

All Saints Sunday, November 4, 2007, Liturgical Year "C"

ST. BARTHOLOMEW'S CHURCH IN THE TOWN OF TONAWANDA, NY

The Rev. Fr. Arthur Ward, Jr. + Rector

Scripture: Revelation 7

"A Glimpse of the Future"

REVELATION'S PURPOSE

In today's second reading, **Rev. 7:2-4, 9-17** we are given a glimpse of the future. Now we all know that Revelation is a book about the future. And in many ways, it is the most difficult book of the Bible to understand, and yet you can't find a more plain, straightforward, and simple message.

What I would like to do this morning is to briefly look at all of **Revelation chapter 7** and to unpack what is being said. Now we all know that reading the Scriptures daily is essential if we are to grow in the faith. And some people think that just picking up the Bible and opening it up is a good way to grow. But isn't? Would we do that with another book? If we are going to understand what God is saying we need to look at a verse and then the paragraph and then the chapter and then the book. And it is no different here. We need to look at more than a few verses if we're to understand and appreciate John's message in this chapter. We need to go back to the beginning to the first three verses of Revelation. So please turn with me to **Revelation 1:1-3** (please read.)

Revelation is the book which contains those words and visions given by the Lord Jesus Christ to John the Apostle while he was in exile on the island of Patmos (**Rev. 1:9**). Most scholars believe that it was written between 80 and 90 AD. It is called Revelation because it begins with the words, "*the Revelation of Jesus Christ*" (v.1). The word, "revelation" or "*apocalypse*" is taken from the Greek verb, "*apocolypto*," which is literally "to reveal," and which means "to uncover that which is hidden." In other words, it is something that man didn't come up with or figure out. It had to be uncovered by God. Notice too, that it is not "Revelations" as some mistakenly think. There is only ONE Revelation of Jesus Christ!

While there has been much debate over the meaning of the symbolic language used in Revelation, its purpose is set forward in the first verse: "*to show to His servants, the things which must shortly take place.*" In other words, Jesus is revealing to John and to all who would hear His words, what will take place in the future. And here sometimes is where the dilemma occurs. Does it refer to what takes place in the 1st century, throughout subsequent history, or the final years before Christ's Return? I believe it concerns all three.

Notice in **verse 3**, that readers are told that they will be blessed by reading Revelation. Of course, anyone who reads and submits themselves to God's Word will be blessed. But when we take Revelation to heart there is a special blessing to be received.

Now we will find in **Rev. 7**, and throughout most of the chapters that there is One Person upon whom is all the focus of attention. It's not the Antichrist (the beast from the sea) or the False Prophe (the beast from the land) or Satan, though they are mentioned, but it's the Lord Jesus Christ. Look for a moment at **Rev. 1:4-8**. Thus, the Person and Power and Purpose of Jesus Christ are declared in the very beginning of Revelation.

Now before we go on any further we need to understand that much of what is in John's visions are symbolic. This means he sees creatures and events that in and of themselves, are not real but rather what they represent is real. So the key is trying to decipher their meaning. The Bible is a literal book in that

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the message it conveys is to be taken truthfully and literally. Most often the language used is simple and straightforward but other times the language used is symbolic.

THE MINISTRY OF ANGELS

At the beginning of **Rev. 7**, we see specific Angels of God in charge of carrying out God’s purposes. Angels are real spiritual beings, not of flesh and blood, but beings made in God’s image who do God’s bidding. There are also fallen angels (demons) who do the work of the devil (Satan).

We see here that four angels are ready to inflict God’s judgment upon the earth but before the wrath of God is poured out, they are sent **“to seal the servants of our God on their foreheads.”** Why the forehead? The head is where the heart and soul of an individual resides. Our will, emotions, and mind emanate from the brain. Recall Paul told us in Ephesians 6 to take on the helmet of salvation. We mark babies with the sign of the cross with holy oil on their foreheads at baptism and when we anoint the sick for healing and for the imposition of ashes on Ash Wednesday. So too, God seals us to protect us from His judgment upon the wicked and evil of our world.

WHO ARE THE 144,00?

Notice who they are to seal? Here we have a reference to those of the 12 tribes of Israel. Notice that 12,000 from each tribe are included. While there are differences of interpretations concerning the actual number and who they represent, the important point is that symbolically all of Israel is being represented. God has not forgotten his people Israel. They are still part of God’s plan of salvation. The Scriptures tell us that before Christ’s return and when He return’s many Jews will come to a saving knowledge of their Messiah (literally “Anointed One,” Yeshua - “God Saves” (meaning of Christ Jesus) (see **Zechariah 12:8-10; Rom. 11**). Specifically how many, we don’t know, or who are these people, we don’t know, but God does! More likely the 12,000 is just used as a number of completion to emphasize that God’s perfect number (what He already has ordained) of sealed Jewish believers will come to pass.

A GREAT MULTITUDE THAT NO ONE CAN COUNT

Then John sees a great multitude, which no one could count, from every nation, all peoples, tribes and languages. Notice we go from Israel to the Gentiles. God is redeeming people not only from Israel but from all nations. And what do they sing out. **“Salvation belongs to our God who is seated on the throne and to the Lamb.”** Who is the Lamb? Jesus Christ.

What are they saved from? Eternal death and Judgment. Why the white robes? They reflect the purity and righteousness they have been given through the Lamb. Recall Jesus when He was transfigured before Peter James and John on the mount, He appeared to them in dazzling white. Why the palm branches? They are a symbol of victory and peace they have in Christ. Notice too, that all the angels also bow down and worship as well. That’s why, concerning the Son of God, **Hebrews 1:6** says **“Let all the Angels of God worship Him.”**

THE WORSHIP OF THE LAMB

And the angels sang out **“Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever. Amen!”** (v.12).

That my friends, is worship. It is ascribing all worth to something. We were created to worship God. Everyone worships something. It is part of being human. God created us to worship Him. Blessing – refers to all that God gives us. Glory – God’s awesomeness, radiance, and beauty. Wisdom – His knowledge and insight, Thanksgiving – giving thanks the One who has given us everything, Honor - for who He is and what He has done. Power and might – His omnipotence. Notice what’s missing? Supplication or asking God for something. Why don’t they have to ask? They already have received from Him all that they need. They are whole, they are complete and they respond with worship.

We ask God for help and assistance in this life. We have to ask to be filled with the Holy Spirit. Such petition is called prayers of supplication. That’s not worship. While we need both worship and prayers of supplication in this life, there will only be worship in the next.

v. 13 - *Who are those clothed in white?* v.14 - *“They are those who came out of the Great Tribulation”* – that period of intense persecution during the final years before Christ’s return (Some view this as the 3 ½ years before Christ Returns.)

“They are washed in the blood of the lamb.” Christ’s death pays the penalty for our sin and makes us pure before God. As a result...

“For this reason they are before the throne of God and serve Him day and night in His temple...” v.15.

“They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore; neither shall the sun beat down on them nor any heat; for the Lamb in the center of the throne shall be their shepherd and guide them to springs of the water of life; and God shall wipe every tear from their eyes.” (v.16-17)

No more pain, suffering, sickness, hardship, disappointment, grief or death. What is true for them will be true for us and for all who have trusted in the Lamb of God, Jesus Christ our Lord!

And notice in verse 17, who is at the center of the throne? – the Lamb! In verse 10, we are told it is God who sits on the throne. In v. 17, the Lamb is at the center of the throne. In other words both the Father and the Son are at the center of the throne. Yet, another Scriptural example highlighting Christ’ Deity (cf. **Rev. 14:1**)

WHAT DO WE LEARN FROM THIS VISION?

- 1) God is in complete control of world events and His angels will help fulfill the prophecies of the End Times.
- 2) Jesus Christ is the Lamb of God who takes away our sins and secures our salvation and He is God!
- 3) There will be members of God’s Kingdom from every tribe, nation, and people of the earth, but Israel has a special place as the first “nation” to serve Yahweh as their own God and His own people.
- 4) There will be a final persecution of true Jewish and Gentile believers of the Lord Jesus Christ.
- 5) We were created to worship the Living God and we will be able to do so for all eternity and will no longer suffer the limitations of our natural existence or the consequences of mankind’s sin.
- 6) All those who die for the faith will have a special place in God’s Kingdom.

So may we all make it our aim to please the Living God and the Lamb of God, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ our remaining days on earth and may we look forward to His Return. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, AMEN!