

Our Forty Years

Ephesians 5:8-14; Revelation 1:12-18

I know this auditorium today holds an eclectic group of people. Most of you are born-again Christians; there may be a few here who are not yet Christians. Some of you have called Meadowbrooke your church home for decades, while others have found Meadowbrooke only in the past year. And there are very few among us who have been here for all forty years.

I want to begin by talking about the number forty for just a few minutes. When God flooded the earth in the days of Noah, rain fell for forty days and forty nights. Moses spent forty years in the wilderness after fleeing Egypt and later remained on Mount Sinai for forty days and forty nights. Israel wandered in the wilderness for forty years. The spies explored Canaan for forty days. Goliath taunted Israel for forty days. Jesus spent forty days in the wilderness before beginning His public ministry, and after His resurrection He appeared to His disciples over a period of forty days before ascending into heaven. I do not want to overstate the significance of the number or turn it into something Scripture does not, but the pattern is difficult to miss. Again and again, forty appears during seasons of testing, waiting, preparation, judgment, refining, and transition.

What is especially interesting is what so often follows. Noah stepped into a new beginning. Moses was sent back to Egypt for the defining mission of his life. A new generation of Israelites entered the Promised Land. David stepped onto the battlefield against Goliath. Jesus emerged from the wilderness proclaiming that the kingdom of God was at hand. And after Jesus ascended, His disciples received the promised Holy Spirit and were sent out as witnesses of the risen Christ. Again and again in Scripture, forty marks a season purposed to prepare God's people for what comes next.

Sometime before my sabbatical, I stood in this auditorium early one morning, reflecting on the years I have served as a pastor and praying about the next season of ministry God had for me here at Meadowbrooke. I can honestly say to you this morning that I am convinced the first fourteen years I served as a lead pastor were, in many ways, preparing me for this church.

I do not say this to boast or to elevate your opinion of me, but there are three sermon series I have preached over the course of my ministry that I would keep if I had to delete every other sermon and series I have ever preached—and all three were prepared and preached here at Meadowbrooke: the Sermon on the Mount, our *Identity* series through Ephesians, and the series we are in right now through Revelation, and I believe this has become the most important sermon series I have preached in my lifetime.

I do not think it is a coincidence that the most important sermon series I have ever preached comes from the one book of the Bible I was most timid to address—and that I am preaching it during Meadowbrooke’s fortieth year at this location, in the eighth year of my tenure as your pastor. I cannot say with certainty that Revelation will prove to be the most important sermon series Meadowbrooke has ever heard, but I can tell you this: it has been the most important one for me.

I have never been more aware of my desperate need for Jesus than I am today. I have never been more frustrated and fed up with my sin than I am today. I have never been more aware of my faults, weaknesses, and inadequacies than I am today. And yet, I have never hungered and thirsted for Jesus as I do today! It breaks my heart that it has taken all these years—all the sermons preached, the people buried, the couples married, the babies dedicated, the counseling sessions, the suffering our family has endured, the Scriptures studied, and the books read—to bring me to this place. I would have said these words before I ever came to Meadowbrooke, and I would have meant them. But today I believe I can say them with a depth and conviction I did not possess then: if all I have is Christ, then Christ is all I need, and Christ is all I want.

This seems to me to be the Christian life. The more we grow in our relationship with Jesus, the more aware we become of our need for Him. The more aware we become of that need, the more deeply we grieve our sin. The more deeply we grieve our sin, the more desperate we become for His help. And the more desperate we become for His help, the more we hunger and thirst for the righteousness only Jesus can provide.

Most of you have not been Christians for forty years—some of you haven’t even been alive that long! However, what season are you in? What season do you believe you are leaving in order to enter the next season better prepared for? What is the angst you are experiencing right now that is creating in you a desire to do something meaningful and lasting that matters in light of God’s kingdom? When you hear the words from Ephesians 5:14, “**Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.**” Does your spirit turn within you? Do you find yourself saying in the core of your person, “Give me some of that!”

I want to use the remainder of our time with you to reflect on some things many of you already know from our time in Revelation. For those of you who are newer, I hope I can demonstrate for you why you ought to be excited about the weeks to come for our time in Revelation.

Look Up—and See Jesus

The book of Revelation was written to unveil the risen Jesus. It answers the question: “Who is Christ?” And the answer is staggering! From beginning to end, Revelation presents Jesus in the fullness of His person and work. He is the **faithful witness**, the **firstborn from the dead**, and the **ruler of the kings of the earth** (1:5). He is the **First and the Last**, the **Living One** (1:17–18), the **Holy One**, the **True One** (3:7), and the **beginning (Originator) of God’s**

creation (3:14). He is the **Lion of the tribe of Judah** and the **Root of David** (5:5), yet also the **Lamb who was slain** and the **Worthy One** (5:6, 9, 12). He is the **Son of Man** (14:14), the **Word of God** (19:13), and the **King of kings and Lord of lords** (19:16). He is the **Alpha and the Omega**, the **Beginning and the End** (22:13), the **Root and the Descendant of David**, and the **Bright Morning Star** (22:16). This is the Jesus Revelation teaches us to see.

Revelation gives us eight reasons to look up to Jesus. I chose eight because seven often represents completeness—the fullness of God’s work—while eight is associated with new beginnings. Eight people were preserved through the flood, when rain fell upon the earth for forty days and forty nights, and they were brought safely into a new world. And what comes after the seventh day? The first day of a new week—the day Jesus rose from the dead. In that sense, the first day is also the eighth day: the day after completion, the beginning of something new. And because of the resurrection of Jesus, that new beginning is ours as well.

1. Jesus is Our Great Liberator. (Rev. 1:1-8)

Jesus is the Great Liberator who conquered death and now reigns as the risen Lord, who loves His people, has freed us from our sins by His blood, and is coming again in glory. At His appearing, every eye will see Him, and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of Him.

2. Jesus is the First and the Last (Rev. 1:9-20)

Our Savior is the Everlasting One who stands in the midst of His churches as our great High Priest, the all-seeing Judge, and the omnipotent King. Nothing escapes His sight, no wound His people suffer goes unnoticed, and His servants are held securely in His hand. There is none like Him, for He is the Living One who holds the keys of Death and Hades, and for that reason we need not fear in life or in death.

3. Jesus is the Head of His Church (Rev. 2-3)

Jesus is not the church’s sidekick, nor is He her mascot—no, He is the Lord of His church, walking among His people and knowing them completely. He sees the faithfulness, suffering, compromise, complacency, and sin of every person, and He knows who truly belongs to Him. Nothing within His church is hidden from Him. He comforts those who remain faithful, confronts what threatens their witness, calls His people to repent and persevere, and promises an eternal reward to those who overcome.

4. Jesus is the Heir of Creation (Rev. 4-5)

Jesus is the rightful Kinsman-Redeemer, the promised Messiah, and the true King. He is the Lion of the tribe of Judah and the Root of David, who has conquered and alone is worthy to open the scroll and bring God’s redemptive purposes to completion. Every covenant, every promise, and every hope finds its fulfillment in Him. Because He has overcome sin and death, God’s promise to make all things new will not fail.

5. Jesus is the Lamb of God (Rev. 5:6-10)

Jesus is not just the Lion of Judah; He is the Lion who conquered as the perfect Lamb of God. He was slain for sinners like us, and through His blood He ransomed a people for God from every tribe, language, people, and nation. Through His sacrificial death, sinners are not only forgiven but restored. They are brought near to God, made citizens of His kingdom, and destined to reign with Him forever.

6. Jesus is the Crescendo of Heaven. (Rev. 5:11-14)

Jesus is worshiped in heaven. He is worshiped because He is no mere creature. He was not created, for all things were created by Him, through Him, and for Him. All power belongs to Him because He reigns. All wealth belongs to Him because He owns it all. All wisdom belongs to Him because His ways are perfect. All might belongs to Him because He has conquered. All honor belongs to Him because He is exalted. All glory belongs to Him because He is God. All blessing belongs to Him because all praise is rightfully due Him. Heaven does not make Jesus worthy by worshiping Him—all of heaven worships Him because He already is worthy. And listen, one day all creation on earth and under the earth will also acknowledge what heaven already knows: the Lamb who was slain is worthy!

7. Jesus Reigns Because He is Sovereign (Rev. 6:1-8)

Jesus reigns even when the world seems to be spinning out of control! He alone is worthy to open the scroll, and He alone has the authority to break each of its seals—releasing the four horsemen of the apocalypse and setting in motion the judgments that follow in the trumpets and bowls. War, famine, suffering, injustice, and death do not operate outside His authority! There are no rogue cells in Jesus' economy! History is not driven by chaos, evil rulers, Satan, or death itself—Jesus Christ is Lord over it all, and nothing happens outside His sovereign purposes.

8. Jesus Sees the Suffering of His People (6:9-11)

Jesus sees the suffering of His people. Let that truth settle into your heart and mind. He does not overlook the pain of His people. The One who cried from the cross, “**My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?**” (Matt. 27:46; Ps. 22:1), sees you! Listen to me: in your suffering, He does not forget your faithfulness, and He does not ignore your cries. In Revelation 6, we are reminded that Jesus promises rest to His suffering saints and assures them that relief will come in His appointed time. When He tells His people to wait, it is not because He is indifferent, but because His purposes are not yet complete. Just as there are no rogue cells in His economy, there are no wasted tears and no forgotten hurts. The Lamb who died for us is the Lord who will bring everything He has promised to completion—for His glory and for our good.

So what are we to do with what we see of Jesus in Revelation? We must wake up, we must arise, and we must go.

Wake Up – and Submit to Jesus

So what are we to do with the Christ we see in Revelation? For those of you who were here two weeks ago, you already know the answer: **Go to Him!** Do not just stand there—go to Him! “Where is that in the Bible?” you ask. It is right there in Hebrews 12:2: “**Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God**” (BSB). To do that, we need to wake up!

Two years ago, while preaching through Ephesians, I told you that repentance is never stagnant; it is always mobile in the direction where Jesus can be found. That truth is still true today. So, my dear brother or sister... if you have grown weary, go to Him. If you have become spiritually apathetic, go to Him. If you have wandered into sin, go to Him. If you are hurting, grieving, confused, or afraid, go to Him! Do not stand there and just gaze, run to Him, and do it with your eyes fixed on Jesus!

Hear again the words of Ephesians 5:14 against the backdrop of all that we have seen from Revelation: “**Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.**”

Church, look up and see Jesus. See the One who is more beautiful than anything you could gain, more precious than anything you could lose, and more worthy than anything else that has captured your heart.

Fix your eyes on Him. Wake up to Him. And go to Him!