

Apocalyptic Hope: Embracing Hope, Rejecting Fear

Revelation 6-10

Intro

We are in the series Apocalyptic Hope learning how Revelation is not a book of fear, but rather a book of hope for God's people. Last week, Kerry covered the vision of the Throne and the Lamb. At first, it was a scene of despair where the scroll, representing the message of the prophets Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel, contained the message of how God would deal with evil once and for all...but none could open it. Then John **hears** an elder speak of the coming Messiah, a mighty Lion of Judah. But what he **sees** is a slain lamb, who conquered evil by resisting evil without sinning, and also conquered death through God's abundant life. A conquering king was expected. What was delivered was an uncompromising demonstration of love.

So there's rejoicing. The lamb is worthy! Jesus can open the scroll. We were left with this statement. *"God's judgment is not disconnected from His character. The God who judges is the same God who loves His creation and promises to restore it. His holiness, justice, and mercy are not competing characteristics. God delights in showing mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment."*

God's mercy deals with our evil by separating our evil from us. Our old self dies. But what about the people and nations that won't yield their power nor give up their evil? What will Jesus' final victory over evil and its servants look like? What's in the scroll?

Overview of Revelation 6-20:

Today we'll be covering Revelation 6-20 which are some of the most talked about chapters in Revelation yet very misunderstood. Keep in mind *Apocalypsis* is a revealing of how things are. A different way of viewing.

We won't be examining every little bit of symbolism, but we will go over the point that's being made. Bowls, Trumpets, and Horsemen are all symbols and hallmarks calling back to previous things mentioned by the prophets, and it is with that lens with which we are to view them. Most of this will involve 3 sets of 7 judgements that represent the period of history between the resurrection of Jesus and the return of Jesus, through 3 separate perspectives.

The prophets, and now John in this book, accentuate the repeated pattern of rebellion where humans try to be God and the disastrous results. But they also show how Judgement is not enough to turn people away from evil. It requires a new tactic of the Lamb. All of these judgments against evil culminate with the questions, "Who can overcome?" and "Where is the hope of the faithful?"

Now, as we go through scriptures, I want our minds to be framed as John's was framed. Let's jump ahead to chapter 10 real quick. Read Revelation 10:9-11. I like to call this the Prophet's Dilemma. Watching the Judgement of Evil that strikes out against the righteous is sweet in the mouth of the righteous, yet the righteous, who are redeemed by the sacrifice of the Lamb, live for the redemption of the lost.

John and all the prophets spoke to turn evil nations back to God. These nations then turned and hurt the ones trying to warn them. Then the nations received judgement. Justice for the prophet often involves doom for the prophet's mission field.

Judgement is sweet in the mouth of those who are wronged, but it turns the stomach to see the people that you worked so hard to save receiving the thing you tried to save them from. Justice.

In about-face, we talked about Pharaoh and how grace has limits. If you don't accept God's mercy, you receive his judgement because evil must be dealt with one way or another. This book is about that judgement, but also it's about how Jesus' mercy conquers all the terrible things we see in these chapters. Embracing Hope and Rejecting Fear.

Faith, Fear, Judgement, and Overcoming:

Chapters 6, 7, and 8 are some of the parts of Revelation that a lot of people get hung up on. Our first reaction is that we want it to be scary, we want it to be in the future, we want to be the ones that unlock the secret code to find out what it is. What we must keep in mind is that this is God's Word and the ultimate purpose of anything you find in it is going to be to glorify Him.

At the end of last week's message, there was a scroll with seven seals that represented the final judgment to deal with evil. In chapter 6 Jesus opens the scroll by breaking the seals.

The first four seals are horsemen unleashed upon the Earth: war, conquest, famine, and death. What you might notice about these, they're typical for a standard day on Earth. Hebrews also recognize these as the horsemen from Zechariah chapter 1.

On the fifth seal, we see a scene where martyrs are asking God for justice and God tells them to rest. Again, this is typical. The church and the people of God are accustomed to persecution.

Then with the sixth seal, we see a literal unfolding of what is called 'The Day of the Lord.' This terrible scene of this terrible day culminates with a question: "Who can stand?" You get the answer in chapter 7 where God marks his servants and takes a census much like the style of Numbers chapter 1. But just as with the unexpected Lamb, John **hears** the number of the census of the tribes of Israel yet he **sees** a coalition of many nations following the slain Lamb. Once again, the military analogy is heard, but the scene realization is the slain Lamb conquering evil. Read Revelation 7:9-10.

The hope that conquers all the terrible things mentioned previously is in the slain Lamb. Jesus and those who follow Him stand during the day of disaster because they have accepted forgiveness of their evil. With it now separated from them, the only thing that's destroyed on the terrible Day is evil once and for all.

Jesus's Mercy has conquered the day of judgment. Hope in the lamb has conquered fear of Doom. This whole sequence is concluded with a meteor shower or something before it is essentially repeated again.

Trumpets and Churches:

This time the pattern is repeated with trumpets instead of seals. Again, not getting into the details, but suffice it to say that the first five trumpets mirror the plagues of Egypt. Then the sixth trumpet brings the four horsemen back. So just as with the seal, these terrible things represent judgments being unleashed upon the Nations just as the plagues were released on to Pharaoh. And, just like Pharaoh, the nations refused to repent.

Read Revelation 9:20-21. This serves as a demonstration that judgment alone is not enough to defeat evil. The new tactic of the Lamb is required.

We are now back to the scroll eating I mentioned earlier. Now that the seals are opened, the angel tells John to eat the scroll then prophesy. The prophets dilemma: justice is sweet but seeing it done on the unrepentant is bitter. The prophecy of this scroll, once eaten, consists of a measured Temple, being a symbol of God's people not being destroyed completely.

There's then a story of two Prophets that are then killed by a superbeast, but they come back to life. Notice in Revelation 11:13 that the result of this interaction between the two prophets and the superbeast is that the Nations repent. So what just happened? Well, in Revelation 11:4, these profits are called olive trees and or lampstands. What was the lamp stand in chapters 2 and 3? A Church. What was a super beast in Daniel chapter 7? A nation. A group of people loyal to their own power and their own way.

So the sequence with the trumpets also shows judgments being unleashed upon the Earth. Just like the seals, it also shows that those who overcome are those who are saved by the blood of the Lamb. God rescuing the churches brings the Nations to repentance.

Then the 7th trumpet, just as with the seventh seal, concludes with a final day of the Lord.

So this is another sequence of judgments against evil and unrepentant Nations, then conquering through the blood of the Lamb, and ending with a final conclusion of evil being destroyed on the day of the Lord. This sequence repeats again in chapters 13-16.

The ultimate point is, the cycle of judgments being passed on rebellious Nations, that ultimately sour until they are evil, will continue until God delivers an ultimate judgment to stop the chaos. The only ones left standing are those who have been counted by the Lamb. The *only* hope is the Lamb of God, Jesus Christ.

Chapter 17 through 20 elaborate on the final Doom of evil. The fate of self-important Nations serving the dragon. But what I want to concentrate on in closing is who this dragon is. This dragon is the sponsor of all superbeasts. The power behind all conglomerations of humans that make their societies take the place of God and judge for themselves what is right.

Dragon Fight at Christmas:

So in chapter 12, we have another *Apocalypsis*. A new way of looking at the prophecy and Jesus' first coming. We are given the scene of a pregnant woman fleeing a multi-headed dragon trying to destroy her and her child. The woman represents Israel and the child represents the Messiah that came from this nation. The dragon represents this attack, doing everything it can to keep the Lamb from arriving because the lamb is the Hope. The one thing to conquer evil.

Read Revelation 12:10-12. This sequence interrupts the repeated sequences of rebelling nations. To show us essentially Christmas from a different angle. This interruption puts a huge spotlight on where our hope lies.

The dragon represents ultimate evil. And ultimate evil desperately fought to prevent Jesus, the only hope. Now that the dragon's attempts have failed when Jesus prevailed and resurrected, the dragon intends to ramp things up because its failure is now assured thanks to the Lamb. Who can stand? Reread Revelation 12:11. Those who trust in the Lamb!

The outcome:

Chapters 19 and 20 slam the door pretty hard on evil. Evil and the dragon will be thrown where they can't hurt anyone ever again. The interesting part is what happens to those who trust in the Lamb. It's described with the analogy of a wedding: two parties, meant to be together, finally uniting.

Read Revelation 19:7-10. God's people with Him, at last, as it was meant to be. *In biblical times a marriage involved two major events, the betrothal and the wedding. These were normally separated by a period of time during which the two individuals were considered husband and wife and as such were under the obligations of faithfulness. The wedding began with a procession to the bride's house, which was followed by a return to the house of the groom*

for the marriage feast. By analogy, the church, espoused to Christ by faith, now awaits the return when the heavenly groom will come for his bride and return to heaven for the marriage feast that lasts throughout eternity. (Christ-Centered Exposition: Exalting Jesus in Revelation by Daniel L. Akin p.286)

Conclusion/altar call:

So Revelation is not a compilation of scare tactics. It's a statement that the culmination of human history is God's church being reunited with Him. It is a statement that the Lamb has overcome, and those who trust in the Lamb will stand on the day of final judgement. The Hope is Jesus. It actually is just that simple. It's all about Him. But are you ready?

Read Matthew 25:1-13. This parable is about a wedding. On the wedding day the bridegroom went to the bride's house for the ceremony; then the bride and groom, along with a great procession, returned to the groom's house where a feast took place, often lasting a full week.

These ten virgins were waiting to join the procession, and they hoped to take part in the wedding banquet. But when the groom didn't come at the expected time, five of them were out of lamp oil.

By the time they had purchased extra oil, it was too late to join the feast. When Jesus returns, we must be ready. Spiritual preparation cannot be bought or borrowed at the last minute. Our relationship with God must be our own. (Life Application Study Bible NASB commentary of Matthew 25:1-13)

Maybe you have a doubt. Maybe your relationship with God was assumed or simply through family association. Maybe it's not your own. Maybe it is your own, but you've let shame keep you away. Make you unfamiliar.

If you're not ready, pray this: *"Dear Heavenly Father, I know I am a sinner. I know my sin should separate me from You forever. I believe Your son, Jesus, died for my sins. I accept Your forgiveness for my sin. Thank You for loving me and for giving the gift of Jesus so I could live with You in heaven. Come into my life and be my Savior and Friend. In Jesus' name, Amen."*

For any of us who prayed that today, or yesterday, or fifty years ago. You're ready. You're invited. You're prepared. But... don't let shame separate you from the Savior. You don't fix your car before taking it into the garage. You take it to the garage and trust the mechanic to fix it.

Reflection Questions:

- Why do you think people are often drawn to the frightening details and future predictions in Revelation rather than its message of hope?
- Read Revelation 10:9–11. Why might seeing justice carried out bring both satisfaction and sorrow? How can we balance wanting justice with a desire for others to be saved?
- Read Revelation 12:11. What does it mean to overcome through the blood of the Lamb? How does this shape the way we face fear, suffering, or opposition?
- Read Revelation 19:7–10. How does the picture of a wedding celebration help you understand the hope believers have in Jesus' return?
- Read Matthew 25:1–13. What does it mean to be spiritually prepared for Jesus' return? Is there anything in your own relationship with God that needs attention?