.
- The worshipers were also to be measured. It would be odd to measure the height of the worshipers who are going to the temple. That number is not very meaningful. Thus, some other quality of the worshipers was to be measured. Perhaps their holiness, sincerity, or faithfulness. God is looking at the spiritual, not the physical. And if some spiritual quality of the worshipers is being measured, then it is logical that the temple and altar were being measured in the same way. You wouldn't measure the physical dimensions of the temple and then the spiritual dimensions of the people. It was one type of measuring rod, not two.
- The context of this chapter focuses on Jerusalem, the holy city. The witnesses are prophesying and trying to reach people spiritually. Certain reactions from the populace (of this city and the world) to the witnesses are gauged. God is concerned with the spiritual condition of Jerusalem and its people. He is going deeper than the surface to look at the heart.

Reflect: No exact record is shown of what John found when he measured. Does the text give any clue as to what was revealed about the people of Jerusalem?

Later the two witnesses are called. Before that, they call down many plagues because of people's hard hearts. The city is called "Sodom" and "Egypt." And God judges the city by causing one-tenth to collapse in an earthquake and seven thousand people to die. Therefore, it seems clear that the city did not pass the test. There will be Jews who seem to be worshiping God at this time at the temple. But they are still rejecting His Son. And as a group, they have not yet come to repentance.

Application: God is also going to measure us. Will we measure up? No one will be able to pass this test. Our hope is in Christ who fills up what is lacking in us replacing our sin with His righteousness. Yet we still have a responsibility. First, we must place our faith in Him. Second, we should live our lives in a worthy manner of the calling to which we have been called.

2. The holy city will be trampled for forty-two months - Forty-two months is a time marker we see several times in end times accounts in Scripture. It represents half of the seven-year period of the tribulation. Thus, it appears that these events occur at the halfway point of the tribulation.

Most likely the witnesses are active in Jerusalem for the first three and a half years of the tribulation. During that time, they are untouchable because of God's divine protection. But at the mid-point of the tribulation, the antichrist will rise up and break his peace treaty with Israel. He will enter the temple and set up the abomination of desolation (Matthew 24:15-16). The city will come under his direct control for the last half of the tribulation (Revelation 11:2). And many Jews will flee the city (Revelation 12). At this point, the two witnesses will be killed. That will give the antichrist his greatest victory, but it will be short-lived (just like when Jesus was killed and raised from the dead).

3. The two witnesses - There is some debate about whether these witnesses are literal or figurative. A good general rule of interpretation is to take the Word at face value unless it clearly is figurative. In this case, all the signs point to these two witnesses

being literal men who are divinely appointed and anointed by God for this special mission.

He says that they are clothed in sackcloth. He also gives them divine authority to call down plagues upon the earth and destroy their enemies.

If for example, the witnesses represent the church, who in the church would have this power? Everyone? And the church itself is dressed in sackcloth?

The text is most easily understood by taking it literally. Much speculation has been made about the identity of these two witnesses. One of them is very likely Elijah.

Malachi 4:5 - *Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes.*

While John the Baptist fulfilled the role of Elijah prior to Jesus' first coming, before His second coming prophecies indicate Elijah himself will return. The two witnesses' ministry and miracles strongly resemble the historical Elijah's. He also shut up the heavens so that it did not rain and called down fire from heaven (2 Kings 1:10, 1 Kings 18).

James 5:16-18 - *The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working. Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed fervently that it might not rain, and for three years and six months it did not rain on the earth. Then he prayed again, and heaven gave rain, and the earth bore its fruit.*

The identity of the second witness is less clear. It may be Enoch as he, like Elijah, never died. God may have taken them to heaven alive because their mission on earth was not yet complete and He planned to send them back again as the two witnesses in the end times.

However, more important than the identity of the witnesses is their ministry. They are going to stand in Jerusalem as God's witnesses to the earth for three and a half years. Their public ministry will be extremely important because it will come at a time when it is difficult for believers around the world to publicly witness for Christ without death and persecution soon following.

4. Clothed in sackcloth - Sackcloth was worn by people who wanted to demonstrate their humility in repentance. And that is the ministry that these two witnesses will be focusing on. They will preach repentance. They will encourage the people of the earth to humble themselves before God, accept His Son as King, and give their loyalty to Him instead of to the beast.

Their primary goal is not to wage war against the antichrist through plagues and fire. These are only signs meant to verify the credibility of their message. The signs are for opening the eyes of their listeners so that they will listen to and believe their message.

Application: Miracles were never about being flashy. They are meant to point people to Christ. We should care more about humility, sincerity, and repentance than about flashy signs. It is easy to be drawn to flashy ministries and powerful sounding speakers. But we should evaluate what we listen to more critically. Search not for the flashy. Don't focus on the number of likes or subscribers. Instead, focus on the content. Follow speakers who encourage humility, holiness, and repentance.

5. Two olive trees and two lampstands - The two witnesses are symbolically referred to as olive trees and lampstands. An olive tree is meant to bear fruit. Its fruit provides nourishment and refreshment for those who pick it. That is what the witnesses were called to do. They were to be fruitful in ministry, providing nourishment to all of those who listened to and obeyed their message.

And the function of lampstands is simple, providing a platform for light to shine forth. That light directs, guides, and enlightens. These two witnesses were tasked with shining the light from God on the earth. That task will be immensely important. The world at that time will be a very dark and evil place.

Antichrist and his forces will seek to immediately silence any believer who shares about Christ. The level of censorship and persecution will be far higher than at any point in all of human history. It should encourage us that even during this time the light of Christ will not be extinguished.

Application: Every believer is to be light. The world we live in is also a dark place. Are you being a witness for the Lord? Are you shining the light from the lampstand or covering it up in fear?

6. God will not stop working - One of the major lessons we can learn from the two witnesses is that God will never stop working. Conditions will be harsh. Satan will unleash his hateful campaign against Jews and believers around the world. But God does not retreat into heaven and just let the chips fall where they may. He will be active. His will make sure that every part of His plan is fulfilled.

Salvation will still be available. The choice to believe in Christ and be forgiven will still be there. All of the people living through that horrible period will still have an opportunity to be saved. And that is very important. Every person from every era has an opportunity to come to God. He is fair. He is gracious. He is kind.

Indeed, He does not wish any to perish.

2 Peter 3:9 - The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.

7. Divine protection - The witnesses will be right in the cross hairs of the antichrist. But they cannot be harmed. Those who try (and certainly there will be people who attempt it) will be incinerated with fire from their mouths. That will be sure to draw some attention!

In addition, God will give them the power to call down plagues upon the earth. Some of the plagues they will call down include drought and turning water to blood. That is a deadly combo since the drought will already cause a scarcity of water.

Reflect: What is the purpose of plagues in the Bible? Why would a merciful God use them?

In Egypt, plagues were sent by God to judge His enemies. At the same time, He used these plagues to change their hearts and force them to let His people go. And these signs and wonders were also a testimony to all nations of His power. Forty years later Rahab professed faith in God largely because of knowledge of these

plagues. So plagues are not only used for judgment. They are also meant to show forth God's power, cause people to repent, and in doing so save people from a worse and final judgment.

II. The Two Witnesses Are Killed and Rise Again (7-14)

Discussion Questions

- How is it determined that they “finished their testimony?”
- When is anyone “finished” with their mission on earth?
- What would happen after their time was up?
- Why were they protected before that?
- What lesson can we learn from this?
- Who is the beast in verse 7?
- Why is Jerusalem called Sodom and Egypt?
- How would the people of earth react to their death? What does this teach us about the state of the earth at that time?
- What will happen after three and a half days?
- What do we learn from their resurrection?
- What do you learn about God's voice in verse 12?
- What is the second woe (verse 14)?

Cross-References

2 Corinthians 8:11 - So now finish doing it as well, so that your readiness in desiring it may be matched by your completing it out of what you have.

Acts 20:24 - But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.

John 11:43-44 - When he had said these things, he cried out with a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out.” The man who had died came out, his hands and feet bound with linen strips, and his face wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, “Unbind him, and let him go.”

Teaching Points

1. When they have finished their testimony -

There are two lessons we can learn from this.

A. You are protected until God's time - The antichrist certainly did not welcome these three and a half years of public witnessing. Every day they stood in public and preached was an act of defiance against his rule. Their ministry will be a humiliation and a shame to him. Though he will certainly try through force to stop them, he will be completely powerless to do anything. The most powerful man in the world with the aid of legions of demons and all the armies of the world will be unable to even harm a single hair on their heads before God's appointed time.

The same is true for us. It will be more obvious at that time because of the supernatural miracles used to protect them. But it is still equally true today. God has a plan for you. Your time on this earth is set. And the day of your ascension to Him is already appointed. No disease, accident, or enemy can thwart God's plan and timing for your life.

Application: Let this truth give you boldness. Do not live your life in worry, stressing out about things you can't control. Instead rest in Him. Trust in His protection and plan.

B. Finish the mission that God has given you - The two witnesses accomplished what God called them to do. If you would interview them at the end, you would find that they had no regrets. Mission accomplished.

Application: Are you doing the mission that God has called you to? Do you even know what He wants you to do for Him? And if you do know, are you making progress toward that? Live your life in such a way that you too will have no regrets.

2. The antichrist will make war on them - Only when God's time is fulfilled, will the antichrist be able to overcome the two witnesses. Until then, he is powerless. All of his evil schemes lead him to be a key instrument in fulfilling God's own prophecies. When he is finally able to kill the witnesses (because God's protection will be removed), he will surely exult and proclaim a great victory.

3. Sodom and Egypt - Sodom and Egypt were two wicked countries, known for rebellion against God. Sodom was known especially for its abominable acts. Egypt was known especially for its paganism, and worship of idols. In this passage, God calls Jerusalem by these names. The holy city was not holy at all. It was steeped in wickedness. If you were to walk through the streets then, you would surely see every type of abomination. And many people there will be worshipers of demons.

4. The celebration of the wicked - When the witnesses are killed most of the population will celebrate. It will be like a great festival. There will be gift exchanges and parties. The hatred toward God's prophets is so strong that no burial will be allowed. The decaying bodies will lie in the streets. People will visit their bodies to mock them and celebrate their death.

People all over the earth will celebrate. That fact would seem hard to understand if it took place in the pre-media days. Now with the internet and TV, the news will be broadcast around the world. Before their invention, it would be unlikely that people who lived far away would hear about what was going on within only three and a half days.

The celebration is a reminder of just how morally bankrupt the world will be at that time. It truly will be a battle between God and Satan and everyone will pick sides.

5. Their resurrection - After three and a half days God will resurrect them. Their dead and decaying bodies will have life breathed into them by God. They will stand up. All who see will be terrified at this latest sign of God's power. In an instant, their victory and celebration will be turned to dread.

God will command them to "Come up here" and at that moment they will ascend directly to heaven much as Jesus did at the ascension.

God's voice is powerful. With it, He created the heavens and the earth. Jesus raised Lazarus with a command. And here the laws of nature will be suspended as the witnesses hear His voice and obey.

6. Judgment on the city - At that point, there will be another divine judgment. This one will target Jerusalem. The city and the people

there are measured and found lacking. Instead of listening to the witnesses and supporting them, they celebrate their death. Therefore, God unleashes a judgment upon it.

He does not wipe it out. As in Old Testament times, God faithfully preserves a remnant. Eventually, the Jewish nation as a group would turn to Him. But that time had not yet arrived. And though God is just, He is still merciful. He will give them even more signs and more opportunities.

III. The Seventh Trumpet (15-19)

Discussion Questions

- What does it mean that “the kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord?”
- Does this represent some major change in the world’s situation?
- What is the seventh trumpet?
- How do the 24 elders react?
- What is the content of their praise to God?
- What do you learn about God’s character from this passage?
- Why are there lightning, thunder, hail, and earthquakes when His temple is opened?

Teaching Points

1. The seventh trumpet is a transition - The seventh seal was a transition with the seven trumpet judgments contained within. The seventh trumpet is also a transition. Following soon after this trumpet will be the seven bowl judgments in Revelation 16. In the following chapters, the focus is on a war in heaven (Revelation 12), the beast and false prophet (Revelation 13), the 144,000, and the harvest of the earth (Revelation 14).

And these things will be quickly followed by Armageddon and Jesus’ second coming. Each trumpet is a warning to the residents of earth. Time is drawing near. God’s judgment is coming quickly.

2. The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever. -

The seventh trumpet is not only a warning to the earth. It also reminds the heavenly host that Jesus' second coming is just around the corner. The mid-point of the tribulation is past and events are rapidly moving forward, which will culminate in Jesus' Himself returning to the earth, judging His enemies, and setting up His kingdom, which will then never end (first in the millennium and then in the new heavens and new earth).

Though things at this time will be bleak, those who know Christ will look forward in expectation of His perfect reign. No matter how dark this world becomes, there will be light. All believers have a common hope. We know Jesus will come and set everything right.

Application: We should remember that this world is God's. It belongs to Him. For some time, He allows a certain amount of autonomy. It doesn't change the fact He is the Alpha and Omega. All is from Him and all will answer Him.

3. The 24 elders worshiped saying - The elders in heaven see things as they are. Firstly, they give Him thanks. And they anticipate His reign. His plan is in motion. Nothing can or will stop Him. No plan can thwart Him.

Isaiah 14:27 - For the Lord of hosts has purposed, and who will annul it? His hand is stretched out, and who will turn it back?

His final judgment is coming quickly.

At first glance, it looks like His earthly reign and judgment have already come. But we can also understand these events as inseparable, part of one larger plan. When the scroll's seal is broken the book is opened. Everything that is predicted within is a foregone conclusion made certain by God Himself, who cannot be thwarted.

4. The temple is opened - There are more flashes of lightning, thunder, an earthquake, and hail. The sheer number of supernatural signs in Revelation is astounding. All point to the glory of God.

Revelation 12

Outline

- I. The Woman, Child, and Dragon (1-6)
- II. The War in Heaven (7-12)
- III. The Dragon's Rage (13-17)

I. The Woman, Child, and Dragon (1-6)

Discussion Questions

- Who does the woman in this passage represent? Why?
- Who does the child in this passage represent? Why?
- Who does the dragon in this passage represent? Why?
- What might the crown of 12 stars on the woman's head refer to?
- What do the multiple heads, horns, and diadems on the dragon's head refer to?
- Who else in Revelation will rule the nations with a rod of iron?
- What does it mean that the child "was caught up to God and to his throne?"
- What will happen to the woman in verse 6?
- What does this passage show us about the result of Satan's long-lasting scheme to thwart God's plans?
- What can we learn from this passage about God's sovereignty?

Cross-References

Isaiah 9:6 For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

Revelation 20:1-2 - Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding in his hand the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain. And he seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years, and threw him into the pit, and shut it and sealed it over him, so that he might not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years were ended.

Isaiah 14:12 “How you are fallen from heaven, O Day Star, son of Dawn! How you are cut down to the ground, you who laid the nations low!

Revelation 19:15 - From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron. He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty.

Teaching Points

1. Overview - In this chapter, we get a special behind-the-scenes look at the epic battle between God and Satan that has been raging ever since the devil rebelled. The battle spans millennia. It also is waged across the cosmos, both in heaven and on earth.

The book of Revelation is largely a description of this war. And in it, we see exactly how the war will end and Satan will be judged. God wins. Good triumphs over evil.

However, in this passage we see that people become ensnared in this conflict. Satan attempts to use people against God just as he originally seduced many angels to join him in this fight.

He alternatively seeks to either seduce and ensnare people or outright target them for destruction. Though he can't hurt God directly, he seeks to hurt God by hurting God's creation. Whether we like it or not, people have become embroiled in this conflict.

The arena has expanded from heaven to earth. And in this chapter, we will see how that war affects God's people.

2. The woman - There are several clues in this passage as to the identity of the woman. But we can first start with who the woman

is not. At first glance, it may appear that this woman is Mary. After all, she gave birth to the most famous child in all of Scripture.

However, verse 6 depicts this woman as fleeing into the wilderness to herself escape the wrath of the dragon for three and a half years. Historically, this did not happen to Mary. Also, the description of the woman in verses 13-17 does not fit Mary. Specifically, the dragon is not just going after Mary's offspring (17).

A better explanation is that the woman represents the nation of Israel. Israel is often referred to as a "her" in the Old Testament (Lamentations 1:1-7). The text also gives us more clues that the woman represents Israel.

The woman is mentioned as being "clothed with the sun, with the moon...and on her head a crown of twelve stars."

This is remarkably similar to Joseph's dream that he shared with his family in Genesis 37.

Genesis 37:9 - Then he dreamed another dream and told it to his brothers and said, "Behold, I have dreamed another dream. Behold, the sun, the moon, and eleven stars were bowing down to me."

The best place to go to interpret Scripture is to other Scripture and Genesis 37:9 interprets Revelation 12:1 very well. The twelve stars on the woman's head refer to the twelve tribes of Israel, just as they do in Joseph's dream. Note that Joseph only mentions eleven stars because he is the twelfth. And references to the sun and moon (Jacob and Rachel in the original dream) show where the woman (the nation of Israel) came from.

The nation of Israel produced the Messiah (the child) just as God originally promised to Abraham (Genesis 12:3). And we see that throughout the Bible and history Satan hates the nation of Israel. They are God's chosen people. So they have a target on their back.

3. The child - In this passage, the child refers to the Messiah, Jesus. He is the one who is going to rule the nations with a rod of iron (Revelation 2:27, 19:15).

Revelation 2:27 - *And he will rule them with a rod of iron, as when earthen pots are broken in pieces, even as I myself have received authority from my Father.*

4. The dragon - There should be little doubt about who the dragon in this passage represents. If his actions are not clear enough, verse 9 names the dragon as "that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan."

The dragon has seven heads, ten horns, and seven diadems. In Revelation 13 we will see that the dragon will give power to the beast (antichrist), who will hold sway politically over many regions or kingdoms. There will be a ten king alliance that the antichrist will rule over and through. That seems to be pictured by the ten horns. Eventually, three of these will revolt and lose. The alliance will then be reduced to seven kings. The seven heads may refer to this.

Much of Satan's influence in the world is exercised through governments. Behind the scenes, he deceives, plots, and schemes. What he attempts to accomplish through subtlety now, he will accomplish through brute force and power then. The dragon will take complete control over the world government and claim the world as his domain. The seven diadems portray his prideful claim to be the ruler.

5. Satan's scheme to thwart the Messiah -

Verse 4 tells us that Satan wanted to devour the child. He wanted to stop Jesus from ever accomplishing His mission. And Satan's attempts to stop Jesus started long before He was born.

Let's zoom out for a moment and look at the big picture of this war.

Genesis 1:31 – *God saw all that He had made and behold it was very good.*

When God created the world, everything was good. It was perfect. There was no darkness, no evil. But it didn't take long for things to change. Only a few chapters later after Adam and Eve rebelled against Him people's sin had become "great on the earth" (Genesis 6:5-6).

God promised to redeem the world. Through Abraham's descendant, He would bring blessing to all the nations of the earth (Genesis 12:3). The same promise was made in front of the snake in Eden (Genesis 3:15). It is a promise that would be fulfilled in the Messiah.

Satan is not dumb. He knows Scripture. And he is aware of God's plan to send a Messiah. He also knew that this Messiah would come through God's chosen people, the nation of Israel (the woman).

From the beginning, Satan has attempted to block God's plan by preventing Christ from ever being born. The best tacticians wage war on many levels. And knowing God's plan ahead of time, Satan, being the skilled terrorist that he is, has tried to sabotage this plan over and over through millennia.

He tries to corrupt the goodness in God's creation. He tries to destroy the line of Christ to even prevent Jesus' birth.

Reflect: How has Satan tried to thwart God's plan of sending the Messiah?

Below we will see a quick overview of how Satan has tried to block God's plan and how God has won each time.

- Satan attempted to corrupt the human race (Genesis 2). If mankind is corrupted and fathers pass down original sin to their children, then how can a perfect Savior be born? God defeated this by the miracle of the virgin birth.
- Satan attempts to kill the godly line (Able). God raised up another godly line in Seth (Genesis 4:25).
- Satan attempted to pollute all the bloodlines of the human race (Genesis 6). God instead sends the flood and preserves one chosen family.
- A famine comes which threatens the fledgling family of Israel. God protects His people by sending Joseph ahead to Egypt (Genesis 38-50).
- In Egypt, Satan tries to kill all of the male children (Exodus 1:15-16). The midwives disobey because they feared God and the nation continues. Later the idol-worshiping king tried to wipe out the Israelites when they were on the border of the Red

Sea. But God flipped the script, protected His people, and wiped out the attacking armies.

- Satan attempted to use Haman the Agagite to exterminate all Jews from the planet. He got so far as to get the Persian king's royal seal of approval (Esther 3:6, 13). God again flipped the script. He elevated Mordecai and Esther, putting them in the exact place and the exact time they needed to be to deliver His people.
- Through Herod, Satan attempted to have Jesus killed along with all the male children in Bethlehem under two (Matthew 2:16). God miraculously delivers the child and his family (Matthew 2:13-14).
- Satan attempted to tempt Jesus and cause Him to sin. If he was successful, Jesus could not save us. But Jesus resisted the temptation (1 Peter 1:18-19).
- Finally, Satan had Jesus killed, thinking this could stop Jesus from reigning as king (Luke 22:3). But this was part of God's plan all along and the method by which He accomplished salvation for all.

We see that the dragon has been after the child all along. Like a skilled tactician, he began long before Jesus was actually born. But God is a far greater tactician. He told us exactly what He was going to do ahead of time. He even declared it to the enemy. Then He made it happen, using the very responses of the enemy to further His plan and reveal His sovereign power for all to see.

One of the most famous plays in baseball history is when Babe Ruth pointed out exactly where he was going to homer the pitch, and then did it.

That is what God did. Nothing can thwart His plan.

Job 42:2 - I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted.

Application: Do not fret about circumstances that seem stacked against you. God is sovereign. His perfect plans will be fulfilled, both in your life and in the world.

6. His tail swept down a third of the stars of heaven - Likely this is a reference to the fallen angels who joined Satan's rebellion. It is

this verse that points to one-third of angels having joined in the rebellion. All of those who did became demons.

7. The woman fled and was nourished for 1260 days - During the second half of the tribulation, the dragon will unleash his anger on the nation of Israel. God will preserve a remnant and give a place of special divine protection for His people.

II. The War in Heaven (7-12)

Discussion Questions

- Who is fighting in this war?
- Why might God let angels fight for Him instead of just winning with a word?
- When do you think this war takes place? Why?
- What will happen to Satan and his followers at the conclusion of this war?
- What is Satan called in this passage?
- What is his purpose in accusing believers?
- What do you learn about God in this passage?
- What do you learn about the final conclusion of this war?
- How does seeing the end give you hope now?
- How can believers conquer Satan?
- How can it be called overcoming when they are killed?
- How will Satan react when he is cast permanently cast out of heaven?

Cross-References

1 Peter 5:8 - Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.

Ephesians 6:11-12 - Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

Teaching Points

1. Now war arose in heaven - There is going to be a clash of the ages in heaven. Michael and God's good angels will pit themselves against Satan and his horde of fallen angels.

Someone might ask, "Why doesn't God just banish Satan and his demons with a word? Why does he need to use angels to fight for Him?"

God can do everything Himself. That is true. He doesn't need people to share the gospel. He could boom it from the heavens. He doesn't need angels to take messages to His saints. He could do it Himself. The King of Kings could have certainly taught His people without the prophets. God could make missionaries and preachers expendable.

However, God seems to delight in using His created agents, whether that is people or angels. We are all called to join this battle against Satan and his demons. As we fight that good fight, we grow spiritually. Our faith is increased. At the same time, we grow bolder and more reliant upon the Holy Spirit. Christian character grows through struggle.

We can assume that angels also reap some benefit personally from serving God. This is what they were created to do. So rather than doing everything Himself, God empowers His followers to be His standard-bearers.

Application: Let us lift His standard high and wave it proudly as His loyal ambassadors!

2. There was no longer any place for them in heaven - After Satan is defeated all access to heaven is closed off. When will this occur? It is probably a still future point in time that will take place during the seven-year tribulation.

Job 1:6-7 - Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan also came among them. The Lord said to Satan, "From where have you come?" Satan answered the Lord and said, "From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking up and down on it."

Job 2:1-2 - Again there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan also came among

them to present himself before the Lord. And the Lord said to Satan, "From where have you come?" Satan answered the Lord and said, "From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking up and down on it."

As we can see in the book of Job, even after Satan sinned and lost his permanent home in heaven, he still had access there. The "sons of God" in these verses are angels. And because Satan is allowed to present himself we can assume that includes both the good angels and the fallen angels.

We don't for sure why God still allows this access for now. Perhaps it is a type of mercy toward them or merely just a method to maintain some level of communication.

However, in the book of Revelation, we see this war playing out. And the first widespread battle is in heaven. Satan is soundly defeated and forever loses any access to the throne room of God. Later in verse 12, we will see how he reacts to that.

3. A loud voice in heaven - After Satan's defeat a loud voice proclaims God's victory. His dominion over the entire universe is being established without question. Step by step he is rooting out all opposition.

4. Satan is the accuser - Here Satan is called the "accuser of our brothers." It reminds us of his nature. If an artist ventured to paint a portrait of Satan, he should do so with Satan pointing his finger in accusation toward believers. That is his traditional pose. He revealed this in the book of Job and he does the same now.

Application: Let us be careful not to be like Satan. Do not be hasty to accuse others.

5. They have conquered him by the blood of Lamb - We can conquer this accuser. The strength to do so does not belong to us. It is only possible to overcome him through Christ. Jesus already won the war when He came out of the tomb. By joining with Him, relying on Him, we too can win the victory.

Note that these believers who conquer are killed for their faith. Yet they are still described as conquerors. Martyrdom is not a defeat for believers. Rather, it is a victory. It is a victory to stand firm in

your faith until the end. It is a victory to never give in to persecution by denying the Lord and joining the world.

Application: When you face temptation, rely on Christ. Look to the cross. It is at the cross that you will find victory.

6. The devil has come down in great wrath because he knows his time is short - Satan will be like a cornered dog, or should we say dragon? Once he is cast out of heaven, he realizes that the final chapter is in progress. He has very little time left. Rather than humbling himself and throwing himself upon the mercy of God, he continues his scheming. His anger is unleashed even more.

III. The Dragon's Rage (13-17)

Discussion Questions

- What does it mean that the dragon pursues the woman?
- How will God protect His people during this time?
- What does "time, times, and half a time" mean?
- Who is "her offspring" in verse 17?
- What important principles can we learn about God from this chapter?

Cross-References

Isaiah 54:17 - No weapon that is fashioned against you shall succeed, and you shall confute every tongue that rises against you in judgment. This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord and their vindication from me, declares the Lord.”

2 Thessalonians 3:3 - But the Lord is faithful. He will establish you and guard you against the evil one.

Isaiah 41:10 - Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.

Teaching Points

1. He pursued the woman - Since Satan lost the war in heaven, he will turn his attention elsewhere. His attack will focus primarily on the nation of Israel, God's chosen people.

He will pursue the remnant into the wilderness where they are being protected.

2. The woman was given two wings of the great eagle - God will again protect His people. Throughout the Old Testament, God's miracles on the behalf of His people are recorded over and over. During the end times, He will continue to do this.

God will enable the remnant to speedily escape what Satan throws against them.

Will this be some fleet of helicopters and aircraft? Or will it be something supernatural akin to the parting of the red sea?

We don't know for sure. God uses both supernatural means and natural means to accomplish His objectives. Either method accomplishes the same result and God receives the glory.

3. The serpent poured water like a river out of his mouth after the woman - Most likely this is figurative language referring to an army that he sends after them. The army is so large it is like a river gushing out to chase them down.

4. The earth came to the help of the woman - It looks like at God's command the earth will open up and swallow the attacking army never to be seen again.

God has done this miracle before.

Numbers 16:31-33 - And as soon as he had finished speaking all these words, the ground under them split apart. And the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up, with their households and all the people who belonged to Korah and all their goods. So they and all that belonged to them went down alive into Sheol, and the earth closed over them, and they perished from the midst of the assembly.

And He can do it again. Once again, it will be clear who is the one in charge. He is the commander of the heavens and the earth. Even the earth itself obeys Him.

Application: For the Jews, at that time all of their senses will tell them they are doomed. It will seem that there is no hope. A massive force is after them. And they won't have the weapons to resist. But God will fight for them as He has done so many times before. Let us trust in God even when we don't at the moment see Him working. He has proven Himself over and over again.

5. The dragon became furious with the woman and went to make war with the rest of her offspring - Since God will be supernaturally protecting the Israelite remnant in the wilderness, Satan will change tactics. He will go after all the diaspora of Jews around the world. And he will also go after all of those who keep God's commands (all believers).

Reflect: How does this chapter encourage you and strengthen your faith?

Revelation 13

Outline

- I. The First Beast: Antichrist (1-10)
- II. The Second Beast: False Prophet (11-18)

I. The First Beast: Antichrist (1-10)

Discussion Questions

- Who or what is this beast?
- What might the heads, horns, and diadems represent?
- What does the description of the beast show us about its nature?
- Where does this individual get his power from?
- What does this passage teach us about Satan influencing this world?
- What happens to this person in verse 3?
- How can its mortal wound be healed?
- What does this trick teach us about Satan?
- How will the world respond to this event?
- What will the antichrist's speech be like?
- What will he do?
- What hope for believers can you see in this passage?
- How are believers exhorted to respond to the beast?
- How can believers endure and remain faithful during this difficult time?

Cross-References

1 John 2:18 - Children, it is the last hour, and as you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come. Therefore we know that it is the last hour.

2 Thessalonians 2:3-4 - Let no one deceive you in any way. For that day will not come, unless the rebellion comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God.

Daniel 7:25 - He shall speak words against the Most High, and shall wear out the saints of the Most High, and shall think to change the times and the law; and they shall be given into his hand for a time, times, and half a time.

Teaching Points

1. The beast from the sea - In the Bible, beasts often represent governments. Daniel had a similar vision which is recorded in Daniel chapter 7. He saw four different beasts. Each beast represented a world government.

The four beasts that Daniel saw included: a lion, a bear, a leopard, and a beast with ten horns. Note that this beast John records in Revelation has all of these features. It is a chimera. The world governments that Daniel learned of in his vision all set themselves up against God. Each one refused to submit to the King of Kings. Instead, they established various forms of idol worship. The leaders of those nations ensnared people in sin. Rather than encouraging their citizens to be faithful to God, they demanded their subject's absolute loyalty.

The beast in Revelation combines all of the world governments into a single one-world-government. That government will pridefully set itself up in opposition to God under the leadership of one man, the antichrist.

Sadly, throughout history, there have been very few governments that lead people to God. The very first attempt to create a government was in Babel under Nimrod (Genesis 10:10). Babel then proceeded to rebel against God's authority and try to unite all people under the banner of human independence and power.

The beast will come out of the sea. The sea probably refers to the mass of humanity. It will emerge from among the people.

Application: Believers are to be loyal to God first. God does command us to obey the government since it is established by God (Romans 13). At the same time, our highest loyalty should be given to God, not man. We place our hope and faith in Jesus, and not in politics or world leaders. All men are fallible and since governments are composed of men, they are fallible.

2. Ten horns, seven heads, ten diadems - These symbols are explained in Revelation 17.

Revelation 17:9-13 - This calls for a mind with wisdom: the seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman is seated; they are also seven kings, five of whom have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come, and when he does come he must remain only a little while. As for the beast that was and is not, it is an eighth but it belongs to the seven, and it goes to destruction. And the ten horns that you saw are ten kings who have not yet received royal power, but they are to receive authority as kings for one hour, together with the beast. These are of one mind, and they hand over their power and authority to the beast.

The beast will not rule all by himself. He will head an alliance of a group of ten kings. These will crown him as their leader and be subservient to him.

3. To it the dragon gave his power and his throne and great authority - As we learned in chapter 12, the dragon is Satan. Satan is the one behind the rise of this world ruler.

He is called the "god of this world."

2 Corinthians 4:4 - In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

Satan is active in this world. He is not laying around dormant. In chapter 12, we see that as he realizes his time is drawing to an end, this motivates him to even greater levels of activity. The devil has always been a master of seduction and deception. He is continuously at work behind the scenes opposing God and the saints.

Already Satan has successfully sold many of his lies to the world. Some of these include: evolution (there is no Creator), hedonism (live for pleasure), materialism (money is everything), LGBT+ (there is no boundary on what you are allowed to do), and relativism (truth is whatever you say it is).

At that time his schemes which he has been laying for millennia will hatch. The world governments will buy-in. And Satan will install his man as the leader of this new world government. All of Satan's minions, the horde of demons, will actively work to delude people and maintain this leader's power.

4. The identity of this world leader - This world leader is the antichrist. He is also called "the abomination of desolation." (Matthew 24:15-16)

There have been many "antichrists," people who oppose Christ. At that time *the* antichrist will emerge. And he will take up the mantle as the final and most powerful one who sets himself up against God.

Application: Some believers spend a lot of time trying to speculate on the identity of this person, wondering if he is alive today or not. The passage says he will come up out of the sea. You will not be able to identify him ahead of time. He will be hidden among the masses of humanity. Only when he "rises up" will his identity be revealed. And that doesn't happen yet. So that time spent trying to guess his identity would be far better spent studying the Bible and sharing the gospel.

5. The mortal wound - Satan is a master imitator. He doesn't have very many original thoughts or ideas. Mostly he seeks to copy God. And this will be no exception. Jesus' death and resurrection proved His divinity and are the crux of our faith.

Satan will want to prove he is equal to or greater than God, so he will seek to stage a similar miracle. It looks like the antichrist will be severely wounded to the point of death. Note that it says "seemed to have a mortal wound."

The antichrist PR machine will be in full motor proclaiming a resurrection. They will use this to push the whole population of the world to worship the beast. The seeming resurrection will be used as proof that the beast is worthy of worship and the object of

religious allegiance. Whether or not the obviously demonic origins of this government are manifest to the common person before this or not is not clear. But it is clear that at this point people will know that this is not just a typical government demanding typical loyalty. Its leaders demand worship. Its top leader will claim to be God.

However, not is all as it seems. He "seemed" to have a mortal head wound. There is something more going on. The language used indicates this will be a trick. It will be something like a very well-executed magic trick. That will be made all the easier since this government will control all media and since they will own the police and morticians, etc.

When Moses performed miracles in Egypt, the Egyptian priests were able to imitate these miracles on a small scale (Exodus 7-8). Perhaps that was through magic or if not, through demonic power. Satan is a supernatural being. He and his demons will be capable of performing signs. However, he cannot create life or truly raise a person from the dead. That won't stop him from pretending he can.

6. And they worshiped the dragon - Not only will they worship the beast (13:4, 12), but they will also worship the dragon. Satanism will emerge as the one-world religion. Satan is behind many of the world religions today just as he was behind the Canaanite idols that demanded child sacrifice thousands of years ago. But he is hiding behind these religions. After this event, the facade will be removed. People will directly worship Satan with full knowledge that that is what they are doing.

Their reasoning is not because the dragon is good. It is because of his power. They say, "who can fight against it." Perhaps in some respect, they will feel resigned to it. Fear will drive them to him.

That is in direct contrast to our relationship with God as seen in 1 John 4.

1 John 4:18 - There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love.

Application: Let us thank God that our relationship with Him is based on love.

7. The blasphemy of the beast - The antichrist will have a big mouth. He will be a huge boaster. Terrible abominations will pour forth from his mouth.

8. It was allowed to exercise authority for forty-two months - Here we see again the phrase "it was allowed." God could squash him in an instant, despite his boasts. Yet God will permit it for a set amount of time to bring His plan to conclusion. The King has limited patience. He will set a limit of forty-two months as the amount of time this evil man can remain in power.

We are reminded again that God is on the throne. Though this world may look chaotic and evil, that will not last. One day God will set everything right.

9. He will make war on the saints - Satan hates those who don't follow him. His rage against believers will be unleashed. In one sense, he will conquer them. He will kill them.

In another sense, they will conquer him when they don't give in and worship him (Revelation 12:11).

10. True believers will not worship him - According to verse 8, every person in the world whose name is not written in the book of life will worship Satan. The reverse of that is that all true believers will not.

Reflect: How can believers stand firm against such serious persecution?

God will protect His followers from apostasy. It is His power that will strengthen them to stand against such terrible persecution as well as the combined deluding power of the demonic horde.

Believers will need to depend on Christ.

John 15:5 - I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.

At the same time, we also see that believers are called to endure. They are not like passive objects. Each believer will also have a responsibility to stand firm and endure. Believers will need to call

upon the name of the Lord for help. Active prayer and strong roots in Scripture will be essential. God's work in the life of a believer is not divorced from the believer's response to Him.

He supplies the power and believers need to connect to that power like a battery to a charger.

II. The Second Beast: False Prophet (11-18)

Discussion Questions

- What will this second beast be like?
- Who or what is this beast?
- How would it be like a lamb?
- How would it be like a dragon?
- What is the role of this individual?
- How does he seek to mislead and deceive people?
- How can he perform signs and wonders since he does not belong to God?
- What unholy trinity do you see in this passage?
- How can we guard ourselves against deceptive teachings and being misled by signs and wonders?
- What observations do you have about the mark that will be forced on the world?
- What rights does the mark entitle a person to?
- What does 666 represent?
- How should believers at that time respond to the mark?
- Is there anything you can do now to prepare yourself to stand against greater persecution in the future?

Cross-References

1 John 4:1-3 - Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you heard was coming and now is in the world already.

2 Corinthians 11:13-15 - For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. So it is no surprise if his servants, also, disguise themselves as servants of righteousness. Their end will correspond to their deeds.

2 Timothy 4:3-4 - For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths.

Teaching Points

1. Another beast - The second beast has some characteristics like a lamb, but its speech is from the dragon. Perhaps it wants to make itself appear pure, righteous, and kind. But he is just another tool of the devil.

2. The unholy trinity - Three characters are seen throughout this chapter. The dragon, the first beast, and the second beast, otherwise known as Satan, the antichrist, and the false prophet.

As discussed earlier, Satan loves to mimic God. For those who can't create, they copy. And that is what Satan does. He models his mission after God's in that he forms a trinity, albeit an unholy one. In this evil trinity, Satan imitates God the Father. The antichrist imitates God the Son. And the false prophet imitates God the Holy Spirit. As such, the antichrist is the most visible of these three and the false prophet's main mission is to glorify the antichrist.

3. The mission of the false prophet - The false prophet will use his influence and power to compel people to worship the antichrist. We can see in this passage that he has real power. Among many other signs that are not named, he is able to call fire down from heaven in front of people.

The false prophet also commands people to make an image (an idol) of the antichrist and then forces them to worship it. He then somehow causes the idol to speak and strikes down those who do not bow to it.

So the power of this being is significant. It seems more than just magic tricks are at play here.

We should not be surprised. Demonic beings are very powerful. They are fallen angels and throughout Scripture we see that angels are very powerful. In one incident, an angel kills 185,000 people in one night (2 Kings 19:35).

The false prophet uses these signs for one goal, to deceive people. His goal is their total devotion to the beast. And his tools are power and fear. That is a stark contrast with Jesus whose miracles always helped people.

4. The prevalence of false teachers -

Believers should not be surprised by the false prophet or his signs.

2 John 1:7 - For many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not confess the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh. Such a one is the deceiver and the antichrist.

Matthew 24:24 - For false christs and false prophets will arise and perform great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect.

As we can see, Jesus Himself warned us about such people. Every era and every civilization has had false prophets from Satan come in and attempt to lead people away from God. Shamans and witch doctors and priests of Baal are just a few of the people he has used over the years. Many of these were able to perform some signs that our world cannot explain. But they do it through the power of demons.

Application: Believers of all times and regions need to be ready to resist false teachers. We do that by being rooted in God's Word (Psalms 1), which will make us like a tree planted by a stream of water. As we fill our minds with Scripture and prayerfully seek to be enlightened by Him, He will give us wisdom and discernment.

Don't be tricked by the flashy. Not everything powerful is from God. False teachers give themselves away in either or both of two areas.

Firstly, their message is not consistent with Scripture. If a person or even an angel preaches any other gospel (no matter if it is accompanied by miracles), we should not believe (Galatians 1:8).

Secondly, their lifestyle is not consistent with Scripture. Many false teachers indulge themselves in the world (2 Peter 2). Their lifestyle is unholy.

With the popularity of the internet, false teaching is more accessible than ever before. That is why you must learn to read the Bible and apply it yourself. As you come directly to God's Word, He will give you increasing discernment.

5. The mark of the beast - The false prophet will force people to get a mark.

The mark is something like a brand that is put on cattle. A brand shows who owns the cattle.

Similarly, the mark of the beast will prove the bearer's loyalty to and worship of the beast. Highlighted in the text is the fact that riches or power will not exempt someone from the requirement to get the mark.

One of the methods used to force compliance is that without the mark, no one will be allowed to buy or sell. Store clerks will be required to check for the mark before allowing customers to checkout. And if anyone is found without the mark, surely they will be reported to authorities and quickly dealt with.

It is not hard to imagine a world like this. Modern technology has made it far easier for governments to monitor, track, and surveil their citizens than ever before. Cash is quickly becoming a thing of the past and digital currencies are being proposed and developed around the world. In some countries, the governments already track nearly everything that their citizens buy and sell. It is only a small step toward a world where a mark like this is required.

Reflect: If the rapture does not come first, how can believers be prepared to say "no" to the mark?

Application: Believers must depend on the power of God. The end times will see demonic forces in full activity. Delusion and

deceit will be powerful forces difficult to resist. Having a gun won't save you from the antichrist. Storing up food will not save you. Resisting all modern technology will not save you. Our only hope is a strong, personal relationship with Christ. He will open your eyes to the truth and keep you from being deluded. He will empower you to resist the devil (1 Peter 5:8) and refuse the mark, even if it means death. During that time of testing, He will give you the help that you need to remain steadfast (Mark 13:11).

Believers should focus on getting close to Jesus (Hebrews 12:2). In the modern world, it is easy to take our eyes off Jesus and start worrying about all of the developments we see around us. It is easy to wonder what all of it means and try to decipher the signs. While you should be alert, don't be distracted. Keep your eyes on Jesus. Don't follow red herrings. Our battle is not against these things which we can't stop. Our battle is for souls. Share the gospel. That is the power of God (Romans 1:16).

John 9:4 - We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming, when no one can work.

6. The number of the beast is 666 - That number represents imperfection and sin.

Application: How can you better keep your focus on Jesus this week?

Revelation 14

Outline

- I. The Lamb and the 144,000 (1-5)
- II. Three Angelic Messages (6-13)
- III. The Harvest of The Earth (14-20)

I. The Lamb and the 144,000 (1-5)

Discussion Questions

- What does the name of God on the foreheads of the 144,000 signify?
- What was the voice like which John heard? What can we learn about God from His voice?
- Why could no one else learn the song which these saints were singing?
- What is unique about the 144,000?
- What does it mean that they have been redeemed as the first fruits?
- What do you see about their relationship with the Lamb?
- What can we learn and apply from their example?

Cross-References

Proverbs 18:10 - The name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous man runs into it and is safe.

2 Timothy 2:19 - But God's firm foundation stands, bearing this seal: "The Lord knows those who are his," and, "Let everyone who names the name of the Lord depart from iniquity."

Psalms 96:1-3 - Oh sing to the LORD a new song;
sing to the LORD, all the earth!
Sing to the LORD, bless his name;

tell of his salvation from day to day.
Declare his glory among the nations,
his marvelous works among all the peoples!

Matthew 5:8 - Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

Psalm 119:9 - How can a young man keep his way pure? By guarding it according to your word.

1 Corinthians 15:20 - But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.

Romans 11:16 - If the dough offered as firstfruits is holy, so is the whole lump, and if the root is holy, so are the branches.

Teaching Points

1. On Mount Zion stood the Lamb – The chronology of this verse is not clear. Revelation 19 describes Jesus' physical return, the second coming. But here in chapter 14, he is described as standing on Mt. Zion (note that Zachariah 14:4 says He will set foot on the Mt. of Olives.) There are many varied interpretations.

One view that many hold is that Revelation is not entirely chronological. Rather, many of the same events are told in a series of visions. These visions repeat the same events from different perspectives. Following that train of thought, parts of Revelation 14 could be describing Jesus' second coming from a different viewpoint. We see His interaction with the believers upon His return in the first part of the chapter and His judgment toward unbelievers in the last part.

Another view is that Jesus is described as standing on Mt. Zion in a spiritual sense. This vision shows that His presence is among those He has redeemed much like He is depicted in Revelation 1 as walking among the seven golden lampstands.

Still another view, is that Mt. Zion refers to heaven rather than Mt. Zion in Israel. Jesus is described as being in heaven in Revelation 9 and then again as returning from heaven in Revelation 19. Thus, the most likely explanation is that Jesus is still in heaven here in the middle in Revelation 14.

Hebrews 12:22 - *But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering.*

In Hebrews 12, we see that Mount Zion is described as being in heaven (In Romans 11:26 He comes from that place to earth.) And in Revelation 14:3 the 144,000 are singing a song before the throne (which is in heaven). If the 144,000 witnesses are in heaven along with the four creatures and the elders, then clearly that is where Jesus is too.

Thus, according to this view, this is a poetic way to say that the 144,000 witnesses have been killed, but they are now safe with the Lamb and are worshiping Him in heaven. They have already been purchased and they are the first fruits of the other Jews who will come to know Him throughout the tribulation. God's sealing meant that they were under His protection (Revelation 7:3) until their mission of evangelism was complete.

Because the 144,000 seem to be in heaven at this point, the last view seems the most likely.

Whichever view you hold, the main points are the same. The 144,000 belong to God. They are set apart for Him and live for Him. And Jesus will not abandon them.

2. His name and His father's name written on their foreheads – The 144,000 are sealed by God. They belong to Him. In the last couple of chapters, we have seen that the antichrist will be forcing people to take the mark. The world will be divided into two camps. There is no room for the undecided or agnostic. You choose either to follow Satan or to follow the Lamb. You get either the mark of the beast or the name of the Lord. And that choice is going to be a public one, marked clearly on your forehead. The 144,000 have made their choice. They belong to His camp.

3. A voice from heaven... and they were singing a new song – John describes the voice as the “roar of many waters,” like “loud thunder,” and like “the sound of harpists playing on their harps.” It is hard to imagine a sound that combines all of these elements! It is mighty. At the same time, it is graceful and melodious.

“They” refers to the 144,000. The song they sang to the Lord was a new song. It was unique, known, and sung only by them. No one else could even learn this song.

From this, we can see that some songs include such personal, intimate experiences that they can’t just be shared with everyone. Some worship songs might be private, from you to God.

Application: Consider writing your own praise hymn to the Lord. It doesn’t have to be posted on iTunes. It doesn’t have to have a perfect tune or melody. You can simply sing it to your Lord in the privacy of your own devotion time.

4. These have not defiled themselves with women – The 144,000 will be celibate. Paul taught in 1 Corinthians about the advantages of singleness.

1 Corinthians 7:1 - *Now concerning the matters about which you wrote: “It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman.”*

1 Corinthians 7:32-34 - *I want you to be free from anxieties. The unmarried man is anxious about the things of the Lord, how to please the Lord. But the married man is anxious about worldly things, how to please his wife, and his interests are divided. And the unmarried or betrothed woman is anxious about the things of the Lord, how to be holy in body and spirit. But the married woman is anxious about worldly things, how to please her husband.*

Even in normal times, there are advantages to being single. A believer who is single can devote all of his time and energy to serving the Lord without distraction. How much more advantageous singlehood will be during the tribulation when there is great persecution. It will be a virtual state of war between believers and the antichrist. What is more, these witnesses will know that their time is short and they will be martyred soon. It will not be a time to settle down and raise a family. The evangelists will be constantly risking their lives for the gospel. And they will be able to do this far better without the distraction and pressure of trying to protect a family.

Their singleness demonstrates their complete devotion to the Lord. They will give him everything they have, giving up all rights and comforts for the sake of fighting in this war and building His kingdom. In a very real sense, their marriage is to the Lamb.

Note that the Lord also selects single virgins to be in this special force of world evangelists. He intentionally chooses those who are best suited for this mission.

Application: How dedicated are you to the Lord? What are you willing to give up? Are you willing to live a life of singleness? Are you willing to give up pleasures and comforts? God does not call all believers to singlehood, but He does call us to live for Him and not for the world. And doing that requires real sacrifice.

5. They follow the Lamb wherever He goes – That is what a true disciple should do. When Jesus called the Twelve, He said, “follow me.” It isn’t always easy. Many times He may call us to go somewhere that is very difficult. And just as Jesus gave His life for the mission, so these witnesses will do the same.

Matthew 20:22 - Jesus answered, “You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I am to drink?” They said to him, “We are able.”

Application: Are you willing to drink the cup that Jesus drank?

6. Redeemed as first fruits for God – First fruits are generally the best of the harvest. They are low-hanging and easy to pick because they are juicy and ripe. At the same time, the first fruits show the quantity and quality of the remaining harvest. The 144,000 are faithful and committed to the Lord. They are pure and blameless. No lie will even be found in their mouths.

Application: We should strive for this type of lifestyle. Many people hurl accusations against the church, claiming that it is full of hypocrites. Sometimes they are right. In this passage, we see these believers faithfully following the Lord. Zealously, they put Him first. And they are fruitful. Their ministry leads to many others being saved. What specific things can you learn from their example and apply in the coming week?

II. Three Angelic Messages (6-13)

Discussion Questions

- Who were these three messages directed to?
- Why does the angel speak with a loud voice?
- What is the content of the first message? The second? The third?
- For what purpose does God send these messages?
- What do these messages show us about the Lord's character?
- What is Babylon the great?
- What will happen if someone ignores the third warning and takes the mark of the beast?
- According to verse 12, how should a believer respond to these messages?
- What practical things can you do now to build up your endurance for future spiritual challenges?
- What does it mean to die in the Lord? How will they be blessed?

Cross-References

Hebrews 1:14 - Are they not all ministering spirits sent out to serve for the sake of those who are to inherit salvation?

Psalms 103:20 - Bless the Lord, O you his angels, you mighty ones who do his word, obeying the voice of his word!

Isaiah 43:7 - Everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made."

Isaiah 43:21 - The people whom I formed for myself that they might declare my praise.

Matthew 10:28 - And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.

Romans 5:3-4 - More than that, we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope.

Matthew 5:10 - Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Teaching Points

1. Three angelic messages – The vast majority of the time, God uses people to witness to other people. Only on very rare occasions does He directly intervene by sending angelic messengers. But that is what we see happening in this passage. Three times He sends an angelic messenger flying around the earth with special messages.

We see that those messages will go out to “every nation and tribe and language and people.” No one will be left out.

Reflect: Why do you think in this case God sends angels with these messages (considering He normally sends people)?

It will be a time that will be very difficult for believers to openly share the gospel. The 144,000 are already martyred. Those who speak out in public for the Lord will quickly be arrested and martyred as well.

But God is not done. He is going to accomplish His plans with or without man. When people will be unable to spread the message, He will do it in another way. From this, we see God’s mercy. Every person on earth will hear these messages. Everyone who has not yet taken the mark will have yet another chance to repent.

One of the most common questions people pose is “what will happen to the person who has never heard the gospel?”

I believe that this passage shows us that God can and does work in ways we may not expect to spread His message. In the Old Testament, Melchizedek was a priest and a king who believed in the true God. Presumably, he led people in his kingdom to do the same. Where and how did he hear about the Lord? We don’t know. But he did. God got the message to him.

I once heard a story of a missionary who went to an isolated tribe to share the good news. When he got there, he found that they were immediately ready to accept the gospel. They said that they knew there was a good and loving Creator and were waiting to hear more about Him. They had received angelic visions where the

messengers told them that someone would come and introduce them to the true God.

Isaiah 59:1 - Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save, or his ear dull, that it cannot hear.

God is not restrained to save those whom He wishes by anything, including the church's failure to go, whether that is because of disobedience or intense persecution, or any other reason.

Application: Be encouraged to trust more fully in the goodness and mercy of God.

2. The first message –

Revelation 14:7 - Fear God and give Him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come, and worship him who made heaven and earth, the sea and the springs of water.

Here is a call to fear God and worship Him. During this period the antichrist will demand the world's worship. He and his false prophet will do many signs to deceive the world. The goal will be to convince people that he is God.

Yet the angel's message is simple. Worship the God who made heaven and earth, not this imposter. Fear Him. It will be hard for many people at that time not to fear the world government. It will have a lot of visible power, even to the point of executing believers.

Luke 12:4-5 - I tell you, my friends, do not fear those who kill the body, and after that have nothing more that they can do. But I will warn you whom to fear: fear him who, after he has killed, has authority to cast into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him!

Application: We do not live in such an extreme time as the tribulation. But many authorities seek to pressure and intimidate believers. A boss may threaten to fire you if you don't forge papers. A teacher may threaten to fail you if you don't bow to the LGBT movement. They have no power over your soul. Fear God and not man.

3. The second message –

Revelation 14:8 - *“Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great, she who made all nations drink the wine of the passion of her sexual immorality.”*

Babylon the great is described more in Revelation 17-18. It is the world system that sets itself up in opposition to God. Satan is behind this world system. It is present throughout all ages (first seen clearly at the time of the Tower of Babel), but in the tribulation, his government will take over as THE world power. As always, Satan will seek to win people to his side through lies. Making false promises is what he does. He will promise fun, wealth, luxury, thrill, and sexual pleasures.

People love free handouts. And the nations of the world will line up for the free fun that is being offered.

The angelic message is a warning that these pleasures are fleeting. The government, the system, and everyone in it will fall.

Application: Do not love the world or the things in the world (1 John 2:15-16). The world offers “free” pleasures like porn. It is not free at all. All of these sinful pleasures come with a cost. And any pleasures are temporary and not fulfilling.

4. The third message –

Revelation 14:9-11 - *“If anyone worships the beast and its image and receives a mark on his forehead or on his hand, he also will drink the wine of God's wrath, poured full strength into the cup of his anger, and he will be tormented with fire and sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever, and they have no rest, day or night, these worshipers of the beast and its image, and whoever receives the mark of its name.”*

Here is the counter to the antichrist’s propaganda machine. Surely, his PR team will be active all over the media extolling the amazing benefits and utopia awaiting those who receive this mark. The convenience, the belonging, and the protections it offers those who take it will be lauded. It will most likely sound like taking the mark will be the ticket to a worldwide paradise, a place of unity and fun for all.

But the angel will give a different message. He announces eternal doom and judgment upon those who decide in favor of the beast by taking the mark and worshiping him. Doom is eternal and never-ending because those in hell will continue sinning for eternity without ever repenting.

Reflect: Why do people risk eternity in hell for the sake of a short-term sinful pleasure?

5. Here is a call for the endurance of the saints –

Persecution is going to get worse. Believers will be reviled for their faith. Those taking the name of Christ will have a target on their backs. Many will be martyred. Deliverance is not promised. They are called to endure to the end. And knowing that death will bring them instantly to the Lord, gives hope and boldness to be a good witness in the face of extreme persecution.

If believers at that time are called to endure the most wicked government in world history, then we must certainly endure now. To receive God's blessing, we must keep the command to endure.

It is easy to trust in and follow God when things are going smoothly, but how about when things are difficult? There are many challenges that might be hard to endure:

- Family separation
- Chronic pain
- Health issues
- Failures in business or school
- Childlessness
- Deaths of loved ones
- Hostility and pressure from the world

Revelation is a call to endure to the end. It is much easier to start than to finish. According to some statistics, 17% of people drop out of marathon races and don't finish. I expect the number is much higher for people who profess Christ.

If you think about your own circle, you can probably remember a number of people who used to be faithful churchgoers who disappeared. I can think of many I have known over the years.

Many of the temptations facing the churches we saw before are reasons: complacency, persecution, loss of their first love, and sexual immorality.

What is the solution?

Philippians 1:6 - And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.

We trust in Christ's power in our lives. At the same time, we are to cooperate with Him. A marathon is finished one step at a time. When you are tired and thirsty and weak, each step can be a challenge. If you think about the finish line so far away it would be easy to get discouraged. One step at a time.

The Christian life is the same. Every day is a new battle. Each day we are called to be faithful and endure. Once you add up all of those steps, and all of those days, it will take you to the finish line, where the eternal blessings await.

III. The Harvest of the Earth (14-20)

Discussion Questions

- Who is this seated on the cloud?
- What does the crown represent? What about the sickle?
- If it is Jesus on the cloud, then how can we understand the term “another angel?” And also, how can we understand an angel seemingly giving Him instructions?
- What is being reaped in this passage?
- What does it mean to “gather the clusters from the vine of the earth?”
- Why are judgment and death called “reaping?”
- What is the great winepress of the wrath of God?
- What does this passage teach us about God’s character?
- What is the result of God’s wrath here on earth?

Cross-References

Mark 4:29 - But when the grain is ripe, at once he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come.”

John 12:48 - The one who rejects me and does not receive my words has a judge; the word that I have spoken will judge him on the last day.

John 5:22 - The Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son.

Jude 1:15 - To execute judgment on all and to convict all the ungodly of all their deeds of ungodliness that they have committed in such an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things that ungodly sinners have spoken against him.

Teaching Points

1. The identity of the one seated on the cloud - At first glance, it appears that this might refer to Jesus. The "Son of Man" is often a Messianic phrase that refers to the Messiah. However, in this case, it appears that this may not be Jesus for three reasons.

A. The Greek word for crown here is "stefanos." That is not the type of crown that kings wear. Rather, it is the type of crown that athletes wore to denote their victory. It is the same type of crown that will be given to believers who overcome. A diadem is a crown that kings wear and the word that is used for the many crowns on Jesus' head in Revelation 19:12.

B. In verse 15 it says that "another angel" came out of the temple. So there was an angel described before this one, hence the use of the word "another." While it could refer back to an angel mentioned previously in Revelation, the most immediate context is the being in verse 14.

C. This angel in verse 15 gives a command to the being in verse 14 to "put in your sickle..." It would seem unlikely that an angel would give Jesus a command.

For these three reasons, it is more likely that the one seated on the cloud "like a son of man" is an angel. And this specific angel appeared like a man. Perhaps this is emphasized because not all angels do look like men (as evidenced by the four living creatures and other beings described in the book of Revelation.)

There are other cases where God uses angels to reap the earth (Matthew 24:31).

2. The first harvest - Verses 15-16 describe the first harvest that is reaped by this angel with his sickle. This ties in with verse 13 which describes the martyrdom believers are going to face.

Revelation 14:13 - And I heard a voice from heaven saying, "Write this: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on." "Blessed indeed," says the Spirit, "that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow them!"

The second half of the tribulation will be a time when believers are martyred in huge numbers. It is also prophesied in Daniel 7:25.

Daniel 7:25 - He shall speak words against the Most High, and shall wear out the saints of the Most High, and shall think to change the times and the law; and they shall be given into his hand for a time, times, and half a time.

Reaping a harvest in the Bible is generally a good thing. And this first harvest seems to be a harvest of believers. Believers who hear the message of Revelation 14:14-16 should be encouraged. While it may appear to them that they are under the power and dominion of the evil one, God is sovereign. And God views this as a good thing.

Consider this. The world at that time will be the most wicked in all of human history. Satan will be openly worshiped. Everyone will want to hunt down and kill believers. So God says, "OK." And He allows believers to be martyred, thus removing them from the earth and taking them immediately to the safety of His presence.

Death for believers at that time will not be a curse. It will be a blessing, just as when a harvest of good crops is brought in. This harvest does not occur all at once, but during the period of the second half of the tribulation.

Application: Looking at persecution in the short term can be disheartening. It may even discourage believers from sharing their faith because of fear of the consequences. But when we look at it from God's perspective, we see that to Him martyrdom of saints is

precious (Psalm 116:15). It means we come into His presence quickly. Let us strive to look beyond the short-term persecution and to the heavenly reward for being faithful. Focusing on the eternal perspective can give us hope and boldness.

3. The second harvest -

Revelation 14:17 - Then another angel came out of the temple in heaven, and he too had a sharp sickle.

This is a second and different harvest carried out by a different angel. In this case, also the angel receives a command to "put in the sickle." There is a difference in how the harvest is described.

Revelation 14:18 - Gather the clusters from the vine of the earth, for its grapes are ripe."

Here the harvest is of grapes. These grapes of the vine will be gathered and thrown into the great winepress of the wrath of God. In a winepress, grapes are smashed and crushed so that the juices can flow out. It is a violent image. The term used in verse 20 is that they will be "trodden."

There is a comfort for believers in that this will happen "outside of the city." Most likely that is a reference to Jerusalem and a reminder that the judgment will target unbelievers who are targeting God's people.

It will result in death and destruction. Vast numbers of the unbelieving will be slain as a result of God's wrath. The blood will flow to the height of a horse's bridle for 1600 stadia. A stadia is a Greek unit of measurement equivalent to about 600 feet (192 meters). The total distance described here will be about 180 miles (300 Km).

All of this points clearly to the fact that the second harvest is one of divine judgment. God's wrath will be poured out against those who continue to rebel against Him. Both of these harvests are described in poetic terms.

4. The timeline - When will these things happen?

Both of these harvests appear to be summaries of what is going to happen over the second half of the tribulation. First, believers will be martyred. After that, will come God's divine retribution for those who supported and caused it. Therefore, this chapter seems to be forward-looking, rather than something which takes place at this precise moment in the timeline.

And seen that way, it is meant to encourage the saints. It is a call for endurance (verse 12). Yes, believers will be martyred. But that is a blessing for them. And unbelievers will be judged. Knowing what is coming will give the believers the strength to endure. If they did not know ahead of time, they might conclude that God is absent or that He is actually losing the war. When they see the result of God's wrath against believers, they will also be reminded that the temporary pleasures of sin (including avoiding persecution) are not worth it.

Revelation 15

Outline

- I. The Song of The Saints (1-4)
- II. The Seven Angels Bringing Seven Plagues (5-8)

I. The Song of the Saints (1-4)

Discussion Questions

- What did John see?
- Why were these plagues called the "last?"
- What might the sea of glass with fire represent?
- Who did John see there?
- In what way did these people "conquer" the beast and its image?
- How can you in like manner conquer those who persecute or pressure you?
- What is the song of Moses? What is the song of the Lamb?
- What aspects of God's character do they praise?
- What can you learn from this passage about worship?
- How can you become a better worshipper of God?

Cross-References

Revelation 4:6 -And before the throne there was as it were a sea of glass, like crystal.

1 Corinthians 15:57 - But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Ephesians 6:13 - Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm.

Romans 8:37 - No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.

John 4:23-24 - But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.

Hebrews 13:15 - Through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name.

Teaching Points

1. Verse 1 – Chapters 14 and 15 are a transition between the trumpet judgments and the last seven judgments (the bowl judgments). John is given a vision of the next step of God's plan. Seven more judgments are going to be poured out upon the earth. These are described as the "last," and "with them the wrath of God is finished."

One of the main purposes of the tribulation is for God to pour out His righteous judgment upon a world that will be crazed with sin and rebellion. By this point, we have already seen fourteen judgments sent upon the earth. Now the end is nearing. After the final seven, that step of God's plan will be finished and Jesus will then return.

2. The wrath of God – God is good and righteous, but He is not tolerant of sin. He is not apathetic or distant.

In the Chronicles of Narnia series, C.S. Lewis writes about Aslan (a lion representing Christ). He writes that Aslan is a good lion, but he is not a tame lion.

Our God is good, kind, loving, merciful, gracious, and patient. But that does not mean that He will not punish evildoers. Throughout the book of Revelation, we see that God's mercy and justice are shown side by side. The very same plagues that are sent in judgment are also a manifestation of mercy. These supernatural signs are meant to wake up a world hardened by sin and turn them

to repentance. However, they are not only manifestations of mercy. They are also clearly God's wrath and judgment against sin.

The scope of these judgments should show us very clearly how much our Lord hates sin. Make no mistake. He is angry. Repeated and willful rebellion against His good commands is not met with silence. He offered the world a carrot many times. But if they won't accept the carrot, then it is going to be the stick.

Romans 1:18 - For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.

Salvation is available. Anyone who wants to escape that wrath can. Only one thing is necessary. Accept His Son.

John 3:36 - Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.

Application: Make sure that you are in right standing with God so that you will not have to face His wrath.

3. A sea of glass mingled with fire – John said that he saw what "appeared" to be a sea of glass mingled with fire. In Revelation 4:6 he describes it as "crystal." He is unable to describe this amazing sight perfectly, because he had never seen anything like it on earth. And because he can't describe it, he uses qualifiers like "appeared." That was the best he could do with the limited language and experience available to someone from this world.

His very description seems to contradict itself. Glass is stationary, but a sea generally has waves and moves. And fire doesn't mix well with water. Whatever John saw had qualities of each of these. Since John mentions it twice, this sea is prominent and has some deeply significant purpose. One day we will find out what that is.

1 Corinthians 13:12 - For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known.

Now we see things dimly. We have just a glimpse of heaven and it is hard to understand. It is as though we are looking at a very poor

mirror. One day we will see the Lord (and all of these other things) face to face and our comprehension will be far greater than it is now.

Application: Be diligent to study so that you can understand as much as you possibly can now about the Lord. Always pray and seek enlightenment from the Spirit in those difficult-to-understand areas.

4. Those who had conquered the beast – Martyred saints will be there next to the sea in heaven with the Lord. It is a great title which is given to them, "those who had conquered the beast."

The beast gets his power from Satan himself. He and the false prophet will have very impressive supernatural powers. In addition to these powers, they will be backed up by the best technology and most powerful armies the world can provide.

And yet believers will be able to overcome these powers of evil. That victory will not be through force of arms. It will not be through subterfuge or sabotage.

Revelation 12:11 - And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death.

Saints will overcome him through the blood of the Lamb. It is not through self, but through the power of Christ. Only by looking to and clinging to Christ's work on the cross, will believers be able to remain steadfast during this terrible time of persecution.

The saints that conquer will almost all be martyred. But death is not losing. Remaining faithful to death proves that their names are written in the Book of Life. Refusing to give in to pressure to renounce the Lord will be the ultimate victory.

Just as King Nebuchadnezzar was furious with the three men who would not bow to his idol, so the beast will be furious that even though he will be reigning over the world he will not have absolute power over the soul.

Application: If you cannot conquer a bit of peer pressure now, how could you hope to stand when the persecution gets cranked up?

God gives you chances to be "faithful in a little thing" now. Thank God for those times of persecution and pressure. And stand up for what is right without wavering. Remember, that God is the one on the throne and not any earthly figure, no matter how powerful he or she seems to be.

5. The Song of Moses – This may be a reference to a poem of praise recorded by Moses in Deuteronomy 32. As Moses praised God, so will they.

6. The Song of the Lamb – Part of this song is recorded in Revelation 15:3-4.

*Revelation 15:3-4 - Great and amazing are your deeds,
O Lord God the Almighty!
Just and true are your ways,
O King of the nations!
Who will not fear, O Lord,
and glorify your name?
For you alone are holy.
All nations will come
and worship you,
for your righteous acts have been revealed."*

Reflect: What can you learn from this passage about worship?

Again and again, in the book of Revelation, we see that in heaven God's people actively sing His praise. Worship is a very important component of what we will be doing there. In heaven, God will be worshiped in the right way as He wants to be worshiped. Therefore, it is a useful study, to study carefully the content of the songs recorded.

Here are a few key observations about the worship we see in this passage:

- It is very God-centric. The focus is on God and not man.
- It mentions what He has done (Great and amazing are your deeds).
- It mentions the goodness of His actions (Just and true are your ways).
- It mentions who He is. God's character is described and praised.

- It encourages everyone to join in praise.

Reflect: How can you become a better worshipper of God?

II. The Seven Angels Bringing Seven Plagues (5-8)

Discussion Questions

- What is the sanctuary of the tent of witness?
- Why do the angels come out of this tent?
- What do you notice about their garments?
- Do you remember the role of the four living creatures?
- What do the coming judgments reveal about God's nature?
- Why does the smoke fill the sanctuary and how does this relate to God's glory and power?
- Why do you think no one could enter the sanctuary until these plagues were finished?
- How does this passage help you more deeply understand God's character?
- How should God's holiness and glory affect your everyday life?
- How will meditating on God's holiness change you?

Cross-References

Acts 7:44 - Our fathers had the tent of witness in the wilderness, just as he who spoke to Moses directed him to make it, according to the pattern that he had seen.

Revelation 3:5 - The one who conquers will be clothed thus in white garments, and I will never blot his name out of the book of life. I will confess his name before my Father and before his angels.

Exodus 19:18 - Now Mount Sinai was wrapped in smoke because the Lord had descended on it in fire. The smoke of it went up like the smoke of a kiln, and the whole mountain trembled greatly.

Exodus 40:34-35 - Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. And Moses was not able

to enter the tent of meeting because the cloud settled on it, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle.

Teaching Points

1. Tabernacle of Witness – There are many names for the tabernacle including; Tabernacle of the Testimony (Exodus 27:21, Numbers 1:50), Tent of Meeting, (Leviticus 1:1, Exodus 39:32, Exodus 40:2), Sanctuary (Exodus 15:17), and Temple of the Lord (1 Samuel 1:9).

Each name depicts a different purpose or aspect of the tabernacle/temple. The word "sanctuary" reminds us of its holiness. It is a place for reverent worship of God. And the word "witness" shows us that it is a place to witness and learn of God's greatness. At the same time, it is a place to share with others testimonies praising the Lord.

The earthly tabernacle was a copy of the heavenly one.

Hebrews 8:5 - They serve a copy and shadow of the heavenly things. For when Moses was about to erect the tent, he was instructed by God, saying, "See that you make everything according to the pattern that was shown you on the mountain."

From this, we learn that there is a heavenly temple.

2. The angels will come out of this heavenly temple to unleash the last seven plagues – Seven angels will come out of the heavenly sanctuary of witness. Coming out of the sanctuary is a reminder to the world that the judgments coming are holy and righteous. They are sent by a holy, righteous God. And those plagues will be a witness to the fact that God is not happy with the rebellion on earth.

It is evident that these seven angels are directly commissioned by God for this task of judgment.

3. Their garments – Like saints who overcome (Revelation 3:5), the angels also will be clothed in pure, bright linen. It does not specifically mention that it is white, but this is likely.

We often don't think it, but angels were also faced with temptation. When Lucifer tried to seduce the angels to rebel against God, they

had a choice to make. Those who chose to worship God remained holy in the state He created them.

4. The bowls are full of the wrath of God – In many ways, this wrath is being stored up. The longer God's patience goes and His wrath is held back, the more these bowls fill up.

One can imagine that God's grace and patience are something like a dam holding back floodwaters. As that water is held back, the area behind the dam fills up higher and higher. The longer those waters are held back, the more torrential will be their release when the dam is released.

Thus, these bowls are full. The effects of these judgments will be extremely serious. It will be no divine slap on the wrist.

5. Who lives forever and ever – God existed long before man or his sin. We are reminded that He is longsuffering. But one day that patience will run out.

6. The sanctuary was filled with smoke from the glory of God – Smoke in this context seems to have several purposes.

Firstly, it conceals. The smoke will conceal the presence of God, reminding all Creation of His glorious transcendence.

Secondly, where there is smoke there is fire. Fire represents perfection and purity. God is absolutely holy and the smoke points to this.

Thirdly, smoke can depict anger, the burning of God's wrath. His righteous anger will be unleashed against sin.

Application: Remember the character of the God you serve. He is not tame.

7. No one could enter the sanctuary until the seven plagues were finished –

Ephesians 2:18 - For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father.

Through Christ, we can approach the Father. However, here we see that occasionally it seems that physical access may not be 24/7.

Will this restriction be forever removed when His judgment is complete? Or will there be times when God chooses to be alone?

We cannot be sure of the answers to those questions now. But this verse reminds us of God's holiness, His "otherness." We are created in His image, but we are not wholly like Him. He is transcendent and He is different from us. At the same time, He is willing to have a relationship with us. For that, we should be thankful.

Another point is that God is going to unleash these seven judgments. The process has started and it cannot be stopped. No one can intervene. The matter has been settled.

Application: It is a blessing to be allowed into God's presence. Let us not waste this opportunity.

Hebrews 4:16 - *Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.*

Revelation 16:1-7

Outline

- I. The First Bowl Judgment (1-2)
- II. The Second Bowl Judgment (3)
- III. The Third Bowl Judgment (4-7)
- IV. The Fourth Bowl Judgment (8-9)
- V. The Fifth Bowl Judgment (10-11)
- VI. The Sixth Bowl Judgment (12-16)
- VII. The Seventh Bowl Judgment (17-21)

I. The First Bowl Judgment (1-2)

Discussion Questions

- What temple is referred to here?
- What were the angels commanded to do?
- Are these bowls figurative or symbolic? Why?
- What is the first bowl judgment?
- Who will be affected by it?
- What historical judgment in the Bible is this similar to?

Cross-References

Exodus 9:8-9 - And the Lord said to Moses and Aaron, “Take handfuls of soot from the kiln, and let Moses throw them in the air in the sight of Pharaoh. It shall become fine dust over all the land of Egypt, and become boils breaking out in sores on man and beast throughout all the land of Egypt.”

Exodus 9:11 - And the magicians could not stand before Moses because of the boils, for the boils came upon the magicians and upon all the Egyptians.

Teaching Points

1. A loud voice coming from the temple – It is the voice of God. Throughout Revelation, we see that God speaks in a loud voice many times. The loud voice shows us His power and authority. His commands and judgments are firm.

In chapter 15, we saw that there is a heavenly temple. The earthly temple is a shadow (copy) of the heavenly one. During this time of judgment, God's presence will be in the temple. No one will be able to go in. That is why His command issues forth from within.

2. "Go and pour out on the earth the seven bowls of the wrath of God." – God initiates the final set of seven judgments upon the earth. Already seven seal judgments and seven trumpet judgments have been unleashed. The final set of seven will be even worse as the judgments escalate in response to the continued rebellion and refusal to repent.

The imagery depicted is that of bowls being filled with the wrath of God. Wrath is intangible. It cannot be seen or touched. Here it will take physical form. Just as at the very word of God, the universe was created, so at His very expression of divine anger, that same world will face plagues. And those plagues will be tangible.

3. The first bowl judgment – The first of the seven bowl judgments is a plague of "painful sores." It is not the first time that God has sent a plague of boils in the Bible. In Exodus 9, He did the same thing. That plague only afflicted the Egyptians. God's people were spared. We see that same division here.

Though believers who are still alive at this point in the future will face many difficulties during the tribulation, there is still a separation in how God deals with the believer and the unbeliever. A number of the plagues will only affect unbelievers. In this case, it is specifically aimed toward those people who take the mark and worship the beast and its image.

The beast will be unable to counter this plague, just as the priests of Egypt were unable to reverse the effects of the boils in the time of Moses.

It is a very quick reversal for those who decide to take the mark. Many will do so because of the benefits offered. The propaganda machine of the evil world government will sell all the advantages of

getting the mark. It will provide protection, convenience, prestige, and a sense of belonging. Even more important, those who take the mark will have the added benefit of not being killed for refusing. Very likely that government will market a new era of utopia for its loyal citizens.

Yet God warned the earth that taking the mark would result in eternal judgment. And those who take it will discover very quickly the truth of His words. Not long will go by until God sends this plague. It is hard to imagine the utter despair that will be experienced by those who realize that their eternal doom has been sealed. The continuous night-and-day pain of the skin sores will serve as an ever-present reminder of their terrible choice. It will be like a small taste of hell.

The rebellious will discover the hard way that Satan is the father of lies. All of the grand promises that they were told, were lies. Choosing the world's way will not lead to utopia, security, or joy. It will instead lead to agony, shame, guilt, and despair.

Reflect: This chapter is very dark. It is very sad. Why does God record these awful things?

God tells us what is going to happen as a warning. God is truth. And the truth will set you free. He told Adam and Eve that if they ate the fruit in the garden, they would die. And they did. Similarly, He records ahead of time the results of choosing the mark (and the world) as a warning of the consequences of sin.

Application: Sin always comes with consequences. Temptation appeals to the flesh. It lures believers with promises of thrill, excitement, freedom, and pleasure. But the results do not live up to the promises. It only brings about guilt and death. Let the truth about sin open your eyes so that you can see through those lies and choose the right path, not the path of instant gratification.

James 1:14-15 - But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.

II. The Second Bowl Judgment (3)

Discussion Questions

- How is this similar to a previous judgment? Which judgment?
- How is this different than that judgment?
- What would the effects of this judgment be for the world?

Teaching Points

1. Comparison to the second trumpet judgment –

2nd Trumpet Judgment

Revelation 8:8-9 - The second angel blew his trumpet, and something like a great mountain, burning with fire, was thrown into the sea, and a third of the sea became blood. A third of the living creatures in the sea died, and a third of the ships were destroyed.

2nd Bowl Judgment

Revelation 16:3 - *The second angel poured out his bowl into the sea, and it became like the blood of a corpse, and every living thing died that was in the sea.*

We see that these judgments are similar. Both of them target the sea. Both involve the sea becoming blood. And both involve sea creatures dying.

A number of the other trumpet and bowl judgments are similar as well.

The third judgment targets freshwater (Revelation 8:10-11). The fourth involves the sun (Revelation 8:12). The fifth brings about darkness (Revelation 9:1-2). And the sixth involves the Euphrates river.

There are two general views to explain these similarities. Some hold that the bowl judgments and the trumpet judgments describe the same events. They are repeated to show different perspectives. Those who hold this view, look at the book of Revelations as

cyclical. Rather than purely a chronological timeline, the same events are repeated from different perspectives.

Others hold to a chronological timeline, where the events of Revelation move forward linearly. They view each set of judgments not as the same events, but as similar events which escalate in intensity.

For example, the seal judgments affect one-fourth of the population, the trumpet judgments one-third, and the bowl judgments affect all.

We see that pattern emerging in the second bowl judgment. Though similar to the second trumpet judgment, there is a clear difference. In the second bowl judgment, all ocean-dwelling creatures die, not just one-third.

Reflect: What does this escalation of intensity show us about God's character?

This escalation is consistent with God's character. Because He is merciful, He doesn't pour out all of the contents of His wrath at the beginning. Instead, He gives a warning. First, He gives a taste of the things to come. At the same time, He sends messengers, both angelic and human witnesses. Then He pauses to give time for people to contemplate and repent. Ideally, they will take heed of the warning and turn to Him before worse judgments come.

When people do not repent, the judgment gets worse. Many judgments are repeated, only the next time they are more intense. In addition to highlighting His mercy, it also shows His judgment. People who have disregarded warnings are more culpable for their actions. Thus, a more severe penalty is reasonable.

The criminal justice system often works like this. A sentence for a first offense may be light. But it will increase with each subsequent infraction.

Therefore, it is reasonable to conclude that these series of judgments are distinct and chronological. God's mercy and justice can be seen in the way He starts off by giving a taste of what is to come before releasing the full wrath.

Application: The clear application is that it is better to repent earlier than later (or never). Some people think, "I will enjoy myself (and sin) now. Later when I have lived my life, I will repent." Such thinking is a grave mistake. Sin over time increasingly hardens the heart, many times to the point of no return. And the more times God's warnings are ignored and willful sin takes place, the more serious the consequences will be. Today is the day of salvation (2 Corinthians 6:2).

III. The Third Bowl Judgment (4-7)

Discussion Questions

- How is the third bowl judgment similar to the third trumpet judgment?
- How is it different?
- What do the judgments show us about God's character?
- How can an agent of God's wrath praise Him even while executing His judgment?
- If you were in the angel's place, could you praise God while doing this? Why or why not?

Cross-References

Isaiah 61:8 - For I the Lord love justice; I hate robbery and wrong; I will faithfully give them their recompense, and I will make an everlasting covenant with them.

Deuteronomy 32:4 - The Rock, his work is perfect, for all his ways are justice. A God of faithfulness and without iniquity, just and upright is he.

Teaching Points

1. The third bowl judgment – This judgment targets freshwater. The second judgment already turned the oceans to blood, killing all of the creatures who lived there. Now we see the same will happen to rivers and lakes. Fish and other freshwater creatures cannot live in blood. Presumably, they too will die.

The combined effects of these two judgments will be catastrophic. A huge amount of the world's food supply (seafood and fish) will be instantly gone. Following soon after that, many crops will fail since they won't be able to be irrigated. An even bigger problem will be a lack of drinking water. Rain should still be drinkable. And perhaps small amounts of water elsewhere will be unaffected. But it will be a catastrophe of truly global proportions. One can easily imagine how quickly things will descend into anarchy as people fight and kill for the little bit of water there is.

The stink and decay will be everywhere. Plant life will be drastically affected. Many species will die out. That in turn will affect oxygen and carbon dioxide levels, which will, in turn, affect temperature and weather patterns. It will be climate change worse than ever dreamed of. No longer will the world be a beautiful reminder of God's goodness. Instead, it will be a visible reminder of God's wrath and displeasure against sin, which is what will bring about this curse.

2. Just are you, O Holy One – As the angel pours out God's wrath on the world, he will praise God for His justice.

This chapter depicts very sad and sobering events. When we read it, we can't help but feel sorrowful that things will come to this.

Reflect: How can an agent of God's wrath praise Him even while executing His judgment?

The angel realizes that God is wholly just in these judgments. He doesn't blame God or ask, "why?" There is no incrimination or doubting God's character. God's character and reasoning are above approach. It is evident to the angel, and all, that God is right in His sentence of punishment upon the earth.

In Genesis 18:16-33, Abraham pleads with God to show mercy upon Sodom and Gomorrah. He negotiates with God, asking that God spare the cities if as few as ten righteous people are found there. God agrees. But He goes even further. Ten righteous people were not found there. Lot was the only one (and God used a very merciful standard in evaluating him). Therefore, God rescues Lot and his family before sending the judgment.

Here in the book of Revelation, it is similar. Any who sought God's rescue, could have received it.

After WWII, Nazi war criminals were tried for their crimes in the Nuremberg trials. But before their sentences, the allies sent chaplains to share the gospel with the Nazi leaders, some of whom actually repented. The Nazis who genuinely repented will be forgiven by God and can enter heaven. Still, all of those found guilty were sentenced to execution.

How would you feel watching those trials if you were a family member of a Jewish victim of the holocaust? Would you want the Nazis set free or would you want justice served?

Most would want justice. And justice demands a penalty. If a judge set them free, surely many would rise up in anger and say that the judge was corrupt or unfair. When the judge did his job and gave them a righteous sentence, no one will blame the judge. The Nazis got what they deserved. As sad as it is, it is also right.

That is exactly what this angel said.

Revelation 16:6 - For they have shed the blood of saints and prophets, and you have given them blood to drink. It is what they deserve!

Application: Some cast stones at God and claim that He is too harsh of a judge. Let us not fall into the trap of setting ourselves up as a higher authority than God, judging Him for His decisions. God is perfectly just and holy. We should praise Him for His righteous judgments, even when those judgments are very serious and sad to behold. The alternative is a tolerant God who allows unchecked sin. Murdering His saints is not allowed to go unpunished, nor should it be. Do not judge God. God is the judge, not you. Behold Him for who He is.

Revelation 16:8-21

Outline

- I. The First Bowl Judgment (1-2)
- II. The Second Bowl Judgment (3)
- III. The Third Bowl Judgment (4-7)
- IV. The Fourth Bowl Judgment (8-9)
- V. The Fifth Bowl Judgment (10-11)
- VI. The Sixth Bowl Judgment (12-16)
- VII. The Seventh Bowl Judgment (17-21)

IV. The Fourth Bowl Judgment (8-9)

Discussion Questions

- What does the phrase "it was allowed" show us?
- How do these plagues show us God's sovereignty over nature?
- What are some reasons why God allows natural disasters now?
- How did people respond to this plague? What does this reveal to us about them?
- What does the phrase "They did not repent and give him glory" show us about God's purposes in allowing this plague?

Cross-References

Psalm 115:3 - Our God is in the heavens; he does all that he pleases.

Proverbs 19:21 - Many are the plans in the mind of a man, but it is the purpose of the Lord that will stand.

Psalms 103:19 - The Lord has established his throne in the heavens, and his kingdom rules over all.

Teaching Points

1. The fourth bowl judgment – This judgment affects the sun, which scorches the earth's population. It could be a result of extreme solar activity or solar flares. Or it might be due to problems with the earth's atmosphere. As that protection is reduced, the more harmful effects of the sun will come through.

Either way, it is a nightmare scenario. Advances in science tend to cause the human race to become prideful. People believe that they can overcome any obstacle that will come up. They believe that they are masters of their fate, captains of the ship.

Yet these plagues show us just how vulnerable we are. One million earths would fit inside the sun. If the sun heats up or cools down, there is nothing that people can do to stop it. With all of our modern technology, people will be completely helpless to find any solutions to this plague. An unbeliever might look at the vast universe and conclude, "we are at the mercy of mother nature." But this is the wrong conclusion. The correct conclusion is that we are at the mercy of the divine Creator.

Think about how fragile life is on earth. If the atmosphere is damaged, we die. If the weather cycle gets messed up, we die. If the air we breathe is contaminated or changes composition, we die. If a large asteroid's orbit lines up with earth, we die. If the sun heats up or cools off, we die.

We are at the mercy of God. And to this point, God has chosen to be merciful. Each sunrise is evidence of the common grace He extends to all mankind, allowing us to live another day. As we see in Revelation, that mercy will not last forever. There will come a point when His patience with sinners runs out. Woe to the one who has not repented of sin and enters that day unprepared.

Application: Realizing that our very existence relies on the mercy of God is greatly humbling. There is no room for pride in the life of the believer. Every good and perfect gift is from above. Let us do away with pride. Let us do away with relying on ourselves. Let us do away with boasting about our accomplishments. Instead, let us daily remember that we live because of God's mercy.

2. It was allowed to – The sun will only release more heat toward the earth because God will allow it to. Every created thing is subject to God's divine will. That is true even of the most celestial

bodies in the universe. One million earths can fit in the sun. And five billion suns can fit in the largest known star, UY Scuti. That means that six quadrillion-four-hundred-eighty-nine-trillion earths could fit in UY Scuti. Yet UY Scuti was made with a word by God. It cannot move unless He allows it to.

To get an idea of the gigantic size of the universe, check out this video:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i93Z7zljQ7I>

In the same way, no snowflake has ever fallen that God did not allow. The smallest of insects and even unseen atoms and electrons move according to God's design and under His sovereign will.

We are no different. We live because God allows us to.

Application: Always remember that God is sovereign. He designed this incomprehensibly large universe for our enjoyment and to showcase His power. And He made us. Even though we are tiny in the universe, He loves us. He values us. He has a plan for us. We should praise Him for His creation.

*Psalms 8:4-6 - What is man that you are mindful of him,
and the son of man that you care for him?
Yet you have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings
and crowned him with glory and honor.
You have given him dominion over the works of your hands;
you have put all things under his feet.*

3. They cursed the name of God – The judgment did not change people's minds. Battle lines had already been drawn. Most of the earth's citizens have already decided at this point to cast their lot with Satan. They have worshiped him and taken his mark. So there is no turning back. There seems to be no desire to ask for mercy or plead with God to forgive their rebellion. Instead, they rage against God, cursing Him. In short, they hate Him. They hate Him because He is more powerful than they are. They hate Him because He doesn't tolerate their sin. They hate Him because He exists, and they don't want Him to.

Having already gone beyond the line of no return, none of them will turn to God. That is not because they are begging for

forgiveness and God refuses them. It is because they are incapable of changing their minds and repenting. Their hearts have turned to stone. Every subsequent judgment hardens their resolve to rebel against God.

V. The Fifth Bowl Judgment (10-11)

Discussion Questions

- What are the implications of darkness?
- What symbolism is attached to darkness in the Bible?
- Since the text says that "its kingdom was plunged into darkness," do you think this plague will affect believers?
- How did people respond?
- Why does darkness cause such anguish?
- How is darkness a taste of hell?
- What can we learn about the importance of repentance?

Cross-References

1 John 1:5-7 - This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.

Exodus 10:21-23 - Then the Lord said to Moses, "Stretch out your hand toward heaven, that there may be darkness over the land of Egypt, a darkness to be felt." So Moses stretched out his hand toward heaven, and there was pitch darkness in all the land of Egypt three days. They did not see one another, nor did anyone rise from his place for three days, but all the people of Israel had light where they lived.

John 3:19-21 - And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed. But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God.

1 John 3:8-9 - Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil. No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in him, and he cannot keep on sinning because he has been born of God.

Hebrews 10:26 - For if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins

Teaching Points

1. The fifth bowl – The fifth bowl judgment is poured out on the throne of the beast and its kingdom. It is a direct judgment from God against the world order that has set itself up in opposition to God with the antichrist at its head. Darkness will cover this evil kingdom and it will be terrifying. It is interesting to note that this plague is something like the opposite of the fourth bowl. The fourth bowl judgment will be "too much sun." And this one will be "too little sun."

It is not the first time that such a plague has descended upon the earth. In Exodus 10:21-23, God sent the plague upon the Egyptians. That passage describes it as a darkness that "can be felt."

Each person was completely alone with his thoughts, his sin, and his guilt. There was no escape. This plague reminds me of the darkness of hell, where each person will forever be in utter darkness alone and in terror to contemplate his sin and rejection of the one true God. It is a taste of what hell will be like.

Matthew 8:12 - *While the sons of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.*

When the judgment of darkness descended upon Egypt, the Jews had light in their dwellings. God made a distinction between the two groups in how He treated them. The fifth bowl judgment also specifically targets the throne and kingdom of the beast. Thus, it is likely that if there are any believers left alive at this point, God will

make a distinction between them and the unbelievers. It is likely that somehow His believers will still be able to see.

Darkness is a symbol of sin, shame, guilt, and judgment. It also symbolizes blindness and deception. Though the world will be deceived and live as blind followers of the blind, God's people see the light. He has opened our eyes to the truth. The fifth bowl judgment will act as a physical reminder of the spiritual truth. Those whose eyes have been opened by the Lord will never live in darkness, but will experience the light directly from God's glorious presence forever. But those who shut their eyes in willful disobedience will be sentenced to live the life they have chosen, without light.

Reflect: What are some ways we can live in the light? How can fellowship help us to live in the light?

2. People's response –

"People gnawed their tongues in anguish and cursed the God of heaven for their pain and sores. They did not repent of their deeds."

In this verse, we see that they were still experiencing pain from their sores, which was the first bowl judgment. The effects of these bowl judgments overlapped. One is not always completely resolved before the next one comes. The cumulative effect of all of these judgments is overwhelming. People are living in anguish. Yet there is still no repentance. Instead, people grow angrier against God, cursing Him.

VI. The Sixth Bowl Judgment (12-16)

Discussion Questions

- Why was the Euphrates dried up? Where were these armies going?
- Who might the "kings of the east" be?
- Who is the dragon? The beast? What are they doing here?
- How do these demonic spirits seek to deceive people?
- What is the goal of these demons?

- What prophecies does this fulfill?
- Are demonic spirits doing the same thing today? If so, how can we be on guard about being deceived or influenced by them?
- What is the "great day of God the Almighty?"
- What application is given to believers here?
- What does it mean to stay awake?
- What are the "garments" and how can keep them on?

Cross-References

Ephesians 6:11-12 - Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

2 Corinthians 10:3-5 - For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ.

Matthew 7:15 - Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves.

Matthew 24:24 - For false christs and false prophets will arise and perform great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect.

Luke 21:36 - But stay awake at all times, praying that you may have strength to escape all these things that are going to take place, and to stand before the Son of Man.

Matthew 24:42 - Therefore, stay awake, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming.

Teaching Points

1. The sixth bowl judgment – The result of the sixth bowl judgment is that the Euphrates River is dried up. Notice it says that its "water" is dried up. In the third bowl judgment, freshwater was

turned to blood. This may indicate that the third bowl is a temporary plague and God restores the waters.

The Euphrates River runs predominantly north to south to the east of Israel. It provides a natural barrier between Israel and the Far East. Any invasion force from the Far East would have to find a way to get all of their troops across the river. And that would be made more difficult since the earthquake in the sixth seal judgment would have likely destroyed all the bridges.

On the surface, it looks like this bowl judgment helps Israel's enemies. It makes it easier for them to gather a massive force and wipe them off of the map.

Reflect: How is this apparent good fortune for the antichrist's forces not actually good for them at all?

The simple answer: it's a trap! God is going to allow these forces to muster and march on Israel in order to gather them all in one place for their final judgment. He wants them to go. All of their elaborately hatched schemes and skillful tactics are just playing right into God's plans. And the funny thing is, He announced these plans in the Bible long before it happens. And they still fall for it.

2. Who are the kings from the east? – Scripture doesn't say. India and China are currently the two largest and most powerful nations to the east that would be well-equipped to launch a large ground invasion against Israel through the Euphrates. A closer nation to the east that has long been an enemy of Israel is Iran.

3. I saw coming out of the mouth... three unclean spirits like frogs – While God is working, Satan is not napping. It is a battle. God has His plans and Satan has his plans. Satan wants to unite the world together against God in one epic battle that he somehow still seems to believe that he can win. It is apparent that his minion, the antichrist, may not be as popular as he once was. The world is in a complete state of ruin. It is far worse than what Germany or Japan faced in the late stages of World War II.

History teaches us that when a war goes badly, it becomes hard to hide the truth. Morale fades. Dictators live in fear of coups, schemes, and betrayal. There is less will to fight. In these times, corrupt regimes scale up the intensity of propaganda. The war is

fought on multiple fronts. And one of those battlefronts is for the minds of people.

Satan also knows this. And he is no stranger to deceitful propaganda. Normal media will be controlled by him. But it won't be enough. To win the minds of people across the world, he will send out demons throughout the earth. They will use various tools of deception including performing miraculous signs. Whatever supernatural abilities they have, will be on public display for all to see.

It will be a last-ditch attempt by Satan to muster his troops for war. His goal will be to get them to join this battle. He will want every man, every woman, and every weapon he can get, thinking that with enough military might he can crush the Jews and defeat God once and for all.

It seems that people will not be eager to sign up and enlist, causing Satan to resort to spiritual mind games: brainwashing, propaganda, intimidation, and fear. Having worshiped him, their minds will certainly be susceptible to demonic influence. Only the power of God can combat the deluding influence of Satan. But God will not stop it. He will allow it to happen (Romans 1), letting people go their own way and then finally reaping the consequences of their choices.

4. Satan is also active now - Make no mistake. Satan and his demons are active in the world. They hate God and all the followers of God. Their constant goal is to fight against God and His kingdom. They enjoy nothing more than seeing believers sin and seeing unbelievers with hard hearts reject the gospel.

Because they can't defeat God, they go for the next best thing, defeating God's followers.

This is a way to strike at God's heart because He is grieved when we fall. It is a way to keep us from enjoying His blessings. They are spiteful and miserable. Misery enjoys company. They know they will be condemned by God and all they can do is drag as many down with them as possible. His strategies are effective. They worked in the garden of Eden and have worked countless times since then. This is our adversary.

Application: We must put on the armor of God and fight. When we do fight, we must do so by the power of the Holy Spirit. If we depend on ourselves, we are doomed to fall.

Reflect: How can we be sure that we are not deluded or influenced by evil spiritual forces?

5. Stay awake – How can we be alert?

a) We should know ourselves well. That means we should know our weaknesses and areas of worse temptation. Then we need to make sure we stay far away from the temptations that are worst for us.

b) Make no opportunity for the flesh. Two are better than one. If we are going to be in a situation that could be a temptation, take along another believer. For example, even if as a guy you are going to share the gospel with a girl, take along another Christian so that there are three together instead of two. This can limit temptation.

c) Part of being alert is having an escape plan ready to go. That means we know what we are going to do if temptation comes. For me, whenever I fly or get on a bus I look around and have a plan as to what I will do if the worst happens. If that crash happens, at least I will know what I am going to do, which will cut down on reaction time and indecision. We should do this about temptation as well. When you face temptation, what will you do? Some things could include:

A. Run.

B. Pray.

C. Call another Christian for help and encouragement.

D. Read Scripture.

A lion is a very dangerous creature. Lion and wild animal trainers try every trick in the book to tame them. Still, you can often read stories in the news about lion tamers who were killed by the lion. Most of the time it is because for a moment they were not alert and the lion chose that moment to attack. Let us not give Satan the same opportunity.

Application: What are some practical ways you can "stay awake?"

6. Armageddon – This is the Valley of Megiddo, where one front of the last battle will take place between Jesus and the antichrist's massive assembled army.

VII. The Seventh Bowl Judgment (17-21)

Discussion Questions

- Who is speaking in verse 17? What is done?
- What previous judgment is this similar to? How is it similar? How is it different?
- Are these the same event or two distinct events?
- How did this affect Jerusalem?
- What will happen to the earth's topography during this judgment?
- How does verse 21 show us that these plagues are literal?
- Some people claim that if people could only see evidence of God they would believe. How do these judgments show us this is not the case? Why will people still not repent even in the face of such signs and judgment?

Cross-References

Revelation 6:12-14 - When he opened the sixth seal, I looked, and behold, there was a great earthquake, and the sun became black as sackcloth, the full moon became like blood, and the stars of the sky fell to the earth as the fig tree sheds its winter fruit when shaken by a gale. The sky vanished like a scroll that is being rolled up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place.

Teaching Points

1. A loud voice came out of the temple from the throne, saying, "It is done." – The seventh bowl judgment ends the series of twenty-one supernatural judgments, where God pours His wrath out on the world.
2. It is a terrifying ending – There will be lightning, thunder, and a massive earthquake as has never been seen before.

It seems quite similar to the sixth seal judgment, which also features an earthquake that affects the mountains and islands. The wording is so similar that some have concluded it is the same event described again here. There are three common ways to interpret this.

A. It is the same event. The judgments are not necessarily chronological.

B. The sixth seal is a summary of what is to come. The trumpet and bowl judgments are contained within (part of) the sixth seal. This view does not seem to be consistent with the fact that the future judgments are described as contained within the seventh seal, not the sixth seal.

C. They are two separate, but similar events. The second event is an intensification of the first one.

The most similar part of these earthquakes is the fact that they both affect mountains and islands. Yet the Greek word used is not the same.

The NASB translates Revelation 6:14 as, "*Every mountain and island were moved out of their places.*"

The NASB translates Revelation 16:20 as, "*And every island fled away, and the mountains were not found.*"

"Not found" is more serious and extreme than "moved out of their places." It seems that the first earthquake shakes and moves the entire earth, including the mountains and islands. They are left changed, bruised, beaten, crumbling perhaps. But the second earthquake finishes them off to the point where they cannot even be found. Mt. Everest will be gone. Hawaii will be gone. They will vanish from the earth. The power needed to cause that is immense. Thus, this global catastrophe will be even greater than any seen before.

Therefore, the third explanation seems the most plausible. And it fits with the theme of "escalation of intensity" we have seen in this chapter and throughout Revelation. As people continue to ignore

God's warnings, their culpability, and hence, the severity of judgment goes up.

3. The great city was split into three parts – Most likely, this is a reference to Jerusalem. It will not completely escape God's judgment.

4. God remembered Babylon the Great – For God's enemies, it is a scary thing to be remembered by God. They would rather just slink away in the darkness unobserved. But, it's not going to happen. As God remembers this wicked nation, he is going to dump out His entire cup of fury on it. There will be no escape. Those who think they can get away without judgment will be wrong indeed.

5. Great hailstones one hundred pounds each – Scholars disagree about how much of Revelation to take literally, and how much to take figuratively. Some argue that the earthquake, thunder, lightning, and hail, are all figurative. If that is the case, it would be odd to describe the weight of the hail.

What significance would a one-hundred-pound figurative hailstone have?

It doesn't make sense to record the weight of the hail unless it is real. When hundred-pound hailstones start to drop, the most fervent God-denier will not have a leg to stand on. The precision of the prophecies, once fulfilled, will bring even more glory to God.

The largest hailstone on record fell in South Dakota in 2010. It was 8 inches (20.3 CM) in diameter and weighed 1.94 pounds. Large hailstones in this size range are sometimes put in their own category called gargantuan hail.

The hail in Revelation will be fifty-times heavier and in a category all their own, apocalyptic hail.

6. The response – What was the response of those who were still alive? They cursed God. Still, there is no repentance. No recognition of sin. No throwing themselves upon the mercy of God. Only bitterness and hatred.

Application: Revelation 16 is another reminder that God takes sin very seriously. So should we. Sin is not a light matter. Too often,

we take a casual attitude toward sin, thinking, "I can do it now, and repent later." Perhaps these people thought the same. Hardening our hearts toward God and sinning willfully is a very dangerous thing. Let us be quick to confess our sins. One practical application is to confess your sins of the day each night before you sleep. Confess them to God, and also the person you sinned against.

Revelation 17

Outline

- I. The Prostitute (1-6)
- II. The Beast (7-11)
- III. The Alliance Against the Lamb (12-14)
- IV. The Beast and Kings Turn Against the Prostitute (15-18)

I. The Prostitute (1-6)

Discussion Questions

- What is she selling?
- Who does she seduce?
- How are these same temptations being sold today?
- Who or what is the scarlet beast in verse 3? Why is she sitting on it?
- What do the purple, scarlet, gold, jewels, and pearls show us about this woman?
- How is she connected with Babylon?
- How does she treat believers?
- How can believers guard themselves against the seduction of the world today?
- What does God call the things in the golden cup? How would the world call those very same things?

Cross-References

1 Corinthians 6:18 - Flee from sexual immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body.

1 Thessalonians 4:3-5 - For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality; that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and

honor, not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God.

Ephesians 5:3 - But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints.

Galatians 5:19 - Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality.

Teaching Points

1. Timeline – The seven bowl judgments have been poured out. Jesus' return and the final judgment upon the world, its leaders, and its system are near. That is what the angel is now about to show John. Chapter 17 is not, however, a snapshot in time. Rather, it shows the progression throughout the tribulation of the relationship between the prostitute, the beast, the ten king alliance, and the world, all of which will finally end in judgment.

2. The Great Prostitute –

Reflect: Who or what is the great prostitute?

Verse 5 identifies this figure as, "Babylon the great, mother of prostitutes and of earth's abominations." Babylon represents the evil world order that throughout history has set itself up against the Lord. From the beginning, Babylon was an evil city and an evil symbol. At the original Babel, people united together in rebellion against God's commands. They created their own culture, own kingdom, and their own religion with the goal of man being independent of God.

Chapter 18 continues detailing the fall of Babylon. It seems that "Babylon" in Revelation is composed of two entities. The first entity (chapter 17) is the evil religious system and the second entity (chapter 18) is the economic system.

The "great prostitute" is a one-world religion that will emerge in the end times. Throughout the Old Testament, prophets often described Israel's pursuit of other gods (including idols) as harlotry.

Jeremiah 3:6-9 - Then the Lord said to me in the days of Josiah the king, "Have you seen what faithless Israel did? She went up on every high hill and under every green tree, and she was a harlot there. I thought, 'After she has done all these things she will return to Me'; but she did not return, and her treacherous sister Judah saw it. And I saw that for all the adulteries of faithless Israel, I had sent her away and given her a writ of divorce, yet her treacherous sister Judah did not fear; but she went and was a harlot also.

A prostitute seduces a person away from his commitment and causes him to become faithless. She uses outward beauty to entice. At the same time, she makes many promises about the thrills and fun to come. All prove to be lies and those who believe her will go to their own destruction.

False religions are like prostitutes because they entice people away from the narrow way of God and onto the broad road of destruction. They use all types of methods, including false promises, to seduce people. And the result is destruction. There may appear to be many different religions in the history of the world. These can be reduced to the one true religion (Bible), and all false religions. These myriads of false religions were all spawned by Satan to mislead.

Throughout history, there have been many "little prostitutes," false religions which have turned people away from the truth of God. During the end times, these will unite under one banner. The great prostitute will be the culmination of all of these. It will be the last and greatest attempt by Satan to lure people away from God and bind them to his false religion.

There have been many movements in history toward a one-world religion. None have been successful as yet, but efforts are gaining steam. In many cultures, "tolerance" and "inclusivity" are popular buzzwords. Of course, we know that Biblical Christianity will not be tolerated because this new one-world religion will seek the total destruction of the followers of Christ (17:6).

Truth, by definition, is narrow. Religions with different beliefs cannot both be true. But the truth will not be considered important. Instead, pleasure and indulgence will be glorified.

What will this new religion look like? Catholicism? Muslim?
Something else?

We don't know the exact path things will take to get there, but we do know the destination.

Application: Believers need to guard the truth. We must stand firm against ecumenism, guarding the purity of the church. While we should seek to preserve unity with other real believers (Ephesians 4:1-3), we must be careful not to follow the modern idea of tolerance to the point of compromising on fundamental Biblical issues. We must guard against the creep of secularism into the church and say as Paul did, "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ for it is the power of God."

3. What is the prostitute offering? – Three times in this chapter it connects this harlot with "sexual immorality."

Revelation 17:2 - With whom the kings of the earth have committed sexual immorality, and with the wine of whose sexual immorality the dwellers on earth have become drunk.

The new world religion will be a filthy abomination. It will be a thinly veiled (or more likely unveiled) invitation to every type of sexual indulgence. How attractive that will be for unbelievers. Carnal pleasures are "worship." The most unholy unions are "holy." Evil will be called good and good will be called evil.

Isaiah 5:20 - Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter!

Students of history should not be surprised. Many religions in history have encouraged sexual immorality. The great prostitute will only level up the seduction that all of the little prostitutes in history have already engaged in.

"All kinds of immoralities were associated with the [Greco-Roman] gods. Not only was prostitution a recognized institution, but through the influence of the fertility cults of Asia Minor, Syria, and Phoenicia it became a part of the religious rites at certain temples. Thus there were one thousand "sacred prostitutes" at the temple of

Aphrodite at Corinth." - Everett Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity* (2d ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993)

Greek mythology is filled with tales of their gods' sexual promiscuity. Roman cities including Aphaca and Heliopolis contained temples where "sacred sex" or cult prostitution was practiced. Historically, in Hindu temples, young girls are given in ritual marriage to a Hindu god and then work in temples as prostitutes. Aztecs practiced sacred prostitution in their religious rites. And Incas sometimes dedicated young boys for homosexual intercourse with chieftains in their temples. The Canaanite peoples practiced cult prostitution. In addition, there is evidence that Sumer and Babylon also had variations of the practice.

It is not only an ancient world thing. Some modern cults also endorse the same practices.

What is going on here?

It is simple. These are false religions. False religions are spawned by Satan. He is the father of lies. Evil is called good and good is called evil. He seeks to pervert what God intended for good. He uses man's appetite for sex to bind him to sin and chain him to the kingdom of darkness. What better way than to claim you can be spiritual and holy by satisfying your own sinful desires?

Ecclesiastes 1:9 - What has been is what will be, and what has been done is what will be done, and there is nothing new under the sun.

Solomon said there is nothing new under the sun. The same strategies are used to tempt people over and over because they are effective. The seductions of the great prostitute in the end times are merely the climax of this age-old battle between good and evil. The things done in the past secretly behind closed walls will then be done openly and brazenly praised as progressive and liberating.

Application: In today's age, Satan is using the same methods to entice and trap people. What are some practical ways to protect yourself against the temptation of sexual immorality? How can knowing the truth help you win this battle even in your own mind?

4. Sitting on a scarlet beast that was full of blasphemous names – The beast appears to be the one-world government of which the antichrist will be the head. The one-world government and the one-world religion will be allied. They will work together to seduce people and wage war against Jesus and His followers. The woman was pictured in verse as sitting on "many waters." She was dominating the whole world and seducing leaders from many nations. Now she is depicted as sitting on the beast. He in turn is over the world. So all of the evil concentrated in her is now concentrated on the beast as they are yoked together.

We will see at the end of the chapter that the alliance is a temporary one. The antichrist and his government will turn against this world religion after he is done using it to accomplish his purposes.

5. The outer appearance of the prostitute – At first glance, the prostitute looks beautiful. She is rich and living a life of opulence. According to the world's standards, she is highly successful. The implication is that those who join with her can be successful too and have their wildest fantasies fulfilled.

Sin is like that. It makes lofty promises, none of which will be fulfilled.

The character of this woman stands in complete contrast with a woman of God. She is exactly the opposite of the kind of woman praised in the Bible. It should not be a surprise that the antichrist's system is the opposite of God's.

1 Peter 3:3-4 - Do not let your adorning be external—the braiding of hair and the putting on of gold jewelry, or the clothing you wear— but let your adorning be the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God's sight is very precious.

Application: Women of God would do well to take note of these worldly values and make sure they are not being influenced by the world's system. Do not focus on external beauty, but focus on your inner character and spirit. External beauty fades away, but the inner spirit is imperishable. Evaluate the amount of time spent on make-up, hair, fashion, design, clothing, cosmetics, spas, etc., and

compare that to the amount of time spent in God's Word and on God's kingdom.

6. I saw the woman, drunk with the blood of the saints, the blood of the martyrs of Jesus – While this religion will likely boast about its tolerance, peace, and inclusivity, it will be anything but. It will not be a religion of peace, but will practice "my way or the highway." Those who don't buy in (believers), will be brutally rounded up and massacred.

Reflect: Why will followers of Jesus be targeted? What does this also teach us about the world we live in now?

II. The Beast (7-11)

Discussion Questions

- What does it mean that the beast "was, and is not, and is about to rise from the bottomless pit?"
- What is the bottomless pit?
- What will happen to the beast?
- How will believers react to him? How about unbelievers?
- What causes believers and unbelievers to react so differently to the same thing?
- How can you grow in discernment so that you will not be deceived?
- What do the seven mountains represent?
- What about the seven kings?

Cross-References

Revelation 13:8 - And all who dwell on earth will worship it, everyone whose name has not been written before the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who was slain.

Revelation 20:15 - And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

Revelation 9:11 - They have as king over them the angel of the bottomless pit. His name in Hebrew is Abaddon, and in Greek he is called Apollyon.

Revelation 20:1-3 - Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding in his hand the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain. And he seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years, and threw him into the pit, and shut it and sealed it over him, so that he might not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years were ended. After that he must be released for a little while.

1 John 4:1 - Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world.

Philippians 1:9-10 - And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ.

Teaching Points

1. The beast that you saw was and is not and is about to rise –

There are several theories as to what this statement means. Some believe it is a reference to the Roman Empire, which existed and faded out, and will exist again as the revived Roman Empire.

Others take it as a reference to the antichrist, who will seemingly be killed and then come back to life.

Revelation 13:3 - *One of its heads seemed to have a mortal wound, but its mortal wound was healed, and the whole earth marveled as they followed the beast.*

This supposed resurrection will appear so miraculous that the citizens of the world will "marvel." The wording is very similar to Revelation 17:8, which makes it likely that it is the same event being described.

Revelation 17:8 - *And the dwellers on earth whose names have not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world will marvel to see the beast, because it was and is not and is to come.*

Through some kind of Satanic power, the antichrist will resurrect (or appear to). That apparent miracle will convince the world of his power and be a catalyst for causing the world to worship him (Revelation 13:4). Immediately following this event in Revelation 13 the world starts to worship the dragon and the beast. And here in Revelation 17, this event occurs right before the prostitute (false religion) is put down, paving the way for the one-world religion to turn into unveiled Satan worship.

2. Only unbelievers will marvel – Believers will not be deceived by this. Everyone whose name is written in the Book of Life will have their eyes opened by the Holy Spirit. The power of God will prevent them from being deluded and instead give discernment. One of the ways God keeps our eyes open to the truth is His Word. These very prophecies in Revelation which are studied by believers warn His people about what is to come so that they won't be taken in when it is fulfilled.

Application: Those without Christ are blinded. But God gives us discernment. Let us carefully study His Word, examine situations in the world through prayer, and test every spirit so that we will be sure to remain standing on the rock of Christ.

3. This calls for a mind of wisdom – Believers who study the Scriptures and look to the Lord for understanding, will be able to understand the challenging symbols about to be depicted.

4. Seven heads and ten horns – Both of these refer to sets of rulers. But they are different sets of rulers. The ten rulers are future rulers. These will rise to prominence in the end times and only rule for a short time (one hour referring to the tribulation period). They will rule under the authority of the antichrist, and give all of their power and authority to him. Either the world or a specific region of the world will be united under these ten regions, which will allow the antichrist to rule them much easier than would be the case now with 249 total countries.

The seven kings belong to a different set. They are represented by seven mountains, which shows how powerful they are. They are not just normal rulers, but the highest of rulers. Unlike the ten kings who were all future to the time of John, only one of these seven was future to John. Five of them had already come and gone by the time John received his vision. One of them was likely

currently ruling when John received his vision. The other was yet to come and will be the antichrist.

This passage has created endless debates among Christians. There are many theories about who these seven rulers are. Here are a few of the common theories:

- The seven refers to seven kingdoms who ruled over Israel: Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Persia, Greece, Rome (the one that is), and the revived Roman empire.
- The seven refers to seven kingdoms who ruled over Israel: Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Persia, Greece, Rome (the one that is), and Ottoman, Turk/Islamic Caliphate.
- The seven refers to seven Roman Emperors. Several different sets have been proposed including; August, Tiberius, Caligula, Claudius, Nero, Vespasian, and Titus.
- The seven refers to seven kings who reigned over Jerusalem and Babylon from the four empires mentioned in Daniel. Only the first king from a dynasty/empire is added to the list. The seven are; Nebuchadnezzar, Cyrus, Alexander the Great, Ptolemy III, Antiochus Seleucid, Titus, and the future antichrist.

Each of the above has different variations that are similar. Since the text specifically says that these are "kings" and not "kingdoms," the first two explanations would not fit. If we take it at face value, these are historical kings (and 1 yet future, the antichrist), who will be connected to the prostitute of false religion. Since the statue in Daniel and the four beasts of Daniel referred to more than one nation, and this is a description of kings ruling over time, I believe the fourth explanation (or a variation of it) above is closest to the correct interpretation.

While the exact names are difficult to identify, the main idea is clear. God is sovereign. He is on the throne. He is bringing history to its planned conclusion. Many of the rulers of the world are connected to an evil system, which sets itself up against God. All finally face His judgment.

5. The beast that was and is not, it is an eighth but it belongs to the seventh – The antichrist is both the seventh and the eighth. After he dies (or appears to), it ends the first part of his short-lived dynasty. When he resurrects (or appears to) that marks the

beginning of the second part of his rule. It will be quite different in some ways from the first part. He will take more power and demand worship, while totally destroying the last vestiges of any religion that is not directly Satanic.

III. The Alliance Against the Lamb (12-14)

Discussion Questions

- What do the ten horns represent?
- What does it mean that they will receive power for one hour?
- What relationship do they have with the beast?
- What war will they fight?
- How are the believers described here?

Cross-References

2 Timothy 3:12 - Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.

Matthew 5:10 - Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Teaching Points

1. They hand over their power and authority to the beast – It is hard to imagine world rulers giving their power to someone else, but these ten rulers in the end times will do just that. The delusion will be so strong, and perhaps their fear so great, that they will in essence turn their kingdoms over to the antichrist. Presumably, all of their weapons of war will also be transferred to his control as well.

2. They will make war on the Lamb and the Lamb will conquer them – Throughout Revelation we see this epic battle of good versus evil coming to a head. It is not a new battle, but has already been waged over the millennia. Yet during this future time, it will be more public and everyone will have to consciously choose a side. These ten rulers will throw in their lot with the devil, and declare war against King Jesus. It will be a colossal mistake and a colossal mismatch.

Jesus will win. The outcome is never in doubt. How could it be? He is the Lord of lords and the King of kings.

His followers also will have their part to play. Believers at that time will be called to be faithful.

Application: Your role is simple. Be faithful. He who is faithful in a little thing is faithful also in much. Be faithful today so that when the persecution and pressure increase, you will be ready.

IV. The Beast and Kings Turn Against the Prostitute (15-18)

Discussion Questions

- What can we learn in verse 15 about this prostitute's worldwide popularity?
- How does this prostitute's relationship with the world leaders change in verse 16?
- What may cause this change?
- What can we learn from this about their trustworthiness? About their end goals?
- What role is God playing in all of this (17)?
- What does it mean that the woman is the "great city" that has dominion over the kings of the earth (18)?
- Since the world is filled with such abominations, betrayal, and lust for power, what should our view of the world be?
- How can we make sure that we are not attached to this world?

Cross-References

James 1:15 - Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.

Proverbs 19:21 - Many are the plans in the mind of a man, but it is the purpose of the Lord that will stand.

Proverbs 21:1 - The king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the Lord; he turns it wherever he will.

Teaching Points

1. The waters are the peoples and multitudes and nations and languages – False religion deceives multitudes of people around the world and it always has. Satan has always sought to control people by enslaving them to false religion.

Only Jesus can break those chains of bondage and set people free.

2. The ten kings will destroy the prostitute – The unholy alliance between the antichrist and the one-world religion will not last. That end-time religion, more than any in all of history, will be visibly evil and Satanic. It will be very thinly veiled Satanism. But even a thin veil is too much for Satan. He won't want to pretend to be something good in order to get worship. He won't want to go by any of his many names Molech, Baal, Zeus, etc. anymore. His goal is to be directly and publicly worshiped as God.

As a result, the one-world religion, with whatever leader will be over it at that time, will incur his wrath and betrayal. He will use it for as long as it is convenient to gain control and power over the divided nations. When he is done with it, he will not only discard it, but rip it to shreds. It will be made "desolate," and "naked," and be devoured and burnt up with fire. This will likely coincide with Revelation 13:4.

Revelation 13:4 - And they worshiped the dragon, for he had given his authority to the beast, and they worshiped the beast, saying, "Who is like the beast, and who can fight against it?"

Very likely all visible signs of false religion will be destroyed including mosques and temples. Churches and synagogues will not escape either.

Satan is in the business of using people. If given the chance, he will squeeze everything out of you and then discard you like rubbish. He will use the leaders of this one-world religion for his own purposes. When he is done, they will be killed. It's very similar to the classic bad-guy movie. In these movies, viewers watch incredulously as people make shady deals with bad guys. At the end of the story, they are always betrayed. Satan is a terrible

master and partner. He does not keep his word and his goal is your ultimate destruction.

In every way, Satan is antichrist. Jesus loves and cares and nourishes, restores, and forgives. Jesus is compassionate. He is a good and kind Lord.

3. God has put it into their hearts to carry out his purpose... until the word of God is fulfilled – God is sovereign. He is working to bring His plan to its ultimate conclusion. These kings do not intentionally choose to be so, but they are his puppets. They are not robots. They make these decisions themselves and are responsible for them. But they are playing right into God's hands.

Isaiah 46:10 - Declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, 'My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose.'

God's sovereignty is so amazing that He uses people who make their own decisions (many of them wrong) to bring about His plan and to fulfill prophecy.

Revelation 18

Outline

- I. The History and Meaning of Babylon (1-2)
- II. The Allure of Babylon (3-16)
- III. The Destruction of Babylon (17-24)

I. The History and Meaning of Babylon (1-2)

Discussion Questions

- What did John see?
- When will these things take place?
- What is Babylon the great?
- Is the description that it is a "dwelling place of demons" figurative or literal?
- What does that teach us about the spiritual warfare we are involved in?
- How should knowing Babylon will fall affect us today?

Cross-References

James 4:4 - You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.

1 John 2:17 - And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.

Teaching Points

Revelation 18:1 - Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great.

1. The history and background of Babylon - This chapter is all about the fall of Babylon the great. To fully understand the

significance of this, we need to go back and trace the history of this city and its meaning in the Bible.

It was started by Nimrod.

Genesis 10:8-10 - Cush fathered Nimrod; he was the first on earth to be a mighty man. He was a mighty hunter before the Lord. Therefore it is said, "Like Nimrod a mighty hunter before the Lord." The beginning of his kingdom was Babel, Erech, Accad, and Calneh, in the land of Shinar.

The name "Nimrod" means "Let Us Revolt" or "Let Us Rebel." And the city lived up to its founder's name.

God commanded people to "*Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth*" (Genesis 1:28)

But the people of Babel had a different idea.

Genesis 11:4 - Then they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be dispersed over the face of the whole earth."

They made up their minds to do exactly the opposite of what God had commanded. In their rebellion, they wanted to gather together under one united banner of mankind and make a statement that they would not submit to God. They would do things their own way. They were independent. Man was boss, not God.

This was the first attempt at a one-world government. They built a **Ziggurat (Tower)** in defiance of worshiping God and setting up false religion.

Thus Babylon represents the world system that sets itself up in opposition to God. That system includes man's religious, political, and economic self-will. Babylon the religion was dealt with in Revelation 17. And Babylon the political and economic entity is dealt with here in Revelation 18.

Babylon is wicked, filled with demons and the influence of demons. Much like Jerusalem is the city of God, Babylon is the city of the devil.

Babylon is mentioned 260 times in the Bible. From the beginning, it has opposed God. It was also the empire that first came and conquered Jerusalem, taking its inhabitants as exiles away from the Promised Land.

Here in Revelation 18, we see the climax of this battle between two systems. Throughout the whole Bible and all of human history, Satan has been trying to use the world's system to entice people to join his kingdom with the enticement of wealth, power, and sex.

So we see three things about Babylon historically.

A. It begins as the place of man's rebellion through a united world effort which God judged by the confusion of languages.

B. It is the instrument that seeks to take away the land promised by God to His people, the Israelites.

For more details on the history of spiritual Babylon see this article:

<https://bible.org/seriespage/23-babylon-seen-scripture-introduction-rev-17-18>

C. It is a worldly system of politics and economics, which is influenced by Satan and sets itself up in opposition to God.

His goal for this system is to lure people away from God's design for them, which is what he has tried to do from the beginning.

II. The Allure of Babylon (3-16)

Discussion Questions

- What is the allure of Babylon?
- What does "Babylon" offer?
- Why is what Babylon offers so attractive to so many people?
- How can you see this system working in the world today?
- In light of this chapter, can/should a believer ever enjoy a luxury? Why or why not?
- What is the danger of riches?

- What is one area that you have been pressured to conform to the world's way rather than God's? What did you learn from this?
- How will most people react when Babylon falls? Why will they react like this?
- What does this teach you about loving the world?

Cross-References

Proverbs 30:8-9 - Remove far from me falsehood and lying; give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with the food that is needful for me, lest I be full and deny you and say, "Who is the Lord?" or lest I be poor and steal and profane the name of my God.

Romans 12:2 - Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

1 John 2:15-17 - Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride in possessions—is not from the Father but is from the world. And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.

Hebrews 13:5 - Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you."

Teaching Points

1. Satan is currently active in the world -

We are not yet in the time that this final version of Babylon has been revealed. But Satan is nonetheless active in this world. He is not just sitting around waiting for his end to come. He and his demons seek to lure, seduce, and tempt people away from God. They target the church. They target families. They target children. They target students. They use every tool at their disposal: especially the world system all around us.

2. Ways the world tries to lure us away from God -

Here we see four key temptations used to lure people away from God and to the world.

A. Wealth - The words "wealth" or "riches" appear five times in this passage. One of the ways Satan tries to entice is through money.

Revelation 18:3b - *And the merchants of the earth have grown **rich** from the power of her luxurious living.*

Here are a few questions you can think about to evaluate your own attitude toward money:

- Do you spend much time thinking about money?
- Do you spend much time talking about money?
- How often do you check your investments or bank account?
- Are you willing to sin to get more money? (For example, avoiding taxes)

Many people give their lives to the pursuit of making money.

Application: Brothers and sisters, this is not the way. God has not called us to pursue worldly riches. Let us instead use any resources He gives us for building His kingdom.

B. Immorality -

Revelation 18:3 - *For all nations have drunk the wine of the passion of her sexual immorality, and the kings of the earth have committed immorality with her.*

One of the things Satan offers is immorality. Of course, he doesn't call it immorality. He calls it pleasure, innocent fun, romance, a thrill. He promises happiness, and free sex with no consequences.

From Old Testament times, many false religions were built upon immorality. Many temples were filled with prostitutes and sexual immorality was even an integral aspect of worshiping that deity.

That hasn't changed today. Modern-day movies and TV shows are increasingly filled with immorality. Access to pornography is far

more widespread. What used to be done secretly in the dark is more and more done in the open. Through media, the allure of immorality can be broadcast straight into the home.

In Revelation 18, we see that the world has mostly bought what Satan is selling. They don't just dabble in it a little bit. They don't do it secretly or try to hide it. They have become completely drunk, intoxicated with sexual immorality. They do it brazenly without any shame.

We see the world quickly moving toward the rampant immorality depicted here in Revelation 18.

People are not content to do it themselves. They praise and exalt others who engage in the same immoral behavior. They glorify it and attack any who points out the sin.

In the end times, people will embrace the government and leaders who support and even celebrate their sin.

Application: Brothers and sisters, this is not the way. God places certain boundaries on us for our good. Let us dedicate ourselves to purity and faithfulness.

C. Luxury

Revelation 18:7 - *As she glorified herself and lived in **luxury**.*

Revelation 18:16 - *“Alas, alas, for the great city that was clothed in fine linen, in purple and scarlet, adorned with gold, with jewels, and with pearls!”*

Babylon promotes indulgence and luxurious living. Merchants who do business with her reap great wealth. This wealth is not used to help others. There is no thought of frugality or generosity.

People make money because they want to spend it on lavish living. In such a world with no restraint, the more grandiose and absurd the purchase the better. Vain people will compete with each other for new ludicrous ways to spend money.

Example: "Art".

Absurd scribbles of art sell for vast amounts of money. I have seen "art" pieces that were literally scribbled circles of chalk on a blackboard sold for seventy-million dollars.

Why do people spend money like this? I believe it is vanity. What better way to prove how rich you are than the ability to waste a large amount? (Like two rich guys burning two piles of money).

People zealously pursue lavish lifestyles, caring not how much money is wasted. It brings them pleasure.

Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah of Brunei for example owns over 5000 luxury cars valued at 2.3 trillion.

Others buy yachts, mansions, and fashion clothes. One of my previous students to whom I taught English told me that her purse cost over \$10,000. And she was quite proud of it.

It is not only the rich who seek luxury. People with less money face the same trap of always wanting more.

Application: Brothers and sisters, this is not the way. God does not call us to pursue a lavish lifestyle. He doesn't call us to chase the world. Let us use all of the resources He has given us for His glory.

D. Culture/Entertainment

Revelation 18:22 - And the sound of harpists and musicians, of flute players and trumpeters, will be heard in you no more, and a craftsman of any craft will be found in you no more.

Another way that this worldly system comes against God is through culture. Think about how many cultural things in history glorify sin.

- Gladiators. UFC fighting?
- Drunkenness (drinking is part of our culture!)
- Certain kinds of art (Many artists paint and display nudity. It is all for appreciating the human body they say. And yet God commands modesty and clothed Adam and Eve. Why are so many statues and art pieces of naked people?)
- Music - Many types of music dishonor God.

- Films - Many modern films glorify sin. Grotesque violence, drugs, sex. But "it's art," they say. Yes, it is a corrupted form of art from a corrupted system that is against God.

Many sinful practices are excused by the phrase "it's culture" or "it's art." Culture is fallen and depraved.

Application: Brothers and sisters, this is not the way. God does not call us to follow the culture around us. He calls us to redeem it. We can redeem music and use it to honor God. We can redeem films and use them to share the good news. There is even a site called Redeem TV and they have good, Christian films like The Chosen, Courageous, and Torchlighters for kids. You can redeem art and use your artistic gift to glorify God. You can redeem sports and use them as an outreach tool. Let us redeem the culture around us.

III. The Destruction of Babylon (17-24)

Discussion Questions

- What can you learn from this passage about worldly wealth?
- Why do so many people work so hard for something so temporary?
- What is it about wealth that has such a strong appeal even to believers?
- How would this city be destroyed? To what extent will it be destroyed?
- How will unbelievers feel?
- How will believers feel?
- How will businesses be affected?
- How will culture, entertainment, and the arts be affected?
- Why were people deceived? How can believers make sure we are not deceived in the same manner?
- Share some ways you can redeem the community/culture around you rather than yoking yourself to it.

Cross-References

Matthew 6:24 - No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.

Deuteronomy 8:18 - You shall remember the Lord your God, for it is he who gives you power to get wealth, that he may confirm his covenant that he swore to your fathers, as it is this day.

Teaching Points

Revelation 18:17 - *For in a single hour all this wealth has been laid waste.*

Revelation 18:21-24 - *So will Babylon the great city be thrown down with violence, and will be found no more; and the sound of harpists and musicians, of flute players and trumpeters, will be heard in you no more, and a craftsman of any craft will be found in you no more, and the sound of the mill will be heard in you no more, and the light of a lamp will shine in you no more, and the voice of bridegroom and bride will be heard in you no more, for your merchants were the great ones of the earth, and all nations were deceived by your sorcery. And in her was found the blood of prophets and of saints, and of all who have been slain on earth.”*

1. The destruction of Babylon - The capital of this economic, commercial, and political system which sets itself up against God is going to be destroyed. When it happens, it will happen quickly. In a single day. In a single hour. God is going to destroy it, burning it up with fire.

The ramifications of this will be seen across the globe. Its political allies will weep and mourn. Its merchant partners will wail and despair. Supply chains across the world will be broken. Ships and cargo will be stranded with no buyers. Businesses will be wrecked.

One doesn't have to use very much imagination to understand how this will affect the global economy. In 2008, when just one important financial firm in the US went bankrupt (The Lehman Brothers), the stock market crashed. Not just on Wall Street. Across the world, one by one as markets opened, they all crashed. Sydney, Tokyo, Shanghai, Hong Kong, Mumbai, Dubai, Berlin, and London. In a single day, the global economy crashed. Every person linked to this economy felt its effects.

On that day of reckoning for Babylon, the pain will be far worse. Every person who is connected to that evil system will feel it. The wailing and despair show how much they hope in and rely on that for their safety and security.

They chose the wrong way. And God's Word says, "you reap what you sow." They chose sin and pleasure and wealth and luxury instead of God. And in this chapter, we see that they will pay the price.

Application

1 John 2:16-17 - For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world. And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.

Look around you for a moment. What is going to last? Nothing. Nothing that you can see is eternal. The only thing that will last around you is the souls of the people next to you. That is what God's kingdom is made up of. And that is where we should invest!

The whole of Revelation and here in chapter 18 show us this epic battle between God and Satan, good and evil, the narrow road and the broad road. Here again, we see that God wins.

Imagine you are a gambler and someone comes to you and can tell you in crystal clear detail how the match will go and who will win. Do you think that gambler will bet on the losing side? That would be insanity. Likewise, it is insane to gamble your soul and bet on this world's system, which is going to lose. We have seen the end of the path. Which path are you on?

Revelation 18 Key Lesson - Our Attitude Toward Babylon

What man sees:

- Beauty
- Pleasure
- Riches
- Power
- Opportunity
- Fun
- Success

What God sees:

- A dwelling place for demons
- A haunt for every unclean spirit
- A haunt for every unclean bird
- Her sins are heaped as high as heaven

When God looks at the world's corrupted system, that is what He sees. And because He sees the truth about this world, He gives those who belong to Him a clear command.

Revelation 18:4 - Then I heard another voice from heaven saying, "Come out of her, my people, lest you take part in her sins, lest you share in her plagues.

The point is clear. God's people must not align themselves with Babylon. From this, we can find our main application for today.

Two Ways - Choose The Right One!

Acts 24:14 - But this I admit to you, that according to the Way which they call a sect I do serve the God of our fathers

In New Testament times, the Christian faith was called "the Way." It was called this because believers lived their life a different way from those in the world. Their faith affected how they live. The way they treated their family was different. The way they did business was different. And most importantly, they followed the true way to God through Jesus.

So in this passage, we see a clear contrast. There are two ways. We can follow the crowd and live like the world or we can be different.

2 Corinthians 6:14-18 - *Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness? What accord has Christ with Belial? Or what portion does a believer share with an unbeliever? What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; as God said, "I will make my dwelling among them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Therefore go out from their midst, and be separate from them, says the Lord, and touch no unclean thing; then I will welcome you, and I will be a father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to me, says the Lord Almighty."*

Here we see five contrasts between God's way and the world's way.

- Righteousness - Lawlessness
- Light - Darkness
- Christ - Belial (Satan)
- Believer - Unbeliever
- Temple of God - Idols

What does He command?

- Do Not Be Unequally Yoked
- Go out.
- Be separate.
- Touch no unclean thing.

And God takes that idea of being separate and distinct very seriously. In the Old Testament, Jews were to be very different from others. Because they could not eat the same foods, do the same things, or even wear the same clothing, they were almost forced to be separate.

In the New Testament, the church is called to the Great Commission. We have all heard the phrase, be in the world, but not of the world. We don't have to become monks in Inner Mongolia and confine ourselves to a monastery. But neither do we join in

doing things the way the world does and say, "I am being in the world."

We in the church are to be salt and light. Jesus said that when the salt loses its flavor, it is no good anymore. We are called to maintain our distinctiveness. The light of Christ through us is to penetrate the world in this dark hour.

In a very real sense, the Holy Spirit through the church is holding back the tide of evil in this world. Without the light from believers speaking the truth, the world would quickly spiral into more and more insane sin.

The question is, are you joining the world? Or are you redeeming it?

Here in Corinthians, Paul commands believers to not be yoked together with an unbeliever. We must not be yoked together with Babylon, the corrupt world system which thumbs its nose at God.

Practical Applications

- Do not marry unbelievers. There is nothing that allies you so close to the world's system than marriage!
- Consider where to send your kids to school. Would you send your child to Nimrod Babel High? If not, should you send your child to a school that is run by the same worldly system today? It may be that your child can go to Babylon University (like Daniel did) and share the gospel, and be salt and light. If that is what God is calling you to do, OK. If so, you must prepare them first. Are your children prepared to face the immense pressure to conform to the system schools?
- Use your money to invest in God's kingdom, not Babylon.
- Think of ways to redeem the culture around you.

Key Verse To Remember

Matthew 6:19-21 - Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Revelation 19:1-10

Outline

- I. Celebration for the Judgment of Babylon (1-5)
- II. Marriage Supper of the Lamb (6-10)

I. Celebration for the Judgment of Babylon

(1-5)

Discussion Questions

- What transition does the phrase "after this" in verse 1 signify?
- Who is celebrating?
- What are they celebrating?
- How do they praise God?
- What can we learn from this passage about praising God?
- What do we learn about God's judgment?
- What instruction is given to us in verse 5?
- How can you develop a lifestyle of praise?
- What are some practical ways you praise God more?

Cross-References

James 5:13 - Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praise.

Hebrews 13:15 - Through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name.

Psalm 115:1 - Not to us, O Lord, not to us, but to your name give glory, for the sake of your steadfast love and your faithfulness!

Acts 17:31 - Because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.

Romans 12:19 - Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay," says the Lord."

Deuteronomy 32:35 - Vengeance is mine, and recompense, for the time when their foot shall slip; for the day of their calamity is at hand, and their doom comes swiftly.'

Teaching Points

1. After this – This phrase signifies a transition in the book. From Revelation 6-18, we have seen the war between God and Satan. The earth and all its inhabitants are caught up in this war. Now the war and the judgments are drawing to a close. In chapters 17-18 we saw the judgment of Babylon, the one-world government, and religion. Thus, the final stages of God's plan are coming to fruition. The world is being judged and the eternal celebration is about to begin.

The phrase "after this" can give us hope. All of the horrible, earth-shattering judgments in the middle part of Revelation will finally be a thing of the past. They do not represent the final state. Though the church will be persecuted and tortured during this era, it will pass and the church will emerge on the other side into the joy of eternity.

Application: Sometimes it seems that the trials we face will never end. Chronic pain or illness seems to go on and on. Sin causes wounds that never seem to heal. Yet this phrase "after this" gives us hope that something more and better is coming.

Romans 8:18 - *For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.*

2. The loud voice of a great multitude in heaven – In Revelation 7:9-12 we saw God's plan for the nations. There will be representatives from every tribe, nation, and tongue. Here we see this great multitude. Note that they are "in heaven." The focus has

shifted from the judgments that God has been executing on the world to the scene in heaven.

Descriptions of the "great multitude" remind us that God is going to save vast numbers of people. He desires to see huge numbers of people saved.

2 Peter 3:9 - The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.

Application: The most important decision you can ever make is if you will be part of this great multitude. Will you be in heaven celebrating and cheering the Lord on? Or will you yoke yourself the world and "go down with the ship?" The book of Revelation gives us a clear choice to make. It is a great blessing that we can be part of that multitude. At the same time, we should be inviting others. If you were gifted one-hundred free tickets to a great concert, you would not let them go to waste. You would invite your friends. How much more should we invite our friends to this eternal celebration?

3. Praises to the Lord – Throughout Revelation, we see that the saints will be praising God for eternity. Jesus told the woman at the well that the time will come when people will worship God in "spirit and in truth." (John 4:24) There is no doubt that when believers are face to face with the Lord that they will worship Him in spirit and truth. They will no longer see Him through a mirror, but will see Him as He is (1 Corinthians 13:12).

Our praise for Him will be free of distraction or distortion. It will be sincere and from the heart. It will be truth-based. And it will be worshipful. God will be worshiped in the way and form He wants to be.

Since worship in heaven is the right type of worship, it is beneficial to study it so that we can worship Him the right way now. Below we will look at several aspects of the worship we see in these verses.

A. Praise for His character (19:1) –

Revelation 19:1 - Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God.

What is praise? Some synonyms for praise include; applause, approval, commend, compliment, esteem, glorify, tribute, and recognize.

Praising God means to exalt Him by testifying of His character. When you describe a person, that description could be criticism or commendation, depending on whether the character quality described is good or bad. When I say that my friend is generous, that is commendation. But when I say that my friend is tardy, that is criticism.

God has no sin. He has no imperfections. He has no character flaws. That means that every time we describe God's nature, that is by definition praise because it will always be positive. Therefore, praising God is consciously observing His character. It can include silent meditation within our minds (which God sees), or public verbalizing.

In this verse, they ascribed certain attributes to God including; salvation, glory, and power. They named out His character qualities, touching on His mercy (in salvation), His beauty (glory), and His might (power).

Application: Some people might think that they are not good at praising God. It's simple. Just describe His character and that is praise. As we intentionally consider His character, He is lifted up in our minds and in front of others around us.

B. Praise for His righteous judgment (19:2) – Another aspect of praise is to observe and highlight His actions.

Revelation 19:2 - For his judgments are true and just; for he has judged the great prostitute who corrupted the earth with her immorality, and has avenged on her the blood of his servants.

Just as describing His nature is by definition praise, so recalling His actions is also by definition praise. When I make a positive comment to my daughter, "you finished your schoolwork quickly," it is praise. But if I say, "you are very slow to do your homework today," then that is criticism. Commenting on people's actions can be positive or negative. But commenting on God's actions is always positive because His behavior is perfect in every way.

Application: Praise God not only for who He is, but also for what He has done!

Isaiah 12:4-5 - *Give thanks to the Lord, call upon his name, make known his deeds among the peoples, proclaim that his name is exalted. "Sing praises to the Lord, for he has done gloriously; let this be made known in all the earth.*

C. Celebration that the war is won (19:3) –

Revelation 19:3 - *"Hallelujah! The smoke from her goes up forever and ever."*

"Her" is a reference to Babylon. The last two chapters show her fate. God will destroy her in a "single hour." The perpetual smoke refers to the eternal punishment of that evil kingdom's citizens.

Babylon will be responsible for murdering many believers around the world. When justice is served, the heavenly multitude of saints will celebrate. When a righteous war is won and evil is defeated, those who love good celebrate.

D. Worship before the throne (19:4) – In verse 4, the elders and the four living creatures (who seem to be responsible for leading heavenly worship sessions) will fall down before the throne and worship God. They recognize that the victory is His.

E. Commanded to praise (19:5) – Lest there be any doubt of what God's people should be doing, God issues a command from the throne.

Revelation 19:5 - *"Praise our God, all you his servants, you who fear him, small and great."*

It is not just the elders who should praise Him. All of His servants, great and small, are to join in the heavenly chorus, giving Him the praise He deserves. He commands it. When we try to take glory for ourselves, it is stealing, because only He is worthy to receive it. It is pride and selfishness.

When God demands it, it is holy and right because He deserves it. When we praise Him, we are fulfilling what we are designed for.

II. Marriage Supper of the Lamb (6-10)

Discussion Questions

- Who is talking in verses 6-8?
- Describe the frame of mind in this heavenly scene.
- Why do you think the voices sounded like "many waters" and "peals of thunder?"
- What is the Marriage Supper Of The Lamb?
- Who is the Bride? Who is the Groom?
- Why is the picture of marriage used to describe the relationship of Christ and the church?
- What are the similarities between our relationship to Christ and a marriage?
- What will the bride be wearing? What will that signify?
- Who is invited to the Marriage Supper?
- How will they be blessed?
- What does it mean that "the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy?"
- What does a bride do to prepare for a wedding? How can you prepare for this event?

Cross-References

Ephesians 5:25-27 - Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.

Ephesians 5:32 - This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.

Galatians 3:28 - There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

John 3:29 - The one who has the bride is the bridegroom. The friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices

greatly at the bridegroom's voice. Therefore this joy of mine is now complete.

John 14:3 - And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also.

Teaching Points

1. The voice of a great multitude like the roar of many waters – John describes the sounds he hears as the "roar of many waters" and "mighty peals of thunder." Both of these point to the fact that this is a tremendous number of people. Their combined voices are reminiscent of the most powerful sounds in nature. Their praises for God are reverberating through heaven. What an incredible day that will be!

2. The marriage supper of the Lamb has come – Jesus' second coming doesn't happen until later in the chapter. So why is the Marriage Supper of the Lamb mentioned first? There are a couple of different ways to understand the chronology of this event.

A. It could mean that the raptured church (and possibly also martyred believers) will take part in this event in heaven before Jesus physically returns to the earth. After the marriage banquet is completed, the saints, who are the bride of Christ, return with Him to earth as His entourage.

B. Another interpretation is that these verses record an invitation to an event that will officially begin only after Christ's second coming. Verse 9 seems to support this interpretation as the angel says to write, "Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb." The invitation goes out through all the ages. And after Jesus' return, all of those who responded to the invitation can then join in this banquet. In this view, Revelation 21 is a description of the Marriage Supper.

In either case, this is a future event where believers will celebrate with Jesus. No longer will they be physically separated from Him. Instead, they will be with Him together face-to-face for eternity.

3. Marriage of Christ and the Church – Throughout the New Testament, the relationship between Christ and the church is pictured as a marriage. This illustration is used not because our

relationship with Jesus is exactly like a marriage, but because there are many similarities. For an in-depth look at this relationship, you can see Ephesians 5:25-32.

Here are some of the similarities:

- The husband is the head of the marriage and Christ is the head of the church.
- The husband should sacrifice himself for his wife and Christ sacrificed Himself for us.
- The husband is to love his wife and put her first and Christ did this for the church.
- Marriage is a commitment and bond on both sides and our relationship to Jesus is as well.
- The wife is to submit to and respect her husband and the church is to obey Christ.
- The wife is a helper for the husband and we are to serve Christ and help Him fulfill the Great Commission.
- The bride is beautiful to the groom and we are beautiful and loved to Christ.
- God hates divorce and marriage was designed to be permanent. Our relationship with Christ will last forever.

Mark 3:34 - And looking about at those who sat around him, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers!"

Marriage is not the only relationship that shows some similarities to our relationship with Christ. Here, Jesus refers to some as "mother" and "brothers." In other places, He calls us "friends." God is also our Master, our Lord, our Savior, etc. Marriage is one of many pictures used of our relationship to Christ. He also calls Himself a shepherd, a doctor, and many other things. Each one of these shows us one aspect of our relationship with Him.

Application: Our key role in this "marriage" is to submit to Christ as our head. A marriage will be filled with conflict and problems if the two sides both strive to be the leader. Christ is our leader. And we are to humbly follow Him.

4. The Celebratory Banquet –A marriage banquet is a joyous and exciting event!

My wife and I looked forward to our wedding day with great anticipation. That day was one of, if not the most, important days in our lives. We spent a lot of time preparing for it. Preparations included studying the Word so that we could be better husband and wife, and have a God-honoring marriage. We also spent time together even before marriage, getting to know each better and deepening our relationship. In addition, we went shopping and bought clothes. We wanted to look our best and be attractive for each other.

The day of the wedding came and it marked a new chapter for us. Our lives can be separated into two parts, life as a single before marriage, and life together as a couple after marriage.

The vows and procedures formalizing the marriage came first. And after that the celebration banquet! Then after the celebration meal, we began the rest of our lives together. It was a time to both look back with gratitude at what God had done in bringing us together, and look forward to spending "happily ever after" together.

The Marriage Supper of the Lamb in heaven will be similar in some ways. Now we prepare ourselves for that day when we will be together with the Lord. We study the Word so that we can be better followers of Christ. We pray toward sanctification. We deepen our relationship with Him. We prepare ourselves for that blessed day. And we anticipate with excitement the time when we will be together with Him face-to-face for eternity. That banquet will be the official beginning of our eternity with Him.

5. The clothing of the bride –

Revelation 19:7-8 - His Bride has made herself ready; it was granted her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints."

We have no righteousness of our own. Every good thing we can do is a result of God's grace. At the same time, like a bride, we are supposed to prepare ourselves to meet the Lord.

Brides often spend a lot of time and expense on picking out just the right wedding dress. They want to look stunning for their groom.

Similarly, we are to zealously pursue good deeds (Ephesians 2:10), which He has prepared for us. This verse equates our robes with righteous deeds. We should therefore seek to do more righteous deeds, which are attractive and pleasing to our King.

Application: Who are you seeking to please? Are you trying to please your boss, a parent, or a teacher? Or are you living your life to please the Lord? On her wedding day, a bride seeks to please her groom. Her eyes are completely on him and no one else. We too should seek to please Jesus above all others.

6. Worship God only – The section closes out with John prostrating himself in worship of the angel who gave him this message. And the angel tells him not to do that. Only God is worthy of worship. Here we see a difference between righteous angels, which seek to glorify God, and fallen angels (Satan) who seek to glorify themselves.

Application from today's lesson: How can you prepare yourself this week for that future meeting with the groom at the marriage supper of the Lamb?

Revelation 19:11-21

Outline

- I. Behold the King (11-14)
- II. The King's War (15-19)
- III. The King's Judgment (20-21)

I was amazed when I looked up a survey that said that 79% of Americans believe Jesus will return to the earth someday. It was surprising to me that so many people say they believe Jesus will return to earth, but then they live as if He won't.

Perhaps they think that when He comes back, everybody will enter paradise and it will be one big happy reunion.

But what will really happen when Jesus returns to the earth? That is what Revelation 19 will show us.

I. The Rider of the White Horse (11-14)

Discussion Questions

- What are your observations about what John saw?
- Who is on the white horse?
- What does the white horse show us about the rider?
- What can we learn of Jesus from His eyes being like a flame of fire?
- What do the "many diadems" show us about Him?
- Why is His robe dipped in blood?
- Why is Jesus called The Word of God?
- Who is the army following Him and what are they there for?

Cross-References

2 Thessalonians 3:3 - But the Lord is faithful. He will establish you and guard you against the evil one.

John 5:22 - The Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son.

Acts 17:31 - Because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead."

Hebrews 4:12 - For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

John 1:1 - In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

Teaching Points

1. Rider of White Horse - John "saw heaven opened and behold..." All eyes are on Jesus, beholding Him. Jesus is the star of the show. Jesus' second coming is very different from His first coming. The first time He came, He was born as a baby in a rural, corner of the world, with poor parents. Only a very few people saw Him and realized who He was at the time. And the purpose of His coming was different. When Jesus entered Jerusalem, He rode on a donkey. It was a symbol of His humility and gentleness.

At His first coming, Jesus said, "I did not come to judge the world." (John 12:47)

But next time He will. He will be riding on a white horse to wage war. This is the symbol of a king. In Revelation 6, the Antichrist was riding a white horse. He was the pretender, copycatting what he knew Jesus would be doing. Now every eye will behold Jesus for who He is, the King of Kings. No more excuses. No more denials. No more false bravado.

Behold. That is what we want to do today. We want to behold Jesus for who He is. Many tend to focus on certain qualities Jesus demonstrated at His first coming that they are attracted to compassion, service, humility, love, and sacrifice. In this chapter, we see a completely different, but equally important side of who Jesus is.

2. Faithful and True - Jesus is called "Faithful" and "True." Both of these highlight the fact that Jesus does what He says. Jesus promised to come again. People mock. They will say, "Where is the promise of His coming?" (2 Peter 3:4). They will claim that the long time gap is proof that Jesus is not true.

Recently someone replied to an online Bible study I posted and said "Jesus is a false prophet" because He hasn't returned yet.

But Jesus is faithful and true. He will come again just as He promised.

3. In Righteousness He Judges and Makes War - Jesus is just and righteous. The war that He makes on the Antichrist and his rebels is a righteous war. Many of the wars waged by man are evil wars. Sometimes the motive is money or resources, power, land, revenge, and hate.

But there have also been wars where one side was in the right. In WWII, the countries fighting against the evils of Nazi Germany were fighting a just war. They had to stop the evil. And war was the only way to do it. After the allies won the war, they held a trial for many of the Nazi leaders. And many of these were put to death. It was justice.

By the same token, the war Jesus will make against the Antichrist and his rebels is a righteous war.

Many people ask, "why does God allow evil?" and "why doesn't God just stop sin?"

But they don't understand that to do that requires war and judgment. Nazi Germany would not be stopped without war. And neither will the sin we see today. Right now God is patient and He is giving more time for repentance. Yet He will not allow the evil and rebellion to go on forever. And that is why this war is necessary.

He sent prophets. The world didn't listen. He sent His Son. The world didn't listen. He sent His Word, the Holy Spirit, missionaries, and the church. The world didn't listen. In Revelation, we have seen that He sent 21 separate judgments, many of them a warning of the hell and judgment to come. The world didn't listen. He sent

144,000 witnesses. He sent angels. He proclaimed messages of warning from the sky. The world didn't listen. Instead, they became more and more wicked in their lusts, pride, and blasphemies.

Thus the only solution is this righteous war. Not one person on earth will be able to claim ignorance as an excuse. Each one had many opportunities, but chose the way of rebellion. Jesus Himself will personally come again and wage a righteous war of judgment.

4. Eyes Like a Flame of Fire - Jesus sees all and knows all. His gaze penetrates any facade people put up. When He returns on His white horse His gaze will expose all. He will search the earth for those who are His enemies in order to bring them to justice. No one can hide from Him. Caves, concrete bunkers, it doesn't matter. His wrath will expose all of those who have lived in rebellion toward Him.

Luke 8:17 - For nothing is hidden that will not be made manifest, nor is anything secret that will not be known and come to light.

Application: The Lord sees all and knows all. What does He see when He looks at you? His eyes either bring judgment or support.

2 Chronicles 16:9 - For the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to give strong support to those whose heart is blameless toward him.

Think about your own life. What is one "secret" you have that you wouldn't want to be announced in church next Sunday? Take it to Christ. Admit to Him that He knows all. Confess. Bring it to the light. Seek for His help and you can overcome it through Christ.

5. Many Diadems - A diadem is a jeweled crown worn as a symbol of sovereignty. It shows the authority and dignity of the one wearing it. Jesus will not just be wearing one. He will have "many diadems." It will be clear to all that Jesus is coming as the King.

When Jesus came the first time, they rejected Him as their king. Pilate wrote "the King of the Jews" on the cross where He was killed. And the Jewish leaders were angry. "Don't call Him the King of the Jews." They did not consider that He was their king.

That unwillingness to submit to Jesus as king continues. Many of the same people who in that survey said they believe Jesus will return to earth, don't submit to Him. They don't want to acknowledge that He is the authority.

Application: If you believe that Jesus is king, He demands that you live your life that way. Acknowledging Him as king means that we should submit to Him. Are there areas of your life that you won't submit to His rule? Are there strongholds that you want to keep Him out of? Perhaps you treat Him as king on Sunday morning, but on Tuesday at 1 AM you are not. Perhaps you treat Him as king at church, but in your dorm or when out with your co-workers you do not. He is the King of Kings. He has eyes like a flame of fire. You can keep no secrets from Him. Treat Him as king at home and when you are out, when you are alone or when you are with others, on Sunday, and the rest of the week.

6. A Name That No One Knows - The name "Jesus" was given to Him after Gabriel told Joseph to name Him this. This was His name as a man. But He has another name which He had before the name Jesus. It is unknown to us and means "the Word of God."

It reminds us that we know only a small fraction of what there is to know about Jesus. We know only what He has revealed to us so far. There are many more things that have not yet been revealed. And we will be learning more about our Savior for all eternity. Since He is infinite, we can be always learning of Him but never fully knowing Him.

7. Robe Dipped In Blood - When you first think of blood, you probably think of it as the symbol of atonement. But here, that is not what it means. The immediate context shows us that this represents Jesus' victory in this war over His enemies. To put it graphically, as Jesus treads on them, their blood tinges His robe.

The first time Jesus came He was a lamb. His opponents mocked Him, scoffed at Him, and beat Him. And the lamb was silent. But now the lamb turns into a lion. Can you imagine how a group of bullies would react if they were throwing stones at a lamb and then it turned into a lion right in front of them?

That is Jesus at His second coming. The first time He was covered in blood it was His own. Now the blood is the blood of His enemies.

And this is a vivid reminder of the gospel message. Jesus shed His blood so that you don't have to. If you accept Jesus' sacrifice on your behalf then when He comes in judgment, you will be spared. Your blood will not be shed. It won't be your blood tinging His robe. But if you don't accept His sacrifice then your blood will be shed. And that highlights God's justice. Sin must be punished. Either Jesus takes it or you do.

8. Armies of Heaven Following Him - Do you know how to ride a horse? You will. Believers are going to have a front-row seat to the action. You will be following Jesus and riding a white horse of your own. So if you don't know how to ride a horse, you had better take lessons.

As believers, we are part of this war. But at that time, you won't need to do very much. Jesus is going to fight the battles Himself. Your role will simply be to observe what Jesus is doing and in seeing His victory, give Him glory and praise.

Jesus' victory then reminds us of how we can have victory now. You would not be able to defeat the Antichrist and the armies of the world. They have all the weapons. They have the numbers. They have all the advantages, except for one. We have Jesus on our side.

In this war, Jesus is the victory. He is the victory tomorrow. And He is also the victory today.

Application: What is the battle that you are fighting? Temptation? Health problem? Jesus is the solution. Do not depend on your own strength or intelligence. Look to Him. He will help you overcome.

II. The War that He Wages (15-19)

Discussion Questions

- What does the sharp sword from His mouth represent?
- What can we learn about His character from it?
- What does it mean that Jesus will rule the nations with a rod of iron? Who will He rule? Why a rod of iron?
- What does it mean that He will tread the winepress?

- What will He do when He returns? Who will He wage war against?
- How should understanding the nature of Jesus revealed in this passage change your life today?

Cross-References

Revelation 12:5 - She gave birth to a male child, one who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron, but her child was caught up to God and to his throne

Revelation 1:18 - For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.

Isaiah 26:21 - For behold, the Lord is coming out from his place to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity, and the earth will disclose the blood shed on it, and will no more cover its slain.

Teaching Points

1. Armageddon - From verse 15 we see the war that Jesus wages. This is called Armageddon. It is called this because the armies of the world will gather together in the Jezreel valley as a staging area before launching their final assault against Jerusalem. And in this valley is a small city called Megiddo, from which we get the term Armageddon. Armageddon is not a single battle, but a war with multiple fronts. Jesus will face His enemies probably in multiple locations before finally setting His feet back in Jerusalem on the Mt. of Olives.

Joel 3:2 - I will gather all the nations and bring them down to the Valley of Jehoshaphat. And I will enter into judgment with them there, on behalf of my people and my heritage Israel, because they have scattered them among the nations and have divided up my land.

God is the one behind the gathering of these forces. They think that they are clever, gathering all of mankind's power together to defeat His people and Him. Can you imagine how prideful that is? By this time, they will know the prophecies. And they will be attacking His people so that He will come and they can take Him out. But in the end, they are only fulfilling His prophecies, gathering in one

location so that He can deal with them quickly and snuff them out all at once.

Zechariah 14:2-4 - For I will gather all the nations against Jerusalem to battle, and the city shall be taken and the houses plundered and the women raped. Half of the city shall go out into exile, but the rest of the people shall not be cut off from the city. Then the Lord will go out and fight against those nations as when he fights on a day of battle. On that day his feet shall stand on the Mount of Olives that lies before Jerusalem on the east, and the Mount of Olives shall be split in two from east to west by a very wide valley, so that one half of the Mount shall move northward, and the other half southward.

What a day that will be!

2. A Sharp Sword To Strike Down The Nations - In Revelation 1:16 Jesus was described as having a sharp two-edged sword coming from His mouth. The sword is the Word of God (Hebrews 4:12, Ephesians 6:17). The world will come together to fight Jesus with all of the weapons they have. Most likely, there will be tanks, fighter aircraft, missiles, and even nuclear bombs. What weapons will Jesus have? Just His words. That is all He will need.

Just as He has the power to create the universe with the spoken word, so His spoken word can immediately mow down His enemies.

Colossians 1:17 - And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

Jesus did not only create the world. He is sustaining it. He is literally holding it together. If He were to withdraw His power, the molecules and atoms would fly apart. Everything would descend into chaos. At this moment it will be as if at a spoken word His sustaining power will be removed from these people and they will just die.

Zechariah 14:12 - And this shall be the plague with which the Lord will strike all the peoples that wage war against Jerusalem: their flesh will rot while they are still standing on their feet, their eyes will rot in their sockets, and their tongues will rot in their mouths.

Death will be virtually instantaneous. Their flesh will just rot and melt away.

Every person lives by the mercy of God. Rich and poor, powerful or sick, atheist and believer, all draw breath because God allows them to. If He were to withdraw His life-sustaining power from you for even an instant, you would cease to breathe.

Application: Let everything that has breath praise the Lord. We must humbly recognize that our lives are in His hands. We are made through Him and for Him.

3. He Will Rule Them With A Rod Of Iron - Some translations call this an iron scepter.

*Psalm 45:6 - Your throne, O God, is forever and ever.
The scepter of your kingdom is a scepter of uprightness.*

A scepter shows Jesus' power and authority over the nations. The war is not a war to destroy everything and everyone. It is a war to purify the world and judge His enemies because Jesus is going to set up a kingdom. The war sets the stage for Jesus' physical reign on earth, which we will learn more about next week.

Revelation 20:6 - And they will reign with him for a thousand years.

There are different opinions on this, but I take this literally. And knowing that Jesus is going to reign as king in this world is a very encouraging truth.

Jesus is going to rule. And what a perfect ruler He will be! We have people from scores of countries here.

Which one of you is happy with the government and political leaders of your home country?

One thing people from all over the world have in common is they complain about their government. We see corruption. We see selfishness. We see inept leadership. We see injustice. We see short-sighted policies. We see evil called good and good called evil. We see people oppressed, exploited, or empowered to sin.

When Jesus reigns, no more! He is going to rule with a rod of iron, which is symbolic of quick and swift justice. There will be peace. Not only will believers be able to rest and enjoy His kingdom, but even creation itself will rest.

Do you look forward to that?

I do. I am tired of all of the bad news. I am tired of all of the evil and corruption. I look forward to Jesus' just and perfect rule.

4. He Will Tread The Winepress Of The Fury Of the Wrath of God - The same imagery is used in the Old Testament for God's wrath against sin (Isaiah 63:3, Joel 3:13). The image is clear. The traditional way to make wine is to first have people crush grapes under their feet. They smash and obliterate the grapes and the juice pours out. Similarly, Jesus will crush His enemies and their blood will flow like juice from grapes.

It is a graphic image. It reminds us just how angry God is with sin. The pride, immorality, corruption, and evil make Him furious.

Again and again, in Scripture we see two aspects of God's character: His mercy/compassion and His justice/holiness. For millennia the dam of God's mercy has been holding His righteous judgment at bay. But during all of those millennia, it is as if the waters of judgment are getting higher and higher behind that dam. Then when the dam is finally removed, the torrent of judgment will be released. And because it has been stored up for so long, it will be catastrophic.

Application: Seeing God's judgment unleashed should remind us of how serious sin is. And seeing how serious sin is, reminds us to be even more thankful for the forgiveness we have in Christ.

5. The One-Sided War - In verses 17-18 we see the results of this war. The world will gather together everything they have. The greatest soldiers of the world will be there along with the most powerful weapons they can muster. It will be the epic climax of the battle between God and Satan, good and evil, for all time. It will be extremely anticlimactic. It will be over in an instant. The enemies of Christ will be instantly defeated. Their flesh will be eaten by wild beasts and the birds of the air as the ultimate disgrace.

*Psalms 2:1-4 - Why do the nations rage
and the peoples plot in vain?
The kings of the earth set themselves,
and the rulers take counsel together,
against the Lord and against his Anointed, saying,
“Let us burst their bonds apart
and cast away their cords from us.”
He who sits in the heavens laughs;
the Lord holds them in derision.*

The best effort that Satan and the world can put against God, and He laughs. It's a joke. All of the promises and gloating bravado by Satan and his minions will be shown to be a farce, a ruse designed to entrap and deceive.

III. The Judgment Against His Enemies (19-21)

Discussion Questions

- Who are the key figures in this war?
- What will be the outcome of the war?
- What will happen to the beast and false prophet?
- What do this war and its outcome teach us about the nature of God?
- What principles can we learn that we can apply to our lives today?

Cross-References

Revelation 21:8 - But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, as for murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death.

Matthew 25:21 - Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.

Teaching Points

1. Beast and False Prophet Judged - The Antichrist and the false prophet will utter the horrible blasphemies. With their slick tongues and fake miracles, they will deceive most of the world. And here we finally see them receive their due. They won't be boasting anymore.

One previous discussion question was, "which judgment do you most look forward to?" My answer was this one. The beast and the false prophet, who deceive so many, will be held accountable. Like everyone else, they will reap what they sow.

Much like Jesus was the first fruits of the resurrection, they will be the first ones thrown into hell. A thousand years later (in the next chapter) we see they are still there when Satan himself will be thrown in.

2. The Rest Were Slain - All of the others were slain by the sword from His mouth.

Application: What Jesus are you following?

To be a Christian means that we are followers of Jesus. But I think for a lot of Christians the Jesus they are following is not the Jesus in the Bible. Many believe that Jesus is loving, kind, tolerant, and merciful. And of course, He is. But they neglect the other qualities of Jesus, the ones we see in this chapter.

They say things like "Jesus is love. He wouldn't judge me for [fill in the blank and pick a sin]." This is a shallow and warped view of who Jesus is. In this passage, we see the qualities of Jesus: fury, wrath, judgment, waging war, and conquering enemies.

All of these remind us of His intense holiness and hatred of sin. These things do not lessen His work on the cross. Instead, they should make us appreciate it that much more. He hates sin, but He became sin for us. He is perfectly just, but He still found a perfectly just way for our sins to be washed away.

The very saddest part of the judgment in Revelation is the fact that it is so unnecessary. No one has to face it. Another future has been opened for us on the cross.

If you haven't done so, I would invite you to come to Jesus and believe Him today. Join His army so that you will be on the right side of this conflict.

If you are already a follower of Jesus, ask yourself what Jesus are you following? Are you following a person of your own imagination, a Jesus who is always tolerant of everything? Or are you following a Jesus who is just and holy and hates sin?

Revelation 20:1-10

Outline

- I. Satan Bound for One Thousand years (1-3)
- II. The First Resurrection and the Millennium (4-6)
- III. The Final Rebellion (7-10)
- IV. The Final Judgment (11-15)

I. Satan Bound for One Thousand Years (1-3)

Discussion Questions

- Who do you think this angel is in verse 1?
- What is the bottomless pit?
- Why is Satan being bound?
- What do you think the world will be like when Satan is not able to deceive the nations?
- What does this passage show you about the power of God compared with the power of Satan?

Cross-References

Revelation 9:1-2 - And the fifth angel blew his trumpet, and I saw a star fallen from heaven to earth, and he was given the key to the shaft of the bottomless pit. He opened the shaft of the bottomless pit, and from the shaft rose smoke like the smoke of a great furnace, and the sun and the air were darkened with the smoke from the shaft.

Teaching Points

1. Satan bound for a thousand years - In chapter 19, we see Jesus' second coming. He defeats the armies of the world that are arrayed against Him. He defeats the Antichrist and the false prophet. Then what?

The next step is to bind Satan himself. An angel comes down from heaven and binds Satan for a thousand years. Very possibly, this angel is Michael, captain of the Lord's armies. He imprisons Satan in the bottomless pit. It is most likely that the bottomless pit is the same one mentioned in Revelation 9:1-12. At times, God locks certain demons away there so that they cannot influence the earth or interfere with His plans.

Note that this is not the final judgment for Satan yet. After one thousand years, he will be released for a short time (discussed below).

The stated purpose for binding Satan is so that he will not be able to deceive the nations during this one-thousand-year period.

II. The First Resurrection and the Millennium (4-6)

Discussion Questions

- Who are on the thrones?
- What might their authority entail?
- Who came to life?
- What is the first resurrection?
- What other resurrection is there?
- What is the difference between the two?
- Who will take part in the first resurrection?
- What is happening on earth during these thousand years?
- Are the thousand years literal or symbolic? Why?
- How does the truth of the future millennium and the resurrection affect you now?
- What do you look forward to about the millennium?

Cross-References

Isaiah 2:4 - He shall judge between the nations,
and shall decide disputes for many peoples;
and they shall beat their swords into plowshares,

and their spears into pruning hooks;
nation shall not lift up sword against nation,
neither shall they learn war anymore.

Daniel 2:44 - And in the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed, nor shall the kingdom be left to another people. It shall break in pieces all these kingdoms and bring them to an end, and it shall stand forever.

Isaiah 65:25 - The wolf and the lamb shall graze together; the lion shall eat straw like the ox, and dust shall be the serpent's food. They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain," says the Lord.

Zechariah 14:16 - Then everyone who survives of all the nations that have come against Jerusalem shall go up year after year to worship the King, the Lord of hosts, and to keep the Feast of Booths.

2 Timothy 2:12 - If we endure, we will also reign with him; if we deny him, he also will deny us.

Luke 14:14 - And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you. For you will be repaid at the resurrection of the just."

Teaching Points

1. Three views of the millennium -

Revelation 20:4-5,6b - Also I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus and for the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended. This is the first resurrection....and they will reign with him for a thousand years.

The most hotly debated event on the eschatological calendar is the millennium. It is such a significant event, that a person's view of this event is used to define his beliefs about the end times.

There are generally three views of the millennium: pre-millennial, post-millennial, and amillennial. There are some variations of these as well.

The pre-millennial view holds that the millennium is a literal one-thousand-year age when Christ reigns as king over the world sitting on David's throne in Jerusalem. After the millennium, there will be a final judgment and then the eternal state. The distinctive of this view is that it is very literal. Jesus has a literal kingdom for a literal thousand-year period and His saints literally reign with Him.

The post-millennial view holds that the millennium will be a spiritual reign of Christ, where the world is mostly won to Him through the preaching of His disciples. It is the most optimistic view. Under this view, the gospel is victorious and the majority of the world will turn to Christ. Things will get better and better and then Jesus will physically return in glory, end history for this world, conduct the final judgment, and usher believers into the eternal kingdom. Those who hold this view do not believe that the thousand years of Jesus' reign as king are literal. Neither do they believe in a seven-year tribulation.

The amillennial view holds that the millennium is a spiritual reign of Christ. He is reigning through the church now. Jesus said that His kingdom "is not of this world." (John 18:36) Satan is currently bound, albeit on a long leash. Because Satan is bound, the gospel can go throughout the world to Gentile nations, which had been blinded for ages. The tribulation is not an exact seven-year period. Some of the things that will happen during the tribulation are happening now (such as the first four horsemen: war, famine, death, pestilence). Things will generally get worse before the end. After the church age, Jesus will physically return and usher believers into the new heaven and the new earth.

Focus on what unites us

It is important to remember that all three of these positions are orthodox. Godly and mature believers may hold different views. Revelation and eschatology are difficult to interpret. At various times in church history, different views have been the most popular.

Believers should not allow a difference in interpretation of these events to divide us. Instead, we should focus on what unites us. All of these roads ultimately lead to the same destination. Jesus will come again. There will be a final judgment. Believers will receive new glorified bodies and be with Jesus face to face for eternity on the new earth. All of us are "*waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ.*" (Titus 2:13)

2. A thousand-year reign with Christ -

I believe that the millennium is a literal event. The thousand years are literally one thousand years. After Jesus' second coming, He will rule over the world with a rod of iron. He will be literal king, on a literal throne, in literal Jerusalem. He will sit on the throne of David.

This is important because many of God's promises to Israel in the Old Testament have not been fulfilled yet. For example, their land area is not currently as large as God promised. And He also said that people will stream to Israel from the nations to worship there. In fact, they will be required to do so and if they don't, their land will be struck with draught (Zechariah 14:17-18). Without an actual millennium, many of these promises would seem to be left unfulfilled.

Romans 11:1 - "*I say then, has God cast away His people? Certainly not! For I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin. God has not cast away His people whom He foreknew.*"

Has God cast away His people? The answer is "no."

One of the key elements of the pre-millennial view is that the promises God made to Israel are still valid. He will keep every single one that He has ever made. God cannot and does not lie. The very existence of Israel as a nation now is evidence of God's promises to them. All of their neighbors (Moab, Edom, Canaan, etc.) are all gone now. But He preserved Israel over thousands of years, much of that when they were scattered around the world. He preserved them because He made a covenant to them and that covenant will stand. If they go extinct then His covenant cannot be fulfilled.

And there are many promises which He made to Israel in the Old Testament which have not been fulfilled yet. Some relate to the land they would possess. Some relate to a descendant of David who will be king. Some relate to promises of blessing and prosperity. Others relate to the fact that the nation of Israel will turn to God. Others are about how people from around the world will go to Jerusalem to worship God and how they will desperately want to make friends with Jews who are recipients of God's blessings.

Other references to the millennium show that it will be a time of peace. The wolf will lay down with the lamb and the leopard with the goat (Isaiah 11:6-9) and a little child shall lead them. Ever since the fall of Adam, the world has been cursed. It has not been able to just rest and glorify God as it was intended to do. People have destroyed what God made. Israel failed. The church failed. The world failed. Governments have failed.

But in the millennium, God will show us how the world could and should be with His Son reigning as the perfect king. Every believer will be able to see the world functioning as it was designed to do, government functioning as it was designed to do. It is almost as if after a long time of oppression, the world and all those in it can just breathe and enjoy their Creator. The millennium time period allows Jesus to show the world how it should function with a righteous ruler.

Application: Hope. We have something amazing to look forward to. Let that hope encourage you during trials and difficulties.

3. The first resurrection - The souls of those beheaded during the tribulation (for not worshiping the beast) will be resurrected and reign with Christ for a thousand years. They are part of the first resurrection.

Revelation 20:6 - Blessed and holy is the one who shares in the first resurrection!

There will be two resurrections. The first is a resurrection to life and the second is a resurrection to eternal punishment.

Daniel 12:2 - And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.

The second resurrection is described in Revelation 20:12-14. It consists of unbelievers from all ages who are gathered forth to the Great White Throne and then sentenced according to their deeds.

There are several other references in the Bible to the resurrection. So it can appear there are more than two. But in general, they are divided into two categories, the resurrection of the righteous (the saved) and the resurrection of the wicked.

The first resurrection occurs in stages.

Jesus is the very first one to take part in the resurrection of the righteous. Note that other people were raised from the dead. But they were not given a new glorified body. They were simply restored to their previous one, which was healed.

Jesus' resurrection is described as the "first fruits."

1 Corinthians 15:20 - But in fact, Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.

The terminology "first fruits" reinforces the idea that all stages of the resurrection of the righteous are part of the same harvest. A harvest of a crop may come in various stages. The first part is called the first fruits and is the best part. It shows the quality of the crops and is a sign of what is to come.

The second stage is the resurrection of the "dead in Christ." These will be raised at the rapture.

1 Thessalonians 4:16 - For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first.

And the third and final stage is seen here in Revelation 20:4; the resurrection of those who were saved during the tribulation.

Old Testament believers may be raised during the second or third stage, though Scripture is not clear. Some scholars also see the second and third stages as being the same event.

Though we cannot be dogmatic on the details, what is clear is that believers will be resurrected, receive a perfect, new body (1 Corinthians 15), and be with Christ forever.

There seems to be a time gap between the first and second resurrection as they are separated before and after the millennium.

Application: All will rise again. Some will rise to eternal life and others to eternal shame. The key to eternal life is not being a good person. Everyone is a sinner. The only way of salvation is to trust in Jesus and wholly depend on Him. Will you be part of the first or second resurrection?

III. The Final Rebellion (7-10)

Discussion Questions

- Why would God allow Satan to be released from prison?
- What will happen when he is released?
- What does this final rebellion teach us about the nature of man?
- What will happen to this rebellion?
- How is this battle different from Armageddon? How is it similar?
- Where will Satan finally go?
- How does knowing the outcome of this final battle and Satan's destination give you hope?

Cross-References

Jeremiah 17:9 - The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?

John 10:10 - The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.

James 4:7 - Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.

Teaching Points

1. Satan will be released from prison and will come out to deceive the nations - Naturally, we ask why would God allow Satan to be released from prison? Many also ask why God allows Satan to influence people in the world now.

In the end, God's ways are mysterious. He doesn't always tell us why He does things.

Isaiah 55:8-9 - For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.

It is enough for us to know that He has a plan and that His plan is perfectly good. While we do not know for sure why God does things in this way, we can see some of the results. Releasing Satan from his bonds one last time will guarantee that people from all points in the earth's history stand on an even footing. Every person is confronted with a choice. That is a choice to follow God or to follow Satan, or to put it another way to obey God or rebel. Adam and Eve faced that choice. Every subsequent generation faced that same choice. Even the people who live during the millennium under the physical reign of Christ will also face that same decision.

Angels and people were all confronted with that choice. Jesus faced it as well when Satan tempted Him in the wilderness.

God chose to create the tree of knowledge of good and evil and to put it into the garden. He knows exactly why, but leaving a choice for people to obey Him or not seems to have always been part of His plan.

2. People will rebel against God in huge numbers - At this period Jesus will be reigning in Jerusalem. Everyone will know without a doubt that He is the Son of God. Moreover, they will be descendants of believers who witnessed the spectacular events of Revelation. Jesus' government will be perfect and the world will thrive under His good and just rule. Yet even with all of this visible

evidence, a vast number of people will join Satan's final rebellion and try to overthrow Jesus. They will come from all over the earth as the sand on the sea.

The earth's population will likely be very large at that time since there will be one thousand years of peace and prosperity. This doesn't necessarily mean that the rebellious will outnumber the faithful. Nonetheless, it is astounding that so many will taste the goodness of God and still choose to rebel.

Reflect: Why would people who personally witness Jesus' reign as king (and all the goodness of His earthly kingdom) throw in their lot with Satan?

These events will reveal one more time the heart of man, which is deceitful and desperately wicked (Jeremiah 17:9). And it should not surprise us. Adam and Eve walked with God and chose to sin. Their immediate descendants heard stories of creation and chose to rebel. The Israelites witnessed many miracles and still rebelled. Jesus' contemporaries witnessed Him as being the only perfect man in history and chose to kill Him. In the end times, people will see all of God's supernatural judgments and harden their hearts instead of repenting. The same thing will be true for some people during the millennium.

Application: The only way we can come to God is through His grace. If your eyes are open, it is because He opened them. It is not because we are better. So let us be humble and be thankful for God's work in our lives that enables us to see and appreciate His goodness and in turn to obey Him.

3. Fire from heaven - These people will not have any excuses for their behavior. Living with Jesus present on earth, they will have all the knowledge they need. Therefore, God does not send them many warnings or reminders or signs. Knowing the truth, they will willfully join Satan's side.

God is not going to mess around. He will send fire from heaven to immediately burn away the opposition. It will disappear almost as if it never existed. And God will get on with His plan without any more rebellions ever again.

4. Satan's eternal punishment - At this point, Satan himself will be thrown into the lake of fire, where he will join the beast and false prophet (they will have been there for one thousand years already). That will be it for him. He will never again be able to harm or influence anyone. And he will have all of eternity to think about the errors of his ways.

Revelation 20:11-15

Outline

- I. Satan Bound for One Thousand Years (1-3)
- II. The First Resurrection and the Millennium (4-6)
- III. The Final Rebellion (7-10)
- IV. The Final Judgment (11-15)

IV. The Final Judgment (11-15)

Discussion Questions

- What does it mean that from His presence earth and sky fled away from Him?
- Who takes part in this next resurrection?
- What are the books in verse 12?
- Since each one is judged according to what he has done (13), what hope do we have?
- What is the significance of the book of life?
- Whose names are written there? When are they written?
- What does it mean that death and hades are thrown into the lake of fire?
- What would you say to someone who says that a God who would send people to hell is not good?
- How does knowledge of the Great White Throne of Judgment affect you now?
- What can you do to make sure that you don't go there? How about your children and family and friends?

Cross-References

Mark 9:43 - And if your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than with two hands to go to hell, to the unquenchable fire.

Romans 14:12-13 - So then each of us will give an account of himself to God. Therefore let us not pass judgment on one another any longer, but rather decide never to put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of a brother.

Matthew 12:36 - I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak.

1 Corinthians 4:5 - Therefore do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart. Then each one will receive his commendation from God.

Matthew 10:28 - And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.

Matthew 25:32-34 - Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.

Teaching Points

1. A great white throne - At the end of days, there will be a final judgment. It is normally called the Great White Throne Judgment. The one who sits upon the throne is the King of Kings. He has supreme authority as the judge. And His judgment is final. There is no one above Him. There is no option to appeal to a higher or supreme court. His court is the final one and highest there is.

The white color of the throne shows that the judgments are pure and holy. He who sits on it is impartial. He cannot be bought, corrupted, or negotiated with.

Most likely, it is Jesus who is on the throne.

John 5:22 - For the Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son.

There is a distinction between this judgment and the one that believers will face. Believers will appear before something called, "the judgment seat of Christ."

2 Corinthians 5:10 - For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.

It could be that Paul and John simply use different terminology to describe the same event. However, the first part of Revelation 20 indicates that believers and unbelievers take part in a different resurrection. Saints who take part in the first resurrection are blessed, while unbelievers who take part in the second one are condemned. And there is also a time gap of one thousand years between these two resurrections.

In the end, the most important thing to remember is that every person who has ever lived will face Christ the judge. You either face Him as friend and follower, having been cleansed already by His blood, or you face Him as a rebel and an enemy.

Application: One day each of us will have to give an account to the one seated on the throne. We would do well to remember who is on the throne. He is the one who has the final authority to judge our lives and the decisions we make. Your boss, neighbor, or teacher will not be on the throne. Neither will even your parents nor your spouse. Our goal should be to live in such a way as to please the one on the throne. Do not be pressured into compromising behavior by those who would use their earthly authority to influence you to sin.

2. From His presence the earth and sky fled away -

This may signify the fact that nothing can be kept secret from Him. There is no barrier between His gaze and our most secret thoughts and actions. People often convince themselves that God is far away. The fool says in his heart, "there is no God" (Psalm 14:1) and believes that he will not be punished (Psalm 53:1).

Many do things in secret that they would never dare to do in front of others. They hide in the dark, behind closed doors, in shady alleyways, in basements, and pass things under the table. None of these things are effective in keeping our actions secret from God.

Hebrews 4:13 - *And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.*

He not only sees everything we do, but He also sees everything we think about. Our innermost thoughts are laid bare to His eyes. All of our lust, greed, bitterness, pride, and envy are exposed to the one who has eyes like fire (Revelation 19:12).

He is always watching.

Psalms 139:8 - *If I ascend to heaven, you are there! If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there!*

Application: Remember that wherever you are and whatever you are doing, God is watching. He sees everything that you do in secret. He knows every skeleton you have in the closet. That knowledge can help remind you to do what is right even when you are alone. At the same time, we are all guilty. Instead of thinking that we can continue to hide our sins, we should pre-emptively confess them to God (and to others). Seek forgiveness now and bring it to Him before He uncovers it at the last judgment. Even from the fall, we see that God wants us to proactively confess sins to Him. He asked Adam and Eve, "did you eat the fruit?" when He knew well they did. He asked because He wanted them to take initiative to confess.

3. I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne - The last judgment is the great equalizer. Every person will one day stand before God and face judgment. It is a time to give account for the life spent on earth, for the use of the gifts and resources God has put in our hands. It is a time to look at one's record and compare it to God's law.

There will be no partiality.

Your riches or position on earth will not give you a free pass. The poor and the rich alike will stand before the throne. No nationality will be privileged. The Ancient Chinese and Native Americans will be there. Viking generals and Thai kings will be there. French paupers and Peruvian shepherds will be there. Great inventors like Thomas Edison and explorers like Marco Polo will be called to give

an account. Those whose names and achievements are recorded in the history of the world will stand before the throne. And in exactly the same manner, those forgotten by history will be summoned to present themselves before the ultimate judge.

We have an ultimate authority who rules over us.

From the very beginning of the fall, mankind has resisted God's authority. Adam and Eve rebelled by disobeying the one restriction God placed on them, falling for Satan's law that God's authority over them was rooted out of capricious and evil motives. Soon mankind degenerated into more rebellious behavior. Only one generation later, Cain murdered Abel. Abel was created in the image of God, but Cain did not care. At the Tower of Babel, people gathered together to flaunt their perceived independence from God. To them, man was a god. They believed they did not need God and could do anything.

When Jesus came, He was rejected and murdered. The Son of God was killed as humankind attempted to cast off all of God's authority.

Fast forward to the twenty-first century. Modern-day man has developed a sophisticated system that enables them to deny God and claim man as the pinnacle of the universe. It is called evolution.

Man's rebellious desire to be free of any authority is shown in Romans 1.

Romans 1:21-23 - For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.

Reflect: Why do people so deeply dislike authority?

People dislike authority because their deeds are evil. They want to enjoy sin without any consequences or guilt.

But in this passage, we are reminded that regardless of man's attempts to cast off God's authority, He remains on the throne.

Each person without exception will come before the throne. He is the authority over our lives and that cannot be changed by us.

Reflect: How does recognizing God's authority over your life impact you? How does it influence your decisions? Your thinking?

Application: Accept God's authority over your life now, rather than later. Submit yourselves to Him. Be humble under His mighty hand.

4. Books were opened... and the dead were judged by what was written in the books according to what they had done -

These books appear to be written accounts, containing the entire histories of each person who has ever lived. Our world history only has bits and pieces of the most significant events or accomplishments of famous people. God's history collection will be comprehensive.

Everything you do will be recorded. This will include everything you have done in secret and no one knows about. It will include things you have long forgotten. Most likely, motivations and inner thoughts will also be written down. Those have to be taken into account for a fair judgment to be rendered.

Reflect: How would you feel if you are called up and your book of deeds is read in front of billions of people?

It will be a time of great personal shame and sorrow. The judged will desire to escape, but there won't be any. All will be revealed under the gaze of the Almighty. No reasonable justification can be offered. No excuse will be good enough. There can be no negotiation, no appeal, and no more second chances.

It is hard to imagine the sheer anguish and regret that will be felt by the condemned at that time. And yet no there can be no finger-pointing to anyone else. Each person will stand on his own before the throne, responsible for his own choices.

5. The judgment will be fair -

The judgment will not be arbitrary. It will be perfectly fair. Everything will be taken into account. Background, environment,

family upbringing, physical abilities, health issues, education level, and exposure to the truth will all be considered.

According to Revelation 20:12, each will be judged "according to what they had done." Personal responsibility is emphasized. If you are abused as a child, that will be considered and factored in. But neither will it absolve you of all responsibility for your own choices. No one will be able to say, "I had no choice" or "he made me do it."

God is the perfect judge. His courtroom will be perfectly just. Every one of His verdicts will be 100% pristine. No one will be able to find fault with His judgments. The condemned will not say, "it is not fair." They will fully recognize that it is fair. Whatever sentence God hands down will be exactly what is fair, no more and no less.

Proverbs 16:11 - A just balance and scales are the Lord's; all the weights in the bag are his work.

6. Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them - Hades is a Greek word, meaning the place of the dead. The Hebrew equivalent is Sheol.

Revelation 20:13 - And the sea gave up the dead who were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them, and they were judged, each one of them, according to what they had done.

This verse simply means that all of those who died will appear at the judgment. No one from any era will escape it.

7. Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire - Death is not the end. Many people believe that after death there is nothing, that one loses all consciousness. The Bible teaches very clearly that death is not the end. There are two final destinations, eternal life with Jesus in heaven (more technically on the new earth, seen in Revelation 21-22), or the second death in the lake of fire.

The lake of fire is described in Scripture as:

- A place of darkness (Matthew 22:13)
- The second death (Revelation 20:13)
- A place for Satan, the antichrist, and the false prophet (Revelation 19:20, 20:10)

- A place originally prepared for the devil and his demons (Matthew 25:41)
- A place of torment (Matthew 25:41)
- A flaming furnace (Matthew 13:42)
- A place of gnashing of teeth and weeping (Matthew 13:42)
- Unquenchable fire (Mark 9:48)
- A place where the worm does not die (Mark 9:48)
- Eternal destruction (2 Thessalonians 1:9)
- Away from the presence of God (2 Thessalonians 1:9)

Much of the agony of hell is not just physical pain, but spiritual anguish. Guilt, shame, and regret will continue. Loneliness and despair will be deeply felt. Sin will continue. People there will not be redeemed or repentant. They will not have glorified bodies. Many will gnash their teeth at God. Bitterness and anger will likely grow. Those in hell will continue to sin against God for eternity. As their sin continues, so does the punishment.

It is horrible to even think about the terror of being sentenced to hell. Every believer should be saddened to think of any souls going there. Its existence should motivate us to boldly share the gospel.

Application: Believers are called to share the gospel with a world that will be doomed to hell unless they come to Christ. We are called by God from above. We are called by our own consciences from within. And we are called by the lost souls below who are already in Sheol. Do not think about the horrors of hell and be so callous as to do nothing.

Firstly, evaluate your own salvation and make sure that you have a relationship with Jesus. He is the only way to avoid this fate.

Secondly, make sure you bring your children up to know the Lord. It would be a truly terrible thing to watch your children sentenced to hell. What are you doing to make sure this doesn't happen? How much time do you spend teaching your children the things of God compared to taking them to soccer practice or dance lessons?

Thirdly, show compassion for the lost souls around you. Warn them of what is to come so they can avoid this fate.

8. The book of life and the lake of fire -

Revelation 20:15 - And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

The Book of Life is sometimes referred to as the Lamb's Book of Life (Revelation 13:8, 21:27). It contains all the names of those who trust in Jesus and have been cleansed by His blood.

After checking the book of deeds, one more book will be checked. The Book of Life will be opened. Since the guilty will not be able to pay this debt on their own, their only hope is that the Lamb already paid this debt on their behalf. All of those whose names are not written in the Book of Life will be condemned to hell.

No one will be able to pass this judgment on their own. No one will be found innocent.

One can imagine the feelings of those about to be condemned. They will know their guilt. They will know they deserve hell. As the Book of Life is opened, they will hope against hope that somehow their name is recorded there. Even while hoping, they will know it is a fool's hope. Since they did not turn to Jesus and seek forgiveness how could this transaction have been made? How could their name be written there when they did not ask for it to be written there? How could they be called one of God's family when they rebelled against Him as His enemy?

Then the dreaded words will be pronounced, "his name is not found here." All hope will vanish. All the sin, guilt, and punishment will remain squarely on the shoulders of the guilty. They will have to bear the responsibility alone. Those words "I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness (Matthew 7:23) will be the most frightful ever known.

It is grievous to think about.

Application: Are you sure that your name is written in the book of life? All of those in Christ have their names written there and will avoid this fate, instead of hearing the words, "well done, good and faithful servant." Do not chase after the thrills of now and so lightly care about eternity. People prepare for interviews, university exams, and to go on dates, but do not prepare for the final judgment, where everything is decided. We should throw ourselves upon God's mercy now.

And though believers do not seem to be present at the Great White Throne judgment, we will be present before the judgment seat of Christ (1 Corinthians 5:20), to receive rewards. Are you ready to meet the judge? If not, what do you need to do to get ready? How should you live your life now knowing He is the authority and you will give an account to Him?

Revelation 21:1-8

Outline

- I. New Heaven and Earth (1-2)
- II. God Dwelling with Man (3-4)
- III. Everything Made New (5-8)

I. New Heaven and Earth (1-2)

Discussion Questions

- What do you think "heaven" includes in this verse?
- What will happen to the first heaven and the first earth?
- Why will there be no sea?
- Where will believers live?
- What is this city called? What does this show us about it?
- What can you learn about God's heart toward believers in verse 2?

Cross-References

Luke 21:33 - Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

Psalms 102:25-26 - Of old you laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands. They will perish, but you will remain; they will all wear out like a garment.

Hebrews 13:14-15 - For here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city that is to come. Through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name.

Teaching Points

1. A new heaven and new earth - The thousand-year reign of Christ on earth will be our present-day earth. But this earth will not last forever. Peter also taught that the world we live in is temporary. One day it will be judged and destroyed by fire.

2 Peter 3:10-13 - But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed. Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn! But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.

This heaven and earth will be destroyed. The heaven referred to here is the seen universe, not necessarily the throne room where God's presence dwells. What it means is that the entire universe that we experience now will be destroyed. The earth, the planets, the sun, the stars, and the galaxies will be dissolved. God is going to create something entirely new.

It is fitting that in the last two chapters of the Bible we see God again creating heaven and earth.

Our story begins in Genesis 1:1.

Genesis 1:1 - In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.

That divine act launched human history. All of our experiences are on this earth, the old earth. Those experiences include the fall, sin, death, and pain.

In Revelation 21-22, we see that chapter will be closed. God will flip the pages and bring His people into a new chapter. It will be a time of new beginnings. And the new beginnings will mean that the old is gone and the new has come.

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth; in the end/new beginning, God will create a new heaven and a new earth. That is the eternal state and that will be our eternal home.

Application: We have something amazing to look forward to. That hope pushes us on in times of difficulty. And we are reminded that although we have received the promise, we haven't experienced it yet. So we must diligently push forward in faith so that we can enter into that rest one day (Hebrews 4:11).

2. The holy city, the New Jerusalem - On the new earth, will be a new city. It will be called the "New Jerusalem." In some ways, it will fulfill what the first Jerusalem was supposed to do. That city was supposed to be a light of the nations, a place where God's glory resided, a place where people were reminded of God's goodness and worshiped Him. But the nation of Israel did not live up to its end of the covenant. Jerusalem at times experienced the curse of God's anger against them and their idolatry, rather than the blessing they could have had.

One day all will be made right. New Jerusalem will be a place where God's people can meet Him and worship Him face to face.

3. Believers will live on the new earth -

Reflect: Where will we live? In heaven or on earth?

John saw the New Jerusalem "coming down out of heaven." Believers will live in the holy city. It will be located on the new earth. Many people think that saints will live in heaven forever. Some depictions show people floating around in heaven with harps. Those ideas are not accurate.

God designed people to live on earth. He gave us two legs to walk on the earth, hands to pick things up off the earth, a nose to smell the fragrances on earth, ears to hear the sounds of wind rustling or birds tweeting, and eyes to see the beautiful colors He made for us to enjoy. Though the new earth will surely be quite different from what we have now, it will still be a terrestrial planet. You will not have wings. You will not float around in outer space as some detached entity, vaguely aware of the infinite space around you.

God's people will live on a new earth, specially prepared by our loving Father for us to enjoy.

Application: We should thank God for His awesome creative power. He has given us many and will give us many more, good things to enjoy. His loving care for us is ever-present.

4. Prepared as a bride adorned for her husband - God will prepare this city for us as a bride prepares for her husband.

So how does a bride prepare for her husband?

She prepares meticulously. Much time and effort are used to make sure she is ready on the wedding day. The best materials are used for her garments, which are thoughtfully sewed together to make the wedding dress. The bride will also ready herself. Perform, jewelry and make-up complete the picture. When she walks down the aisle (or the equivalent of this in the first century), she and the groom are beaming. The day of rejoicing has finally arrived. And a grand celebration commences.

Modern cities have city planners. But not all modern cities are attractive. Some are chaotic. Buildings are erected wherever, almost stacked upon each other. This causes some to be surrounded and get no sunlight. Alleyways are narrow and winding and it is hard to find your way. Transportation can be a mess because of poor planning. And the city itself may look dirty and unkempt.

But God is the city planner and the architect of the New Jerusalem. It is His gift for His children. Great thought and care are put into making the city just right. Much like Eve was made just for Adam, so this city will be made just for us. It will come from God's mind. Every aspect will reflect His perfect design. Each detail will be planned out to satisfy every need we will have. Functionally, it will be matchless. Aesthetically, it will be faultless. The transportation will be convenient. The gardens will be beautiful. It will be easy to get around in and have everything we need. Surely, we will react with unbridled joy.

There is no place like home. And that is where will be, finally. It will be our forever home sweet home.

If you have ever gone on a long and arduous trip, you have probably experienced the joy and comfort of returning home to your own bed. When we are presented with our own room (John

14:1-3) in this holy city, we will likely have the same feeling but magnified many times over.

Application: The hope of what is to come should motivate us to live our life for our Lord now.

Colossians 3:2 - Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.

When you feel overwhelmed by the storms and trials of life, remember what God has in store for you. The afflictions we have now cannot be compared with the eternal weight of glory He has in store for us. (2 Corinthians 4:17)

II. God Dwelling with Man (3-4)

Discussion Questions

- Whose voice was this?
- What will the new spiritual reality be like on the new earth?
- What will our relationship with God be like? How will it be different from now?
- Why can we not dwell with God now? What does the new reality show us about sin?
- Which of the promises in verse 4 are the most comforting to you and why?
- How do these promises give you hope and help you persevere now?
- How can you use these promises to comfort someone who is struggling?

Cross-References

1 John 3:2 - Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is.

Isaiah 53:4-5 - Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed

for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed.

Teaching Points

1. The dwelling place of God will be with man -

Revelation 21:3 - And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God."

Of all of the promises ever given, this is probably the best. God will dwell with man. We have never experienced anything like it. Adam and Eve had visits from God for a while. Then after the fall, those became less frequent.

Our sinfulness creates a barrier between us and God

Isaiah 59:2 - But your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden his face from you so that he does not hear.

Since He is holy, He cannot tolerate sin dwelling in His midst. Sin prevents people from having a relationship with God. When they come to Jesus, sins are forgiven. A legal transaction is made and we are redeemed. Yet in practice, we still sin. Those sins create distance between us. It breaks our fellowship with Him. We can only see Him dimly as through a mirror (1 Corinthians 13:12). Then, we will see Him face to face.

Our sins will be totally wiped out and forgotten. No more will even the thought of sinning enter our minds. It will be incomprehensible for us to dishonor our Father by sinning against Him, who has done so much for us.

We will have direct access to Him. This fact also teaches us about God's character. He is willing to condescend to our level to dwell with us. Can you imagine an emperor moving out of his castle to a hut to live with a beggar? Can you imagine a genius like Albert Einstein wanting to hang out with high school dropouts?

God is so much higher than we are that we cannot even comprehend it. And yet He condescends to desire a relationship with us, even to the extent that one day He will make His home with us.

Application: Are you inviting God to dwell with you even now? Your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit. Are you living in such a way as to honor Him with your body? Are you welcoming Him into your life or trying to keep a distance?

2. Awesome promises -

Revelation 21:4 - He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.

Most of the description here is about what will NOT be on the new earth. There will not be:

- Tears
- Death
- Mourning
- Crying
- Pain

Note that God will wipe away every tear. That could mean that at the beginning there might be some tears. Perhaps there will be tears for those who are lost and won't be there. Or perhaps there will be tears of regret. However, God is going to wipe away those tears. There may be a moment in time when God makes everything right and helps us to deal with those feelings, process them, and move forward in complete joy.

It is not clear how this will work out, but it is clear that God is the one who will bring about this change. He will kindly bring us into this new chapter and help us put all regrets and sadness behind us.

The former things will all pass away. All of the wounds from your life on old earth will be healed. Every abuse, depressing thought, worry, scar, and hurt will be fixed. Everything will be made new, including you.

Application: These promises should bring us comfort in times of sadness. Jesus said that "in the world you will have trouble." We do experience all kinds of troubles now. But Jesus overcame the world. Memorize this verse and recite it to yourself when you are hurting. And use it to encourage others who struggle to see hope.

III. Everything Made New (5-8)

Discussion Questions

- What does it mean that He is making all things new? What are some of the things you look forward to Him making new?
- What does the name "Alpha and Omega" mean?
- What does this name teach you about God's character?
- How does God being the "end" relate to you personally?
- What is the spring of the water of life?
- Why is no payment required for something so valuable?
- What do believers need to conquer (remember the seven churches each had to conquer something unique they faced)?
- Since all people have some of the sins listed in verse 8, how can we avoid this fate? Is there a difference between doing these sins and being this type of person?

Cross-References

2 Corinthians 5:17 - Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.

Romans 6:4 - We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.

John 7:38 - Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.'

Revelation 3:21 - The one who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I also conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne.

Teaching Points

1. I am making all things new - God is not just going to upgrade what we have now. It is not so much Earth 2.0 as it is a totally new system. That doesn't mean that everything is going to be unrecognizable. There will still be water, trees, gold, silver, jewels, fruit, food, people, and many other things we are familiar with. It won't be completely different, but it will be better.

Included in the "all things new" is you. Just as the current you is designed for this world, so the future you will be designed for that world.

This world is flawed in so many ways. Family, government, religion, environment, and everything else has the stink of sin on it. What we experience now is a cursed, faded, and rotting version of what God made "very good" in Genesis 1. The things in this world are being used up. Even the laws of nature (entropy; second law of thermodynamics) tell us that this world is descending into chaos.

The laws that govern the new earth will be different. There will be no entropy. It will be a new system with new natural laws for a new you.

Application: Do not get too attached to this world! This world will fade away, but His words last forever.

2. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end -

He is the giver of life. And not just physical life, but our spiritual life is from Him. But He is also the end. He created the world, but after that, He didn't just leave it to itself. He has the final say.

In the beginning, He was there and started it. In the end, He will be there and end it (for the old earth and heaven). And He will still be there at this new beginning. He is the great "I AM."

The fact that He is the end is not only true in a general sense, but also a very personal sense. No one will be able to enter this new earth without His express permission. The one constant amid this cataclysmic change, that sees a new universe formed, is God.

Application: The most important thing we can do is make sure we have a relationship with the Alpha and Omega! Every person

will go through Him to eternity, either eternity in the lake of fire or eternity in this beautiful paradise He prepared for His children.

3. To the thirsty, I will give from the spring of the water of life -

The water of life (or living water) represents eternal life.

John 4:14 - But whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.

In the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve were not allowed to eat from the Tree of Life after their fall. It was an act of mercy to keep them from living eternally with the stench of sin.

But believers will be made new. We will be made holy. And God will offer the living water to us. We will have eternal life.

It is only given to those who are thirsty. Another way to say that is that only people who ask for it can have it. There is a condition there. Someone must want the eternal life that God offers. And we must come to Him for it because He is its only source.

Those who thirsted for the world will receive what they thirsted for (both in the world and for eternity). But those who thirst for God will be satisfied.

Matthew 5:6 - Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

Reflect: What are you thirsting for? Can you tell by a person's actions what he is thirsting for? What actions would reveal a heart that is thirsting for the world? What actions would reveal a heart that is thirsting for God?

4. The one who conquers will have this heritage -

One of the themes of the book of Revelation is that believers are to overcome. Every church had to overcome a specific obstacle or temptation.

A. Ephesus – Overcome apathy and robot-like Christianity (2:7)

B. Smyrna – Overcome persecution (2:11)

- C. Pergamum – Overcome false teaching (2:17)
- D. Thyatira – Overcome sexual immorality (2:26)
- E. Sardis – Overcome apostasy and dead Christianity (3:5)
- F. Philadelphia – Overcome complacency (3:12)
- G. Laodicea – Overcome self-reliance (3:21)

God calls us to conquer these things. That is the message of Revelation that we are to keep. The one who conquers will be blessed. Each one of these churches was given a promise of blessing IF they overcame. The book of Revelation shows us what we are up against. And we are called to fight. We are called to conquer.

In Revelation 12, the angels fight a war against Satan and his demons and drive them out of heaven. Why God didn't just say the word and banish the bad guys immediately? The answer we came to is that He wanted the angels to fight. It was good for them to participate in the war. And the same is true for us. God does not call us to be just spectators, watching these supernatural events unfold. Each of us is to actively fight against evil, both in the world and most importantly in our lives.

Those who are in Christ will overcome by His strength. And they will be His children and be with Him forever.

Application: Are you fighting in this battle? Or are you passively observing? Think about which of these seven things you need to overcome. Make it a matter of prayer. Actively seek the Lord's help. Pick up the sword. And fight.

5. Those without Christ will be judged in the lake of fire - The fate of the wicked is contrasted with the fate of the saved.

While all people are sinners, those in Christ have been forgiven. Because they are in Christ, they have new life. Though they still sin, their life direction is not typified by these sinful lifestyles. A believer may do something cowardly, impure, or deceitful. But he will not go headlong into these things and never repent.

There once was a pastor named Pastor Wang. He was dragged before the governing authorities and told to denounce his faith in Christ or be thrown in prison. So he signed a document and denounced his faith. He was faithless. Yet he felt guilty about what

he had done. And the next day he marched back to the police station and told them he changed his mind. After tearing up the document, he was then thrown in prison. Though he was faithless for a moment, the Holy Spirit would not let him remain in that state. And he repented and did the right thing at great cost to himself.

This passage reminds us there are two roads. We must beware of the broad road that leads to destruction. A life of unrepentant sin leads there. Those whose lives are typified by the willful and unrepentant practice of sinning will find themselves in the lake of fire, even if they raised their hand to accept Christ in Sunday School decades before.

Application: Write down one thing you need to do based on what you have learned in this passage.

Revelation 21:9-27

Outline

- I. Description of New Jerusalem (9-14)
- II. Measurement of New Jerusalem (15-17)
- III. The Walls of New Jerusalem (18-21)
- IV. The Glory of New Jerusalem (22-27)

I. Description of New Jerusalem (9-14)

Discussion Questions

- Why is New Jerusalem described as the bride of Christ? Isn't the church the bride of Christ?
- How does the city have the glory of God?
- What are your observations about the city?
- What did it look like?
- Why are there twelve gates and twelve foundations?
- What do we learn from the fact that both Israel and the church are mentioned?

Cross-References

Ephesians 5:25-27 - Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.

Ephesians 2:20-21 - Built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord.

Luke 13:29 - And people will come from east and west, and from north and south, and recline at table in the kingdom of God.

Teaching Points

1. Is the Bride the city or the church? –

Revelation 21:9-10 - "Come, I will show you the Bride, the wife of the Lamb." And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great, high mountain, and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God."

In this verse, it appears as though the city itself is the bride of the Lamb. However, Revelation 21:2 shows us that God prepared the city for us. And later in Revelation 21, we see that saved Israel and the church will be residents of the city.

The bride of Christ (the church) and the "wife" of Yahweh (Israel) will reside there. Together they are the bride of the Lamb. In this context, it appears that the city is used to personify the people of the city.

In Scripture, we can see other cases where a city is used to personify the people. Jerusalem is often used to personify Israel. Babylon is used to personify its wicked residents. Sodom is used to personify the ungodly.

When John was taken to see the bride of Christ, the first thing he saw was the New Jerusalem. However, within this same vision, he saw the people who dwelt in the city. The bride was therefore within the city God had prepared for them, enjoying its spectacular beauty. So John saw that God would take care of His bride, having prepared a wonderful place for her to live for all eternity (John 14:1-3).

Application: We see that Jesus takes care of His bride. He loves us and He wants what is best for us. Some husbands mistreat their wives. Some use them. Many do not value them or treat them well. Jesus will not be like this toward us. He is going to give us the very best for all of eternity. Knowing that should motivate us to faithfully love and serve Him even now.

Reflect: This city will be prepared for us by God. What can you do to prepare for meeting Him?

2. Coming down out of heaven from God – Again, it is emphasized that God is the one who designed this city. It is His gift to us. It will be a heavenly city on the earth, literally paradise on earth.

3. Having the glory of God – As the city is created by God it will point to and glorify Him. All of God's creation points to His awesome design. The sun, moon, and stars show His power.

Psalms 19:1 - The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork.

Similarly, people glorify God by pointing others to Him. We do that primarily when we properly reflect the image of God He put in us when He made us. Our good deeds point people to our Maker, giving glory to Him (Matthew 5:16). Our love for one another leads people to the one we are following (John 13:35).

The New Jerusalem is God's masterpiece. Through it, we will be pointed to the majesty of its grand designer. The beauty of that city will remind us of His beauty. Its order and structure will remind us of His attention to detail. The sheer size of it will help us have just a taste of God's might. Its absolute perfection and cleanliness will bring to mind God's holiness.

Sometimes when we give gifts, we just pick up something random because we need to give a gift. A gift certificate to Walmart doesn't exactly fill the recipient with warm fuzzies. But sometimes, great care is put into giving the perfect gift. The giver hopes that gift will symbolize the relationship they have. The giver hopes that whenever the receiver sees that gift, she will be reminded of him, his love for her, and their times together.

That is the type of gift the New Jerusalem is. It is meant to remind us of the pure, beautiful relationship we have with our Savior. Every step we take in it will be a visible symbol of God's deep love for us. I believe we will not be able to go through that city without praising God.

Application: We don't have to wait to see God's gifts to us. Every good and perfect gift is from above. Spend some time reflecting on

God's gifts to you. What are some of the ways He has blessed you? How should you respond to those blessings?

We should regularly reflect on God's gifts to us. Recognizing and acknowledging them should lead us to respond with thanksgiving. Just as the New Jerusalem will cause us to glorify God, so too should the gifts we receive now.

4. The twelve gates and twelve foundations – The city will have three gates on each side, three on the north, three on the south, three on the east, and three on the west. On each gate is written the name of one of the twelve tribes of Israel.

The wall of the city will have twelve foundations. On those will be written the names of the twelve apostles.

Looking at these facts together, we can conclude that the redeemed of Israel and the church will dwell in the city together. They will be united in one body.

Ephesians 2:14-15 - For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace.

All the redeemed in Christ will dwell together in unity for all of eternity. We will be at perfect peace with God and with one another.

Application: Although many from the nation of Israel will one day turn to Christ, that day has not arrived yet. Pray for the salvation of God's chosen people. When He fulfills His promises to them, it will be a wonderful reminder of His faithfulness through the ages.

II. Measurement of New Jerusalem (15-17)

Discussion Questions

- What shape is the city?
- What functionality do you envision in a cube city?

- How large is the city? How tall are the walls?
- Why do you think the city has walls?
- Will the gates be shut or open?
- What do we learn from the shape and size of the city?

Cross-References

Ezekiel 38:30-35 – This passage describes Jerusalem in the time of the Ezekiel featuring 12 gates, one for each tribe.

Teaching Points

1. Its length, width, and height are equal – Many take this to mean that New Jerusalem will be a cube. The number twelve is used many times in the description: twelve gates, twelve foundations, 144 cubits, and 12000 stadia dimensions. A cube has twelve sides, while a pyramid has only eight.

That certainly could be the case. However, a pyramid or mountain shape also could fit this description. We will only know for sure when we see it.

The only other cube mentioned in Scripture is the Holy of Holies in the temple (1 Kings 6:20). It also had equal length sides.

"What is forbidden to all but the High Priest in Old Testament times is now open to all the redeemed. Relationship with Christ elevates all to the roles of kings and priests. All have face-to-face engagement with God (Rev. 22:4) in the heavenly Most Holy Place, the New Jerusalem."

<https://revelation-armageddon.com/2018/07/shape-new-jerusalem-pyramid-cube-new-earth-7/>

It is difficult to imagine what a three-dimensional city will be like, especially since the text also says that it has high walls. What is sure is that it will be very different from anything we have experienced before.

The 3D nature of the city reminds us of the unspeakable wonders God has in store for us in the future.

2. 12000 Stadia – Scholars believe that 12000 stadia is equal to 1400 miles (2253 KM). Thus, the city will be very large. It is larger in area than India, over half of the size of the United States. If indeed it is a 3D space and one could live inside of the city as well, it would be massive and would have more livable space than our entire earth.

III. The Walls of New Jerusalem (18-21)

Discussion Questions

- What does jasper look like?
- What are your impressions of the city and the wall?
- What are the gates made out of?
- What is the most beautiful architecture you have observed in the world? How do you think the New Jerusalem will compare to it?
- What does the city teach you about its Creator?

Cross-References

Revelation 3:12 - The one who conquers, I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God. Never shall he go out of it, and I will write on him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down from my God out of heaven, and my own new name.

1 Corinthians 3:10-13 - According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building upon it. Let each one take care how he builds upon it. For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw— each one's work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done.

Teaching Points

1. The materials of the city – The city is going to be beautiful and like nothing ever seen before. The walls will be made from jasper,

which is a red gemstone. Pure gold will be used as the main material for the city. But it won't be ordinary gold. It will look "like clear glass." The foundations of the city will be "adorned with every kind of jewel."

Each gate will be fashioned from a single pearl. Considering the size of the city, the gates are likely very large. Those are some massive pearls!

Even the streets, which generally use the cheapest materials, will be made of pure gold. That gold too will look like glass.

God uses only the best. Each aspect of the city will declare the glory of God.

IV. The Glory of New Jerusalem (22-27)

Discussion Questions

- Why does New Jerusalem not have a temple?
- In what way is God a temple? Then what was the purpose of the original temple in the Old Testament?
- What does light represent in Scripture?
- What does the bright presence of the Lamb teach us about Him?
- How is light necessary for life?
- What does verse 24 teach you about the residents of the city? Will there still be nations? Kings?
- Why will the gates never be shut? Then why even have them?
- What may be the glory and honor of the nations that people will bring into the New Jerusalem?
- What does verse 27 teach you about the city?
- How does knowing about this eternal city impact your life now?

Cross-References

John 8:12 - Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."

1 John 1:5 - This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.

1 John 1:7 - But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.

Ephesians 5:8 - For at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light.

John 1:14 - And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

2 Corinthians 3:18 - And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.

Teaching Points

1. Its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb – The purpose of the Old Testament temple was to provide a way for people could approach God. Only after going through the gate, past the altar, washing at the basin, and entering through the veil on the day of atonement with a blood sacrifice could the high priest enter into God's presence in the Holy of Holies. This was only allowed for one person, once per year. The restrictions were set in place because of man's sin. It was that sin that created a giant separation between man and God.

But in New Jerusalem, no physical temple will be required. There will be no veil. No more sacrifices will be necessary. No more blood will need to be offered. Jesus paid it all already. There will be no physical temple because there will be no more sin. Everyone will have access to God, not just a selected priest. We will dwell with Him face to face.

Application: Even now we have access to God's throne through prayer. Let us not wait until that future day to have communion with God. We can draw close to Him now daily through prayer.

2. Its lamp is the Lamb – In Genesis 1, light was created before the sun. The sun has always been the light source for our planet. Light brings life. Without the heat that life brings, we could not survive in the cold. Through photo-synthesis light is transformed into energy for plants that causes them to grow. And from this process, oxygen is also created. Light brings energy, life, and oxygen. Without it, we could not live.

Now God uses the sun to bring that life. But in the New Jerusalem Jesus, Himself will be that light. The light of His glory will radiate throughout the city sustaining life itself.

Light also represents truth and safety. No deceit will take hold and mislead people. No danger will be stumbled into. No one will lose their way. You will not stub your toe on a tree root in the night. You will not step on a Lego and experience that excruciating pain. There will be perfect truth. Perfect warmth. Perfect wisdom. Perfect safety.

Application: We can follow Jesus' light today as well. It is not as obvious as it will be then. But through studying God's Word, we can know the truth. Let us hold all of the ideas and culture of this world up to the light of the Word (Psalm 119:105), exposing the lies, and pursuing the truth.

3. By its light will the nations walk – All the tribes, tongues, and peoples of the world will have representatives in this holy city. While we will be united under the banner of one King, it seems that there will still be some reflection of our individual nations.

We look at God's creation and it is varied. We see all kinds of trees, flowers, and animals. The uniqueness and beauty of each one give glory to the creative power of God.

The uniqueness of every person is also a testament to our Lord's attention to detail and creative genius. In heaven, this too will be reflected. People will not be identical clones. Just as no two snowflakes are alike, so we won't be either. Every individual will be special.

Will it be various worship styles or music that will shine with ethnic variety? Will it be stories of how the gospel was brought to their people?

We don't know, but I can't wait to see it! All nations of the world celebrating our Savior together in unity will be a sight to behold!

4. They will bring their glory into it – This statement, along with the fact that there will be gates where people can go in and out, show us that the city will not be the only place where people will reside. It will be the center of life on the new earth, the focal point for the worship of our King. However, people will also be able to come and go. There will not just be a New Jerusalem, but a new earth as well. The new earth is not described in detail here, but we will have an eternity to explore it.

5. Its gates will never shut –

The gates will be open all day, and there won't be night. Since there won't be any night (or any sun), we could say that there will only be one day in eternity. It will just be a very long day! Since eternity is infinite, there seemingly would not be a need to keep track of time.

Reflect: What is the purpose of a gate that never shuts?

Generally, a gate or a door is used to keep unwanted people out. But there won't be any unwanted people.

We can understand the idea from the phrase one would say to a friend, "my door is always open." The open gates are an eternal reminder that God is welcoming His people into this city, into His presence. There will be no enemies and no war. Instead, we will have great freedom.

In John 10:7, Jesus said that He is the "*door of the sheep.*" And in John 14:6, He said that He is "*the way.*"

The idea seems to be simple. Those who walk through that door now in this life will be granted access to Him forever in eternity.

Application: Have you walked through that door of salvation? Are you following the narrow road it leads to?

6. Nothing unclean will ever enter it – All unbelievers will have already been judged and sent to the lake of fire. Only believers, those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life, will

populate the new earth. Their sins will be cleansed and they will be holy.

The description of what the city doesn't have (sin), is as welcome as the description we have already seen of what the city does have.

Reflect: How does hope in God's promises, influence your life now?

Revelation 22:1-7

Outline

- I. Seven Eternal Blessings (1-5)
- II. Keeping the Words of the Prophecy (6-7)

I. Seven Eternal Blessings

Discussion Questions

- What does the river of water of life represent?
- What is living water and where does it come from?
- What other Scriptures talk about the tree of life? What was it like in the Garden of Eden? Is this the same or different?
- What are your observations about the tree of life?
- What is the significance that it has twelve types of fruit?
- What clues about heaven can you learn from this tree?
- Why having His name on their foreheads significant?
- In the Bible, what is night/darkness a symbol for?
- In what ways do you think believers will reign?
- How does this picture of eternity motivate you?
- Which part is the most exciting to you and why?

Cross-References

John 4:14 - But whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.

Genesis 2:9 - And out of the ground the Lord God made to spring up every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food. The tree of life was in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. A river flowed out of Eden to water the garden, and there it divided and became four rivers.

1 John 3:2 - Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is.

Teaching Points

Key verse: Revelation 22:7 *“And behold, I am coming soon. Blessed is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book.”*

The word for "blessed" here is the Greek word "Makarios." It is pronounced "mak-ar'-ee-os. It means to be well-off, fortunate, and happy.

Many people would pay a lot of money for the secret to eternal happiness. And it is given to us right here in this passage for free. The blessings that we will see in this passage are freely given by God to those who keep the counsel and warnings in this book.

First, we will look at 7 eternal blessings and then at what we are supposed to keep to receive those.

1. The river of the water of life -

The angel shows John around the New Jerusalem like a tour guide. The first thing he shows John is the river of the water of life. It is bright as crystal. Its waters are beautiful.

But more than its beauty is the life the water brings. Without water, you cannot live. It is the most essential ingredient there is for life.

Jesus promised living water to His followers.

John 4:14 - *But whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.*

When a person is saved, he drinks living water from Jesus. Our heart then contains a spring of water. We have spiritual life. And Jesus promises that one day that will well up to eternal life. We see the fulfillment of that promise of eternal life here in Revelation 22.

The water comes from the throne of God and the lamb. The water represents the eternal life that we have in Christ. There is no other source. How many rivers of life does John see here? One. One river from one God. God is the source of physical life, spiritual life, and eternal life. There is no other road to salvation.

See also that this river flows through the middle of the street. That is a little hard to envision, but it shows us that the water is freely accessible. Everybody there can drink it.

Application: You can walk into a bookstore and find hundreds of thousands of self-help books telling you how you can have your "Best Life Now." Each one contains all kinds of promises and methods for achieving a great life or finding happiness. You don't need all of those books. You just need one. The Bible. God is the giver of life. He is the source so go to Him for wisdom, not to the world.

2. The Tree of Life -

The next thing on John's tour is the tree of life. The last time any person saw the tree of life was in the Garden of Eden. Perhaps that tree was a reflection of (or seed from) the heavenly tree. After Adam and Eve sinned, they were driven out of the garden and banned from eating of the tree, which was protected by a cherub. That was an act of grace because if they ate of the tree, then they would be condemned to an eternity trapped in their sinful flesh.

Now that sin has been wiped out, all of God's people are free to eat of the tree of life. It is not restricted any longer. No angels are guarding it. In fact, an angel is showing it to John.

The river of life and the tree of life show us that that place will be permanent.

There are a few interesting things about the tree of life. Firstly, it was on both sides of the river. That is rather curious. Have you ever seen one tree on two sides of a river? Some trees have very large root systems and the various trunks that come up are part of the same tree. Regardless of how it works, it shows us that its fruit is accessible. One can imagine walking down this beautiful street, taking some water from the river for a refreshing sip, and picking

fruit to nibble away at while continuing your stroll. It is a very peaceful scene.

A. 12 fruits 12 months -

The tree also has twelve kinds of fruit, one kind for each month. That represents the variety there will be in heaven. I will be honest with you. I am happy about that. In some depictions of heaven, we float around in the clouds and play harps forever. That sounds boring to me. God can do anything and when we are with Him nothing will be boring. But I like variety. God created an amazing variety of plants and animals and stars and galaxies.

How many plants and animal species do you think exist on earth?

Scientists estimate there are around 8.7 million species of plants and animals. That is a lot of variety! God could have just created a few, maybe cows and sheep and chickens. Have you ever played the road trip "spotting game" where you make a list of things to look for? Imagine playing that game with just a few animals or plants. "There is another cow. There is another one. Oh, look, a cow."

God didn't do that. As Creator, He created so many things for us to look at and enjoy. Each one motivates us to glorify Him for His creativity and power. I believe the tree of life with twelve different fruits shows us that heaven will be the same way. You don't always eat exactly the same thing. You won't always do exactly the same thing. There will be a great variety. And all of that variety will point us to glorify God.

Now we have limited time to explore even the limited variety of earth. Then we will have unlimited time to explore the wonders that will only then be revealed. That's an exciting thought.

B. Leaves of the tree for the healing of the nations -

Revelation 21:4 - He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.

So how will God accomplish all of these things in this verse? It appears that at least in part it is through this tree.

Do you like tea?

If so, you can look forward to one day making tea from the leaves of the tree of life.

Regardless of the exact method God uses, the point is that He will heal all people. All of the marks of sin in your life will be healed. All of the hurt inflicted on you by others will be healed. All of the marks from abuse and racism, healed. All of the damage that has been done by strife, war, hate, and violence will be healed.

That brings us to the next blessing.

3. Nothing accursed

Nothing dirty or sinful will be there. One of the best aspects of being there is that temptation won't be. Here we struggle against temptation. Even the fleeting thought of dishonoring the King won't enter your mind.

I look forward to the day when I won't need to struggle against sin anymore. Often, I feel like Paul in Romans 7 as he described his inner battle with sin, doing the things he didn't want to do.

Your mind will be perfectly pure.

4. He is there -

"the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it"

Someone once said that he wouldn't want to go to heaven if God wasn't there. God's presence is the highlight. Did you ever notice that the Bible doesn't describe heaven very much? We get a bit of information, but there are a lot of unanswered questions. People often ask me questions about heaven and mostly my answers are, "I don't know." God didn't tell us more because we don't need to know it. What we need to know is that He is there. And that is enough.

5. Seeing Him face to face -

Revelation 22:4 - *They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads.*

He will not only be there, but we can see Him and visit with Him face to face.

Question: What do you most look forward to about being with God.

6. No more darkness -

Revelation 22:5 - *And night will be no more. They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light.*

Darkness is a place to hide. Criminals come out at night. There will be nothing to hide. We will walk in the light as He is in the light and have perfect fellowship with one another (1 John 1:5-7).

7. Reign forever and ever -

Revelation 22:5 - *They will reign forever and ever.*

2 Timothy 2:12 – *If we endure, we will also reign with him.*

There are a number of passages in Scripture that indicate that believers will reign with God. That can be confusing.

- How can we reign if He is reigning?

It doesn't mean that we share His throne or glory. But it is a great promise. We are part of His kingdom. We are part of His team. We are on the winning side. We reap the blessings.

As part of His team, He delegates some authority or responsibility to us. We will have some areas of authority under His rule. From this, we also see that there will be work in heaven. Commence the groans.

Work in itself is not bad. Before sin came into the world, God commanded Adam and Eve to cultivate the garden. They worked. That work was fulfilling and enjoyable. It was only after sin came into the world that work changed. Part of the curse was that you

would have to toil and labor. Work would be difficult and wearisome. It would be accomplished through sweat.

Reigning requires work. There will still be work. But it will be fulfilling. Someone once said, "if you love your job, you will never work a day in your life." The work that we do there will not feel like work. Work done well for God brings with it a great sense of achievement. So put another way, you will be productive.

- And how can all believers reign? If all believers are reigning, then who are the subjects?

Someone asked me this question recently. It may be that each person has their own sphere of activity which they are overseeing. In a church, for example, one person may oversee one ministry as the "leader," but in another ministry, he is following another.

So probably this means that, like in the church, all believers will have an important role in God's kingdom. Every single person will have areas where they serve as overseers or organizers, all to worship God.

Application: The church now is a reflection of what the kingdom will be then. Just as every believer will reign then, so every believer should serve now. God has given you a spiritual gift. Are you using it for Him? Or are you watching others do the work? If you want to practice reigning in His kingdom then, start serving now. If you don't know what to do, come and see me and I can help you get started.

II. Keeping the Words of the Prophecy

Discussion Questions

- Why does the angel emphasize that the words are true?
- Why did God reveal what was going to take place?
- Having nearly finished the book of Revelation, what is the key application for us?
- How specifically can a person "keep" this prophecy?

Cross-References

Amos 3:7 - For the Lord God does nothing without revealing his secret to his servants the prophets.

2 Peter 1:19-21 - And we have the prophetic word more fully confirmed, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts, knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

Teaching Points

1. Keep the words of the prophecy –

Revelation 22:7 - *And behold, I am coming soon. Blessed is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book.*

We are almost finished with our study of Revelation. And we have seen a lot of amazing things in this book: beasts, rulers, miracles, signs, cosmic battles, horsemen, plagues, and most importantly God on His throne, and Christ and His victory over Satan. In the last two chapters, we have seen some of the blessings God has in store for His people.

We have been studying for months. What are we supposed to do with all of this information? Simple. We are called to keep the words of the prophecy. We are called to obey. This verse teaches us clearly that the blessings are for the one who obeys.

So as we near the end of our study in Revelation I want to review the commands in Revelation that we are to obey. The following is a list including almost all of the direct commands we are to obey from this book. They can be divided into four general categories.

1. Overcome -

One of the themes of the book of Revelation is that believers are to overcome. Every church had to overcome a specific obstacle or temptation.

A. Ephesus - Overcome apathy and robot-like Christianity (2:7)

- B. Smyrna - Overcome persecution (2:11)
- C. Pergamum - Overcome false teaching (2:17)
- D. Thyatira - Overcome sexual immorality (2:26)
- E. Sardis - Overcome apostasy and dead Christianity (3:5)
- F. Philadelphia - Overcome complacency (3:12)
- G. Laodicea - Overcome self-reliance (3:21)

We chose the theme "overcoming through Christ" for this past year largely because it is a major theme of the book of Revelation. We are His church and we live in a dark world. Forces of the enemy and this world seek to draw us away from the Lord. Many methods are used.

Some are external. Some face pressure from family or society to conform to the world's standards. Maybe it is a parent saying, "It's OK to be a Christian, just don't be too radical." The world tempts us to sin with promises that we will "enjoy it" and "no one will know."

Other temptations come from within the visible church. False teaching subtly comes in and takes control of people's minds, leading them away from the safety of God's Word.

And other temptations are from ourselves. We are tempted to grow complacent. The fervor that we had years ago for the Lord may grow cold if we are not careful.

And one of the worst temptations is self-reliance. We are tempted to rely on ourselves to overcome these things rather than going to Christ for help.

Take a moment and look at this list of seven things we need to overcome. Which one is the biggest challenge for you?

God calls us to conquer these things. That is the message of Revelation that we are to keep. The one who conquers will be blessed. Each one of these churches was given a promise of blessing IF they overcame. The book of Revelation shows us what

we are up against. And we are called to fight. We are called to conquer.

In Revelation 12, the angels fight a war against Satan and his demons and drive them out of heaven. We asked why God didn't just say the word and banish the bad guys immediately? The answer we came to is that He wanted the angels to fight. It was good for them to participate in the war. And the same is true for us. God does not call us to be just spectators, watching these supernatural events unfold. Each of us is to actively fight against evil, both in the world and most importantly in our lives.

Application: Are you fighting in this battle? Or are you passively observing? Think about which of these seven things you need to overcome. Make it a matter of prayer. Actively seek the Lord's help. Pick up the sword. And fight.

2. Endure -

Another command we see echoed throughout the book is to endure, to be faithful until the end.

Revelation 13:10 - *Here is a call for the endurance and faith of the saints.*

Revelation 14:12 - *Here is a call for the endurance of the saints, those who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus. And I heard a voice from heaven saying, "Write this: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on." "Blessed indeed," says the Spirit, "that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow them!"*

Persecution is going to get worse. Believers will be reviled for their faith. Those taking the name of Christ will have a target on their backs. Many will be martyred. Deliverance is not promised. They are called to endure to the end.

If believers at that time are called to endure the most wicked government in world history, then we must certainly endure now. To receive God's blessing, we must keep the command to endure.

It is easy to trust in and follow God when things are going smoothly, but how about when things are difficult? The list of things difficult to endure is long:

- Family separation
- Chronic pain
- Visa problems
- Health issues
- Failures in business or school
- Childlessness
- Deaths of loved ones
- Hostility and pressure from the world

Revelation is a call to endure to the end. It is much easier to start than to finish. According to some statistics, 17% of people drop out of marathon races and don't finish. I expect the number is much higher for people who profess Christ.

If you think about your own circle, you can probably remember several people who used to be faithful churchgoers who disappeared. I can think of many I have known over the years. Many of the temptations facing the churches we saw before are reasons: complacency, persecution, losing their first love, and sexual immorality.

What is the solution?

Philippians 1:6 - And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.

We trust in Christ's power in our lives. At the same time, we are to cooperate with Him. A marathon is finished one step at a time. When you are tired and thirsty and weak, each step can be a challenge. If you think about the finish line so far away it would be easy to get discouraged. One step at a time.

The Christian life is the same. Every day is a new battle. Each day we are called to be faithful and endure. Once you add up all of those steps, and all of those days, it will take you to the finish line, where the eternal blessings await.

3. Stay Awake (Be Alert) -

A third warning we are to keep from Revelation is to stay awake.

Revelation 16:15 - *Behold, I am coming like a thief! Blessed is the one who stays awake, keeping his garments on, that he may not go about naked and be seen exposed!*

Be ready. God tells the church what He is going to do ahead of time so that we will not be caught by surprise.

Armies are to be ready all of the time. Would-be attackers are not going to call up and say, "tomorrow we are invading." So armies continually train and prepare for war to break out at any moment. They go through drills. They exercise. They keep fit. They are disciplined.

How would you get ready? We get ready the same way. To stay awake means to be alert. We are to be conscious of the fact that time on this earth is short and that Jesus' return could happen at any time. A lot of it is having the right mentality, the mentality of a soldier. When you have the right mentality, the Christian disciplines will follow.

4. Be Separate -

A fourth command we are to keep is to come out and be separate.

Revelation 18:4-5 - *Come out of her, my people, lest you take part in her sins, lest you share in her plagues; for her sins are heaped high as heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities.*

In the book of Revelation, we see two systems. It is God's kingdom against Satan's kingdom. Satan's kingdom is all about the here and now. It is about pleasure, power, luxury, riches, greed, and the flesh. That system is completely set against God. There is no common ground between the two systems.

You cannot have one foot in each. Just as water and oil don't mix, so we are to be different from this world. Our motivations and our goals are to be different. The way we spend our time and money is to be different. Our value systems and beliefs are different. This is how Paul puts it:

2 Corinthians 6:14-16 - *Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness? What accord has Christ with Belial? Or what portion does a believer share with an unbeliever? What agreement has the temple of God with idols?*

As we have gone through this book, one message should be ringing loud and clear. This world and its system are bound for destruction. Why would you yoke yourself to this world and tie your future to it when its fate is sealed?

Here are just a few practical ways to remain separate from this world:

- Don't date or get married to unbelievers.
- Don't educate your children the same way the world does.
- Don't spend your life pursuing the same goals the world does (riches, IRA, early retirement).
- Don't tie your personal happiness to things the world says are most important (getting a top degree, owning a house, etc.)

God commands us to be separate.

5. Repent -

If our salvation was dependent on us keeping 100% of these four commands we would be in trouble. We are all sinners and we all fall short.

Revelation 2:16 - *Therefore repent.* (Revelation 3:3, 9:20-21)

Another command we see throughout Revelation is to repent. Ultimately only the person who repents of his sins and places his faith in Christ will receive these eternal blessings.

If you have never placed your faith in Christ and repented of your sins, I would invite you to do that today. Talk to your lighthouse host or tell the small group leader online.

Verse 6 says these things must "soon take place." In verse 7 Jesus says, "I am coming soon." In verse 10 it says, "the time is near."

The time is getting closer and closer. Jesus is going to return and He is going to bestow eternal blessings on those who keep His commands. We are almost to the end of our study in Revelation and we have learned a lot. All of that knowledge will be useless unless we keep it. We have been challenged to overcome, endure, be separate, stay awake, and repent. Let us faithfully keep these words as we depend on Christ.

Reflection Questions

- What do you most look forward to about being with God? Which one of the five commands from Revelation to keep (overcome, endure, stay awake, be separate, repent) will you focus on and how?

Revelation 22:8-21

Outline

- I. The Angel Converses with John (8-9)
- II. Important Reminders from Jesus (10-16)
- III. Final Invitation, Warning, and Promise (17-21)

I. The Angel Converses with John (8-9)

Discussion Questions

- Why does John emphasize that he heard and saw these things?
- Why would John fall down and worship at the feet of an angel?
- What does the angel's response show you about him and God?

Cross-References

Matthew 14:33 -And those in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God."

Luke 4:8 And Jesus answered him, "It is written, "You shall worship the Lord your God, and him only shall you serve."

Teaching Points

1. I, John, am the one who saw and heard these things –

Throughout John's writings in Scripture, we see that it is very important to him to show that he was an eye-witness to the things recorded. John lived the longest of any of the disciples. He saw many false teachers enter the church, people proclaiming strange doctrines and heresies.

Therefore, he seeks to establish his credibility and by extension the credibility of his writings. He was not just making stuff up according to his own opinion. Neither was he relaying hearsay he had heard from others. He was recording exactly what he had seen and heard as an eye-witness.

John 21:24 - This is the disciple who is bearing witness about these things, and who has written these things, and we know that his testimony is true.

1 John 1:1-2 - That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life—the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us.

Statements like these remind us that the Bible is trustworthy.

2. I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel – John’s actions are a bit surprising here. He certainly should have known better than to worship an angel.

However, lest we be too hard on John, we should remember that we do many things when we “should have known better.”

It is a reminder that the saints in the Bible were human beings. Like you and me, they were sinners. Sometimes they made wrong decisions. Sometimes they acted irrationally. We often do the same.

The fact that John records his folly here (and many other Bible writers record theirs as well), is strong evidence of the truth of the account. Writers would be naturally dispositioned to put themselves in the best light. The fact that Bible writers did not do that shows us that their accounts are objective and accurate.

Application: Be careful not to be too quick to judge others. We often do the same things we look down on others for. Instead, let God’s grace toward sinners who should know better motivate you to show the same grace toward others.

3. The angel refuses the worship – The angels’ response is in contrast with Jesus’ response to the disciples (Matthew 14:33) when he accepted their worship.

Angels are powerful beings. To people, they would appear terrifying and supernatural. However, the angel says that he is merely a “fellow servant.” It gives us an insight into the minds of angels. They don’t consider they are superior, but instead are working together with us as servants of the Most High.

Application: Worship God only. Many things, even good things, can distract us from focusing on God. What are some things that could become a believer’s object of focus instead of Jesus?

- Angels
- Baptism
- Church
- The Bible
- Christian Friends or Fellowship

All of these things are good, but we must not elevate them above Christ (or focus on them to the exclusion of Christ).

II. Important Reminders from Jesus (10-16)

Discussion Questions

- In this passage, who says what? Identify the speakers and what each said (keep in mind that quotation marks and punctuation were not in the original Greek).
- What command is given to John in verse 10?
- Why does the angel say, “Let the evildoer still be evil and the filthy still be filthy?”
- Who is the “I” in verse 12?
- What is Jesus bringing with Him? What does this teach us about Him?
- How is Jesus being the Alpha and Omega have special significance within the context of the book of Revelation?
- How should you react to the fact that Jesus is the Alpha and Omega?
- How can you wash your robes?

- Where are these people who are outside the gates? Are they on the new earth? What is the main point of saying that they are “outside?”
- What do you learn about Jesus from verse 16? Why is this important for you?
- What should you obey in light of Jesus’ warnings in this passage?

Cross-References

Daniel 12:4 - But you, Daniel, shut up the words and seal the book, until the time of the end. Many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall increase.”

John 5:22 - The Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son.

Acts 17:31 - Because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.

Revelation 7:9 - After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands.

Matthew 3:12 - His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and gather his wheat into the barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.

Matthew 25:32-33 - Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left.

Teaching Points

1. Who said what? – This section of Scripture is a bit confusing to decipher who is speaking. In verses 12, 13, 16, and 20 the speaker is Jesus. But in verses 8-9 the speaker is an angel who doesn’t accept worship. At some point the speaker changes.

It is important to note that quotation marks (and other forms of punctuation) are added in English. They represent the editor's best guess as to where quotes start and end. Different English translations put the quotes in different places throughout this whole section. Some put quotes around verses 14-15 and others do not, ascribing those verses to John as the narrator.

The speaker could change from the angel to Jesus in verse 10 or verse 12.

One other theory is that the angel gave the entire message. The meaning of the word "angel" is "messenger." As the messenger, he refused to accept worship. But he relayed direct quotes from Jesus to John.

One important rule of Biblical interpretation is to use the clear to interpret the unclear. In Matthew 14:33, Jesus accepts worship. So we can know for sure that it was not him speaking in verse 9. Beyond this, we cannot be dogmatic.

Application: Remember that punctuation marks and quotations are not used in the original language and were added by the translators. Dig into the Scriptures and use more versions to develop your own broader understanding of the text.

2. Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book – Daniel, on the other hand, was commanded to seal up the words of the prophecy (Daniel 12:4). The reason given that John should not seal it up is that the "time is near."

God wanted the world to know the next steps of His plan. By knowing what is coming, people can make a wise course of action.

Reflect: If John was not supposed to "seal up" these words, what about us? What about the gospel?

3. Let the evildoer still do evil (12) – Some take verse 12 as a reference to the period after the final judgment. If so, it should be taken as a warning to the wicked and a promise to the righteous. After the final judgment, one's eternal state is fixed. There would be no more opportunity for repentance. The wicked will continue to add to their sins for all of eternity. Believers should see this as a promise. They will continue in their holiness forever.

It is also possible that this verse is about now and not after the final judgment. If that is the case, it means that the coming judgment is certain. Nothing can change it. Those who are evil can ignore all of the warnings in the book and continue to do evil. It won't change God's plan. But they should know that Jesus will come soon and they will be judged for this as we see in the next verse. And how should the righteous respond? Continue to obey God!

We should not take this verse to mean that God does not care if people repent. Other Scriptures are clear this is not the case.

Reflect: Which interpretation do you believe is correct and why?

Application: In some ways, the application is the same. At some point, there will be no second chances, no turning back. For some, that might occur when they harden their heart to the point of no return. For others, it might occur at death or Jesus' second coming. Either way, we should be quick to repent and throw ourselves upon the mercy of God, asking Him to give us a new heart. Now is the day of salvation. Don't wait!

4. I am coming soon and bringing my recompense with me – In the first sentence of this book, John says it is the “revelation of Jesus Christ.” The book reveals Jesus as a judge. After millennia of showing patience toward sinners, Jesus will return as a judge. His wrath will be poured out upon the rebellious. He will also return as Savior, to rescue, heal, and vindicate His followers.

The wicked will not escape justice forever. And neither will the righteous have to suffer forever. Jesus will return and make everything right.

5. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End – The title “Alpha and Omega” is used by God the Father once (Revelation 1:8) and Jesus two times (Revelation 21:6, 22:13) in the book of Revelation. And this title is not used anywhere else in the Bible.

The title is significant in the context of the book of Revelation. It reminds us that the world is from God and to God. He has a plan for the world He created. The world as a whole and every

individual in it will come face to face with the Creator. There are many paths one may seek to take in this life. But all of those paths lead to a meeting with the Judge. And He will decide which one of two final destinations each one is sent to.

Application: Do you have a good relationship with the Judge? Are you ready for that final exam? Compared to that exam, all others fade in significance.

6. Blessed are those who wash their robes –

He washes us.

1 John 1:7 - But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.

We cannot find cleansing anywhere else besides Him. Only the blood of Christ can wash away our sins and make us clean.

At the same time, this verse highlights the fact that we have a role to play in this. We are to “wash [our] robes.” Believers are not passive spectators in this process. Instead, we are to be active participants. We have to come to Him for that washing, and take initiative to ask for it.

Take for example a man who lives next to a crystal-clear mountain brook. He is wearing filthy clothes. The water is fully capable of cleaning the dirt off his clothes. But the man still has to take initiative to approach the water and apply it to his clothes. If he doesn't do so, he can't blame anyone and say, “I didn't have a choice” or “I didn't have a chance.” Cleansing was right there, freely accessible.

Similarly, Jesus' blood was shed for the world. It is freely accessible to anyone who will take initiative and come to Him for washing.

John 3:18 - *Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.*

Application: If you continue to carry your burden of sin and shame around, that is on you. Jesus sacrificed Himself already to

pay for it. Forgiveness is freely available if you will only come to Him and confess. Is there any sin that you have been carrying around? Confess it today.

7. Outside are the wicked – Those whose robes are washed can enter the city. But the wicked of all shapes and sizes are outside. This doesn't mean that the wicked are also on the new earth, just outside the walls, looking at it longingly. Revelation 21:8 shows us that they will be in the lake of fire.

Rather, it is another way to highlight the fact that God's people and His enemies will be separated. His followers will be in. The unregenerate will be out. You are either in Christ or not in Christ. There is no middle. There is no third choice. The narrow road leads to salvation. The broad road leads to destruction.

Application: Those who love sin more than God will find themselves in an eternity without God. Never will they be able to enter those blessed gates. Let that thought sink in next time we face the temptation to chase the pleasures of the moment.

III. Final Invitation, Warning, and Promise

(17-21)

Discussion Questions

- What invitation is given? Practically, how can you respond to that invitation this week?
- What warning is given? Practically, how should you respond to that warning?
- What does it mean to add or take away from the prophecy?
- How should this warning shape our attitude toward God's Word?
- What is the consequence of ignoring this warning?
- Do you believe that Jesus is coming soon? If so, how should you live your life in light of that?

Cross-References

2 Timothy 2:15 - Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth.

2 Peter 1:20 - Knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation.

Teaching Points

1. I am the root and the descendant of David – The statement seems impossible to understand unless the speaker is divine. A root is something that comes before the tree. You cannot have a tree trunk and leaves without a root. When Jesus says that He is the root of David, it means that He came before and established David. He is the ancestor of David. At the same time, He is the descendant of David.

As God, Jesus pre-existed David. And as the Messiah, Jesus descended from David.

2. The bright morning star –

Jesus uses the same description in Revelation 2:28.

Revelation 2:28 - *And I will give him the morning star.*

A morning star is the brightest “star” at dawn. It is the planet Venus and is the brightest object in the sky aside from the sun and moon. It symbolizes hope and guidance. The morning star can be seen as a promise of a new day, something better to come. Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection give us the hope and promise of all the eternal blessings He has in store for those who are His.

3. The Spirit and the Bride say, “Come” – The Spirit is making the invitation known. And He is making His plea through the church (the bride). He calls believers to spread the gospel, empowering, emboldening, and strengthening us for this mission. In the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20), we see that He has entrusted this task to us. It is not given primarily to angels, but to the church.

Here is the final invitation in Scripture. After so many warnings and so many prophecies, God still seeks to win over the lost to Himself. The book of Revelation reveals the fight for souls taking

place behind the scenes between God and Satan. God doesn't coerce. He doesn't force anyone to accept His message. Instead, He invites them. Again and again, His gracious invitation to "Come" is sounded far and wide. It goes out to all nations, tribes, and tongues.

Jesus gave the same invitation during His earthly ministry.

Matthew 11:28-30 - Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

It is a gentle invitation from a gentle Savior. But it is also extremely urgent, and it gets more urgent day by day.

Note also that all who hear this invitation are supposed to repeat it.

Revelation 22:17 - And let the one who hears say, "Come."

Every believer who hears the call is to echo it forward so that all can hear. Those who respond to the call are given the "waters of life without price." You cannot earn the living water. However, God does set a condition. "Come."

Application: Have you accepted Jesus' invitation? And if yes, who can you extend that invitation to? Consider if there is someone in your life you need to pass on this news to. What a blessed opportunity it is that we can come to Jesus. Let us invite others to join us with Him!

4. Words of warning – Jesus warns those who will add or take away from the prophecies of this book. In the immediate context, "this book" seems to refer to the book of Revelation (the prophecies that John received). But we can infer that if this warning is true for this portion of Scripture, it is also true for the rest of Scripture.

God's Word should be taken seriously and treated with respect. It is not to be trifled with. False teachers often add to and take away from Scripture. And even sincere believers may use the Bible to proof-text their points. All of us are guilty of sometimes reading our own thoughts and opinions *into* the text rather than simply taking *out of* the text what is there.

Those who ignore the warning and misuse these prophecies will be dealt with very harshly. They will have no part in the blessings described in the book, but will instead receive the judgments.

Reflect: What does it mean to add or take away from it? Does this include an honest mistake of misinterpretation?

Application: Be a good student of God's Word. Don't use it haphazardly. Don't seek to use it just to prove yourself right or put others in a bad light. Be respectful of it. That includes being respectful of the process of studying and exegesis. Don't be afraid to admit that you don't know the answer to something. And do avoid speculating on (adding to), things which Scripture is silent on. Let us go back to a simple process of studying and obeying what is in the Word as it is written.

5. Jesus is coming soon – One of the most important points in the entire book for us to remember is that Jesus is coming again. He promises it. He says He is going to come soon.

Like in the time of Habakkuk, sometimes for us earth-dwellers God's prophecies seem to take ages to come about. This is what He told Habakkuk when He felt that way.

Habakkuk 2:3 - For still the vision awaits its appointed time; it hastens to the end—it will not lie. If it seems slow, wait for it; it will surely come; it will not delay.

Application: Are you ready for Jesus' to come again? If not, what do you need to do to get ready?

Book Application: What is one important lesson you should never forget from your study in the book of Revelation?