



*The Revelation of
Jesus Christ
Part I*

Daily Bible Readings for

August 15 – September 18

WEEK 1: THE FIRST REVELATION OF JESUS

The sermon series which begins on Sunday has been 18 months in the making. It was during the Spring 2021 semester when I determined that I was going to preach a sermon series on Revelation for my Doctor of Ministry Final Project. The sermons and devotions heard and read over the next nine weeks are a culmination of research which started in Spring 2021. I pray that these devotions help you to understand Revelation and lead to you applying the truth from this book to your daily life.

-Pastor Josh

Monday, August 15 - Revelation 1-5

If a person reads Revelation straight through, it will take them a little over an hour. It is likely that the original hearers of this letter, whether they were in one of the seven churches mentioned in Revelation 2-3 or another church, would have heard the pastor of the church read John's letter in its entirety. I will not ask you to read Revelation in its entirety on one day, but I am asking you to read it in larger chunks before we break it down starting later in the week. The devotions for each passage will start on Thursday. As you read over the next three days, note how the sections make you feel. What are you feeling as you read several chapters at one time? Is it easier to see the big picture of Revelation when reading it as one story? Journal about these feelings and return to them when we read that section again over the course of the next two months.

Tuesday, August 16 - Revelation 6-11

Wednesday, August 17 - Revelation 12-22

Thursday, August 18 - Revelation 1:1-8

Prepositions are small words with big importance. “At”, “by”, “in”, etc. can make all the difference when reading a sentence. If you tell someone to meet you, you have not given them enough information. If you say to meet you at the park, you have more information, but still not enough. However, if you say to meet you under the oak tree at the park by the elementary school at 6 pm, now you know what you need to know to meet your friend. Prepositions help give the necessary information to understand what is happening.

The last book of the Bible is Revelation, but the title alone is not enough information to understand what the book is about. The first prepositional phrase of the book does give us the information we need: “the Revelation *of* Jesus Christ.” As we begin to hear from Revelation, let us remember what it is a revealing “of”. The book of Revelation is the revealing of Jesus Christ.

“Of” has two definitions in this verse. This apocalypse (apocalypse means revelation) reveals Jesus and is also from Jesus. The message of Revelation is a message of hope from Jesus to churches who are facing great difficulty. It is a message from Jesus and about Jesus.

Too often, when people read Revelation, they forget about the prepositional phrase here in 1:1. They see it as a revealing of cataclysmic events to occur in the future. They read it as a revealing of tribulation. They think there are secrets hidden in the book which when understood will reveal who the Antichrist is. That’s not what Revelation is at all. Revelation does not reveal evil, but it reveals what God is doing even though it looks like God is doing nothing while evil flourishes. Revelation is “the Revelation of Jesus Christ.” Let us remember that as we study this book over the next nine weeks.

Friday, August 19 - Revelation 1:9-20

This week's title is "Jesus' First Revelation", and it is in these verses we read today where we read the first vision that John has while on the island of Patmos. Luckily for us, whereas much of Revelation does not explain the visions which are occurring, this vision is partially explained in verse 20. This explanation can help us unravel the mystery of the rest of the vision. We will hear of the work of the one like the Son of Man in the midst of the seven lampstands on Sunday.

For today, let us consider the number seven and the number one. There is one person amidst the seven lampstands. It is very clear that the one in the midst of the seven lampstands is Jesus. We know from verse 20 that the seven lampstands are the churches. But more than that, the number seven is of great significance in the Bible and specifically in Revelation. Seven is the perfect number. Seven signifies completeness. Seven is God's number.

Seven churches is not just describing the seven churches of Revelation 2-3, but the seven churches represent all churches in all generations. The number seven signifies this. It is meaningful that the vision has seven lampstands. Whether one is a member of the Ephesian church in the 1st century, a member of a German Lutheran church in the 16th century, or a member of FBC Gonzales in the 21st century, we can know that Jesus is in our midst because this vision shows that Jesus is in the midst of the seven lampstands.

Whenever you read a number in Revelation, it rarely should be taken literally. Understanding the numerology of Revelation will help you to understand the message Revelation has for you. Seven means completeness, perfection. All churches in all eras are represented by the seven lampstands. Jesus is in our midst.

Saturday - Sunday, August 20-21 - Revelation 4:8-11

Worship of God is a major theme of Revelation. Not only will we spend one week studying this theme, but every weekend, we will read/sing sections of Revelation as we prepare for Sunday worship. "Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord God Almighty!"

WEEK 2: A CALL TO VICTORY

Monday, August 22 - Exodus 3:7-10

Before we start to read about the seven churches of Revelation, we need some background. Exodus 3:7-10 gives us some of that background. There is a message which God continues to give His people, whether it's Israel while they are in Egypt, Israel during the time of the Judges, or the churches in Revelation. When God speaks to His people, God acknowledges that He has heard their cries and He has seen their plight.

A lot of the Exodus story is alluded to in Revelation. Actually, not just Exodus but all of the Old Testament. One theologian suggests that there are over 500 Old Testament references in Revelation! This makes sense. If John is being shown an incredible vision, then he must describe it as best he can. What better way to describe the vision of God than to relate it to something John and his congregations knew about: the Old Testament.

When Moses is called by God to save the Israelites from Egypt, the message that God gives Moses is that God knows and has seen Israel's problems. God has heard their cries. To me, it is greatly reassuring to know that no matter what trouble is going on right now, God is watching and understands the misery of His people. What about you? Consider for a few moments how it makes you feel to know that God hears the cries of his people and God is working on our behalf. How does it make you feel to read the words of God saying "I know [your] sufferings"?

The Israelites must have thought that God had forgotten them while in Egypt. The church of Revelation must have thought that God had forgotten them while they were being persecuted by Rome. Christians today are tempted to think that God has forgotten them while they are persecuted by governments around the world. Do not give in to that temptation. God has observed your misery and knows your sufferings.

Tuesday, August 23 - 1 John 5:1-5

Conditional statements are commonly known as “If-then” statements. (Yes, last week we talked about prepositions, this week conditional sentences, you didn’t know you’d be taking English classes again this month did you?) “If-then” statements are logical sequences which are always true and can lead people to understanding about certain facts or the world at-large. For instance, if the temperature is above 32 degrees Fahrenheit, then water will melt. Or if it seems too good to be true, then it probably is. You get the point.

There are a few conditional statements which we can create from the message in 1 John 5:1-5. If you believe that Jesus is the Christ, then you are born of God. If you love the Father, then you love the Son. If you love God, then you will keep God’s commandments. And finally, if you are born of God, then you will overcome/conquer the world. So, if you put all these conditions together, you realize that if you have faith that Jesus is the Son of God, then you will overcome/conquer the world. In other words, if you hold on to Jesus during the calamities of life, then you will persevere.

We will begin to read tomorrow about this important message to each of the seven churches in Revelation. Some are doing a better job than others in persevering against the Roman Empire. All the churches are given a promise: if they overcome/conquer, then they will receive their reward in heaven. Whether it’s 1 John or Revelation, this “if-then” message is important for us to remember in our own era as well. If you trust in God, then you will overcome the struggles of this world. If you overcome the struggles of this world, then you will receive your eternal reward. In sum, if you trust in God for salvation through Jesus, then you will receive eternity in heaven.

Wednesday, August 24 - Revelation 2:8-11; 3:7-13

There was a movie in the late 1990s called Richie Rich based off the old comic. Macauley Culkin, of Home Alone fame, played Richie Rich. In the movie, he meets some lower to middle class kids who become his friends, the first real friends he ever had. In

the movie, there is a moment when one of those kids looks around at all the riches Richie Rich has and is jealous of the life he lives. In that scene of the movie, though, Richie Rich tells the other kids how lonely his life is and how he just wishes he could be a normal kid. The moral of the movie is that money cannot buy happiness and friendship is worth more than any amount of money.

The church at Smyrna is poor and persecuted and yet Jesus calls them rich. Because they have persevered and overcome, because they lost all their possessions due to their faith, they have won the victory. In each of the seven letters there is affirmation for what the church is doing well and/or there is discipline for their missteps. Smyrna and Philadelphia are the only two churches which receive only affirmation. Smyrna is commended for remaining faithful even as civic leaders take away their possessions and goods for not participating in pagan civic rituals. Philadelphia is commended for not giving up on Jesus even though the Jews of the city have done everything possible to strip away whatever prestige Christian brothers and sisters had in Philadelphia. There is a clear message in the letters to these two churches: perseverance is difficult. Remaining faithful to Jesus in a world which continually tries to disrupt your faith is difficult. No matter what, continue to remain faithful.

This message is not just for these churches, but it is for us as well. “Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches.” When Jesus shares these words with John, Jesus does not mean for only these churches to learn from them. These words are meant for all Christians during all generations. There is temptation in every generation to succumb to the pressures of the world and choose riches today instead of riches tomorrow. Don’t succumb to that temptation but remember what Jesus calls victory. There is victory in the saving power of Jesus and nowhere else. “Do not fear what you are about to suffer.”

Thursday, August 25 - Revelation 2:1-7, 12-29

When you are evaluating someone's work, leaders are taught to use a "criticism sandwich." If you want someone to accept your negative criticism in a way which will lead to change, you should also give that person positive critiques of their work. Start with the positive, then go to the negative, and end with positive. That is a "criticism sandwich." When I was in high school, my band director would use this method to help individuals get better. For me, I would do a good job with playing in tune and playing the right notes but would sometimes struggle with harder rhythms. He would make sure that I knew I was doing some things well, but also would help me to understand I needed to practice these few sections here or there. The "criticism sandwich" was effective.

The churches of Ephesus, Pergamum, and Thyatira seem to be your average churches. They needed Jesus to give them a "criticism sandwich." The churches have their faults, but they also have strengths which are to be commended. These three churches receive affirmation but also indictments proclaiming their failures. I think most churches are like this. These churches were patiently enduring which is good but they were also either going through the motions (Ephesus) or allowing for false teachers to remain at the church (Pergamum and Thyatira).

I think if Jesus were to write a letter to the First Baptist Church of Gonzales, TX, we would also receive positive and negative criticism. I wonder if Jesus would say we are going through the motions in some of our programs and ministries. We continue to do the work because we've always done it, but our heart is just not in it anymore. I wonder if Jesus would commend our love for neighbor and each other and commend the progress the church has made over the past few years. I wonder if Jesus would question our motivations for doing certain things in the community while also commending other work that we do. I think Jesus would have positive and negative feedback to give us if he were evaluating our church. What about you? What do you think would be in a letter by Jesus to us? What type of evaluation would we receive? What type of motivation would Jesus give us? As you end your time with God, meditate on these questions. Consider

where we are as a church and where God wants us to be. Then ask God to show you how we can get from one place to the other. And then be ready to lead our church in the direction where God is leading.

Friday, August 26 - Revelation 3:1-6, 14-22

Yesterday, I said the best way to give criticism was a “sandwich” of positive and negative comments. Sometimes, however, there is no good news to give. There are no compliments to give because there is nothing good happening. This is the situation in Sardis and Laodicea. The majority of people in Sardis “have soiled their clothes”, likely referencing the white robes for conquerors. Their robes are no longer pure.

For Laodicea, they are like lukewarm water. Good for nothing. It is this water which I want to focus on today. There are a few passages in Revelation which are very familiar and the “lukewarm Christians” of Laodicea is one of them. But when I’ve heard this preached, I’ve heard it as they were neither hot or cold Christians, but kinda just “C student” Christians. This could not be further from the truth.

While lukewarm water is an average temperature water, it is water that is not desired. If I want to drink water, then I want cold water. If I need to cook, then I want boiling hot water. Lukewarm does nothing for me. Beyond that, being called lukewarm would have been even worse for Laodiceans because they knew what lukewarm water brought: disease and bacteria. There were Roman aqueducts which brought freshwater to Laodicea. The only problem was that by the time the water got to Laodicea, it was lukewarm, so the lukewarm water had to be boiled in order to get rid of bacteria which would make people sick. The lukewarm water as-is was worthless.

Don’t be worthless to God. Don’t be like the lukewarm water which God wants to spit out. Instead, let God into your life so that the Holy Spirit can control your life. If you let God in, God will be with you. While you’re most likely to hear Revelation 3:20 as part of a plea to non-Christians, Jesus is saying this to Christians in Laodicea. Christians who have grown worthless to God. If you feel that is you, then repent of this sin and go to

God for your riches instead of thinking you have everything you need. Do not remain lukewarm. But become a cold glass of water or a hot cup of coffee...whichever you prefer!

Saturday - Sunday, August 27-28 - Revelation 5:9-12

“Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!”

WEEK 3: WORSHIP

Monday, August 29 - Isaiah 6:1-8

There was a 2004 movie called *I, Robot* which was based off the 1950 Isaac Asimov book of the same name. In the movie, there is a robot name Sonny who is different from the other robots. Throughout the movie, it is unknown why his maker made him different from all the other robots. Much of the movie is spent with the robot gaining the respect of a detective who has been assigned to investigate a murder at the robotics lab. One of the things which makes Sonny different is the material he is made of. His arms have a stronger alloy metal than the other robots. At the end of the movie, this choice that the inventor made makes sense. This stronger alloy allowed Sonny to defeat the villain in the movie. This was Sonny's purpose and his maker made him a specific way in order to fulfill his purpose.

Worship is giving God the proper respect and honor which He is due. Worship of God is our purpose in life. Proper respect and honor to our Maker is why we are living and breathing. In this scene of heavenly worship in Isaiah, the Seraphs are appropriately designed to give God the proper worship that God deserves. They have two wings to cover their face because they are unworthy to look upon the face of God. They have two wings to cover their feet because God is too holy to look upon that part of their body. And they have two wings to fly to be close to the God they are worshipping. God knew

the purpose of the seraphs and designed them in an exact way which fulfilled their purpose.

God made you as you are in order to fill a specific purpose. Each of us has a purpose to fulfill. When we fulfill our purpose, we are worshipping God. For Isaiah, he was fulfilling his purpose by being ready to go where God sent him. His purpose was to preach a message which the people would not respond to (v. 9-10). What purpose has God given you? What specific work can you do for God which gives God the proper respect and honor which He is due? Doing that work like the seraphs and Isaiah did is worship. Worship God by serving Him today.

Tuesday, August 30 - Revelation 4

I could write an entire book (and people have) about this scene in Revelation 4, and we still would not understand every single detail which John relays in his vision. As I mentioned at the beginning of these devotions, Revelation is meant to be felt more than it is meant to be dissected. If you are looking for answers about why jasper and carnelian or why a lion, ox, human, and eagle, then you are missing the point of this passage. What does this scene make you feel?

“Awe” is the word which comes to mind most when reading this scene of worship. This scene of worship involves many different senses. John describes what he sees and what he hears. His vivid depiction gives us a sense of what he smelled from the flaming torches and the four creatures. We hear of the different postures of worship which the beings in this passage take. (And while John doesn’t taste anything in this worship scene, he will eat a scroll later in Revelation 10:8-11 much like Ezekiel did in Ezekiel 3:1-3.) The awakening of the senses in this passage creates an awe which overcomes you. It is truly awe-some.

Starting with Revelation 4, we have left the comforts of the shore and entered the deep waters of apocalyptic literature. The vision which John is invited to see and receive begins in worship. The cycles of visions in Revelation, in many places, begin and end

with worship. Given this order, it seems that God, through John, is making it clear that worship of God is our purpose. As we continue to read the Revelation *of* Jesus Christ, let us continue to remember that Jesus is the focus. No matter what is happening in the world, God was on His throne, is on His throne, and will be on His throne. God is worthy of our worship and our praise.

Wednesday, August 31 - Revelation 5

As the Revelation of Jesus Christ continues in our passage today, we read about a metaphor which most of us are familiar: Jesus as the lion and the lamb. And it is in verses 5 and 6 where we begin to understand what it is going to take to conquer as the churches are called to do in Rev. 2-3.

Greg Maddux is one of the greatest pitchers of all time. With precision like command and a fastball which could reach 93 mph, he was the one pitcher you'd want to be on the mound for a pivotal game. The Atlanta Braves relied on Maddux for their success during the 1990s. Maddux was a ferocious competitor, but he did not look the part. Mild-mannered and wearing glasses, he earned the nickname the Professor. He looked nothing like what his résumé said he was.

John hears Jesus's résumé which says he is the Lion of Judah and has conquered and has earned the right to open the seven seals. John then sees Jesus, and Jesus looks like a slaughtered lamb with seven horns and eyes, indicating his perfection and completeness. He looked nothing like how He was described.

Jesus conquered his enemies by being slaughtered. The churches are called to overcome and conquer by persevering in the face of persecution. Because of what Jesus did he is worthy to open the scrolls and is worthy of our worship. Every creature, no matter its location, will sing to the one on the throne and to the Lamb. What a glorious picture of worship! And the Lion is worthy of worship because He sacrificed himself like a Lamb.

Thursday, September 1 - Revelation 7:4-8:1

The visions of Revelation go back and forth between visions of what is happening in heaven and happening on earth. The visions of worship which we have encountered this week so far are mostly visions of heavenly worship (with the exception of the very end of Rev. 5 which includes heaven and earth and more).

Today's passage is also a picture of heavenly worship. In verse 9, it tells us that "every nation, tribe, people, and language" are represented in heavenly worship standing before the throne and the Lamb. This is what worship will be like in heaven. People of all types unified as one and crying out in worship together. Those who persevere, those who conquer, join this chorus of people in heaven worshipping the God who "will wipe away every tear from their eyes."

If this is what will happen in heaven, shouldn't churches make a better effort to worship this way now? It does not seem that there will be different worship services to choose from in heaven. It does not seem that there will be a Baptist church and a Methodist church and a Lutheran church and a Catholic church. It seems there is one group of Christians worshipping God together. There does not seem to be the English service and the Spanish service and the Mandarin service and the Swahili service. There seems to only be one group worshipping in all languages together.

What a beautiful picture of heaven it would be if we worshipped in this way. What if we came together more regularly with other Christians who go to different churches? What if we sang in different languages at the same time? Can you imagine the wonderful witness it would be to the world if Christians joined together as one to worship our Lord in heaven? Every nation, tribe, people, and language. Can you imagine it? It's going to be a wonderful day. Should we start practicing?

Friday, September 2 - Revelation 19:1-8

Last December, I was at the Big 12 Championship game for football between Baylor and Oklahoma State. The game came down to the last play. It was 4th and goal from the Baylor 1 yard line and all OSU had to do was get a touchdown to win the game. As the running back tried to cross into the end zone, a Baylor defender stopped him barely 2 or 3 inches from scoring. Baylor won the game and the Big 12 Championship. When Baylor made that stop, the Baylor fans erupted in screams. It was easily the loudest sound I have ever heard in my life. It was so loud that I felt as if I could not hear my thoughts for a good 30 seconds while the noise was at its height.

This event in my life is the best example I can think of when I read Revelation 19:6. God has won victory over Babylon. God has avenged his people. In celebration, many groups cry out the praises of God, including “the voice of a great multitude”, in verse 6. The sound is described as rushing water and mighty thunder. It is so loud that this sound is the only thing that you can even comprehend. You can’t even think of anything else. All you can do is join in the praise of God by crying out “Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns.”

As I think about the scene at the football game, it brings a smile to my face. It is something I will never forget. Similarly, and with greater importance, I think about the rejoicing that takes place as the Kingdom of God defeats the kingdoms of this world. It brings a smile to my face that God fights on our side, and this is the worship which occurs while Jesus defeats Babylon.

Saturday - Sunday, September 3-4 - Revelation 7:9-12

WEEK 4: WITNESSES

Monday, September 5 - Joel 2:28-32

Old, young. Men, women. Slave, free. In the last days, everyone will be hearing from God and sharing the message of salvation. The church does its best work when

everyone is working together. There are a few times a year when the entire church body must all work for one event to be a success. VBS is one such time. I love the week of VBS. I love seeing every age from middle school to great-grandparents serving together. I love watching the kids get involved in bringing offerings and singing songs to God. I love when the church comes together to decorate and then undecorate. It is awesome to see the church building alive during the week when it is usually quiet. When the church comes together, it does its best work.

Our text for Sunday will be Revelation 11:1-14. Before we read that on Friday, there are several texts which can help prepare us to understand John's vision of the Two Witnesses. Joel 2:28-32 is one such text. The picture being painted in Joel is very similar to the visions John is seeing in Revelation. There are plagues and supernatural calamities presented in Joel along with hope. There is death and destruction in Joel along with the remnant of God's people being filled with the Spirit of the Lord and preaching a message of repentance. The purpose of this passage is to show that even among the most horrific of devastation, God is still at work through the hands and feet of God's people.

I hope you are starting to realize that Revelation is not focused on the revealing of the death of enemies or the revealing of tribulation which can connect to certain world events in history. Instead, it is the revelation of Jesus Christ to the world. It is a revelation of Jesus to show his followers that they must endure and continue to spread the gospel. Revelation is a message of hope to the people who are following God and a message of persuasion to those who are not. The church is to continue to be witnesses for Jesus until the day he returns.

Tuesday, September 6 - Acts 1:6-11

A court's verdict can hinge on the testimony of witnesses to the supposed crime. What did that witness see and hear when the crime was committed? This can be very important to jurors or the judge. Similarly, expert witnesses can be influential. While they may have not been at the event which took place, they still have expertise which can help

explain what happened at the time in question. To tell the jury and judge what you have seen, heard, and/or know is crucial so that the accused can be correctly convicted and sentenced. Witnesses tell the truth about what has taken place.

From the church's founding, Christians have been called to be witnesses. We are called to go and tell about what we have seen and what we have heard concerning Jesus Christ. Until Jesus returns in the same manner he left, we continue to be his witnesses. Verses 6-7 ask a similar question to what the people in John's churches would have been wondering: when will God rule on the earth? Whether it is in Acts, Revelation, or today, the answer has always been the same. "It is not time yet and it is not for you to know when the Kingdom of God will be established on the earth. Until then, keep sharing the gospel to all people."

How are you being a witness to your Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and world? Our church supports mission work near and far, so in a way, all of us are sharing Christ and his love at home, around the world, and everywhere in between. At the same time, how committed have you been to sharing Christ's love with people you see? Please make no mistake. The "you" in Acts 1:8 is plural. You are not supposed to go to the ends of the earth alone. As the church, we are witnesses together locally, regionally, nationally, and internationally. But how much work are you putting into fulfilling your role? What are you doing to be a witness for the Kingdom of God to others?

Wednesday, September 7 - Revelation 10:8-11

At one particular restaurant at Disney World, there is an incredibly yummy bananas foster bread pudding. It is served with vanilla ice cream, and it comes at the end of an all-you-can-eat dinner. It is one of the best desserts I have ever had. Its ability to tickle the taste buds makes it very dangerous. You have already eaten lots of food, but you don't want to stop eating the bread pudding. And I must admit, the first time I ate at this restaurant, I didn't stop eating when I should have. The dessert was sweet in my mouth but became bitter very quickly in my stomach.

What seems to be the picture in Revelation 10:8-11 is John eating a scroll as a symbol of being giving prophecy which he is then to deliver to “many peoples and nations and languages and kings.” It is a prophecy which is sweet and bitter at the same time. What could that mean? First, we should remember that Ezekiel had a similar experience in a vision where he ate a scroll which tasted like honey. However, Ezekiel never mentions it being bitter in his stomach. Second, I think it is important that this vision happens immediately before the vision of the Two Witnesses. The angel tells John to go and prophesy, and then the vision turns to Two Witnesses prophesying for 42 months. Is there a connection between the two events? I think so.

Prophesying or proclaiming the gospel can be sweet and bitter. It is sweet because it is the truth but it is also bitter because it is a hard truth to tell people. “Peoples and nations and languages and kings” do not like to be told they are wrong, yet the Gospel, that sweet truth, tells the world that it is wrong. It is sweet to our lips, but also a bitter pill to swallow. The message of the gospel is the greatest news the world has ever heard, but the world continues to disbelieve. That makes the message sweet to our lips, but bitter to our stomachs. Even knowing the bitterness that awaits us, let us continue to eat the scroll and tell others about Jesus.

Thursday, September 8 - Revelation 2:12-17

Why are we back to reading about the church in Pergamum? Because of swords and a witness. Let’s start with Antipas, who is called Jesus’ Witness. Antipas is killed for remaining faithful to Christ. As you are probably aware, we call Christians who are killed for their faith martyrs. Our word martyr comes from the Greek word *martion* which is also the word we translate as witness. To be a witness for Christ is to value your faith higher than everything else including your life. Antipas did this and is remembered forever because of his faithfulness.

Next, swords. Something we did not mention when looking at the letters of the seven churches was that each letter has a different description of Jesus as the byline. For

Pergamum, Jesus is the one who has the sharp two-edged sword. In addition, later in the letter in verse 16 Jesus tells the church to repent of their belief in the teaching of the Nicolaitans. If not, he will make war against them with the sword of his mouth. I think this means that it is Jesus' words which are the weapon against those preaching heresy. I think it is the authentic gospel message which wages war against false teaching. In addition, Hebrews 4:12 tells us that “the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword...” The war against the adversary is not fought with metal, but it is fought with words. It is fought by sharing the gospel message to the world. To be a witness, we must continue to use that two-edged sword that is the Word of God. We continue to combat false teaching with our witness to the gospel. We remain witnesses even if that means we are martyred like Antipas.

Friday, September 9 - Rev. 11:1-14

Who are these two witnesses? Some are convinced that these two are Moses and Elijah, the two men who stood next to Jesus during the Transfiguration. After all, Moses is the one who turned the Nile to blood in Exodus, and Elijah who called fire to consume his enemies in 2 Kings. Others are convinced that it is Elijah and Enoch because these two men were taken to heaven without dying. No matter what, though, we must realize we are never going to answer this question accurately because “who are these two witnesses?” is not the right question.

The Revelation of Jesus Christ is not about what is going to happen in the future, but about what is happening in the first century and now from heaven's perspective. This episode with the two witnesses is no different. The passage is not trying to tell us a story of two literal witnesses who will stand at the Temple night and day for 42 months witnessing to all who will listen. The story of the Two Witnesses is about the church.

As I read Revelation, I keep coming back to one note about the symbolism involved in the apocalyptic style: symbols rarely change in the middle of the book. In Rev. 11:4, these witnesses are described as olive trees and lampstands. In Rev. 1:20, it is

the church which is defined as a lampstand. To me, that means that the witnesses are the church. There are two of them to note the power that the church has. The number two shows strength in Revelation.

The point of this passage, which we will discuss at much more length on Sunday, is to encourage the churches. While they may be facing great persecution, they have also been given power by God to perform great works in this world. And even though they may face martyrdom, the church will rise with the breath of God once again. With that confidence, go and be a witness for Jesus Christ today!

Saturday - Sunday, September 10-11 - Revelation 7:15-8:1

Silence is sometimes said to be the punctuation mark of speaking. What type of punctuation is God giving on this vision to have silence for half an hour? Could you sit in silence for 30 minutes?

WEEK 5: SEALS, TRUMPETS, THUNDERS, AND PLAGUES, OH MY!

Monday, September 12 - Revelation 6:1-8

Revelation is the revelation of Jesus Christ. At the same time, it is the revelation of Jesus Christ to the church in a world of chaos. We have built a foundation over the past four weeks of what Revelation is, and now we turn to atrocities which happen in a world who ignores God. We read about the first four seals today. These seals, along with the other three, were on the scroll which the Lamb was worthy to open. These first four are commonly referred to as the four horsemen of the apocalypse. A white horse, red horse, black horse, and pale horse emerge with a quarter of humanity destroyed by war, famine, wild beasts, and disease.

Does it not seem like the four horsemen are on the earth today? Are we not bombarded with war and famine across the world? It is July as I write this devotion. Yesterday, I read an article about the cost of food in Somalia doubling over the past several months because of the war in Ukraine. Before the war, Ukraine was the sixth

ranked wheat producer in the world. With that amount of supply, prices were such that mothers were able to buy just enough food to feed their children. Now, without that supply, prices are up, and these mothers watch their children starve to death. I'm not saying that the war in Ukraine and this famine are the events of Revelation unfolding. What I'm saying, and what I think Revelation is telling its readers, is that these types of events will continue to take place until Christ returns.

As prices rise, it affects the poor more immediately. I don't like paying more for groceries, but I can. For many people, though, the price of food becomes a life or death struggle. It is tragic that this is the way the world is. This hard reality is why we have spent four weeks leading to this. We have a foundation to realize that God is here among these tragedies. God is with us. God is the Lamb who was slain for us and can conquer and has conquered this tragic world. We can't think that Revelation is just telling people about all the bad things that will happen in the world. It is a promise that God is with us even when it seems like evil is winning. Hold on to God even on the bad days.

Tuesday, September 13 - Revelation 9:1-12

Scripture is written for us, but it was not written to us. This nuance is crucial to remember as we read any portion of the Bible, but certainly in Revelation. If your interpretation of the passage would not have been understood by the original audience, then that is the incorrect interpretation.

Hal Lindsay, a noted end-times prognosticator, wrote in the 1980s that these locusts were military helicopters in battle. He asserted that John had no idea what helicopters were, so he described them as we see in Rev. 9. Here's the biggest problem (just the biggest problem, not the only problem) with that interpretation: for nineteen centuries, no one knew what a helicopter was. Lindsay admits as such, but what he misses is that Revelation meant something to the original hearers in those seven churches. They couldn't have possibly understood these creatures to be a 20th century helicopter, so we shouldn't see them as such either.

So what is this fifth trumpet showing the seven churches and us? In the last days, all hell has broken loose. Devastation is so severe in those days that people wish to die. But those who are marked with the seal of God will be protected from the devastation. This is a message for God's people to persevere in their Christian life. As this Revelation of Jesus Christ continues, we are continually reminded that a life with Jesus is better than a life without Jesus. I am reminded of 1 Peter 2:9: "you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people..." Let us be people who are marked and set apart for God's Kingdom.

Wednesday, September 14 - Revelation 10:1-7

I don't mind telling you that when my children were babies, I wanted them to nap for as long as possible. We all know that naps help the parents as much as the children. In order to let my kids nap for as long as possible, I wouldn't immediately go into their room when they started making noise. Many times, their little grunts and groans and cries were while they were still asleep. Other times, their noises indicated they were awake. I learned which noises were fine to ignore and which ones meant they were awake and ready to play or eat or need a diaper change. If I had gone into the room too early, it would have awoken my child and caused less nap time. I had to learn what each sound meant.

What sound are the seven thunders? We are only left to speculate because John is forbidden to write down the seven thunders. Typically when we think of thunder, we think of danger. With thunder, comes lightning. This passage comes in the same section of Revelation as the seven signs and seven trumpets which are mostly dangerous and violent (except the seventh seal which is silence). This makes us think that the seven thunders are dangerous.

However, there is an argument to be made that the seven thunders are not violent. The sound of thunder elsewhere in Revelation coincides with the presence of God. When this occurs, it is usually during worship. This too could be worshipful with a call and

response almost between the angel and the seven thunders. There is also the order in which events occur in this section. During the course of the seven seals, we have four quick seals, two long seals, a break for worship, then the seventh seal. During the course of the seven trumpets, we have four quick trumpets, two long trumpets, a break in Rev. 10:1-Rev. 11:14, then the seventh trumpet. If the order of events is supposed to be the same, then this break in Rev. 10 is worshipful.

I think the seven thunders are part of worship. Elsewhere in Revelation, thunder is associated with worship and not punishment, so I think it is in this passage as well. Like with our kids, we have to listen close to know what type of sound is being made. When we listen close to the context of the seven thunders, it sounds like to me that it is worshipful not destructive. But we cannot know for sure. What we do know for sure is that God is at work and the seventh trumpet is about to be blown.

Thursday, September 15 - Revelation 15:1, 5-8

Sometimes horrible tragedies can have beautiful moments. On May 18, 1980, Mount St. Helens erupted, sending plumes of ash and suffocating smoke into the sky. Lava flowed from the volcano down the mountain. The eruption caused avalanches and a 5.1 earthquake. It was the deadliest volcanic eruption in U.S. history with 57 people killed. It was a horrible tragedy. However, when you look at pictures or video of the lava flowing or the smoke billowing into the sky, there is this impressive beauty because you are seeing the power of nature.

We consider the seven plagues today. The plagues are poured upon the earth in Rev. 16, but our focus today is on Rev. 15 and the preparation of the plagues. We have encountered lots of ugly pictures in Revelation and the plagues are no different. However, I find a peculiar beauty to the worship which occurs as the plagues are prepared. Can you imagine it? The seven angels are in pristine white robes with brilliant golden sashes. The horrible plagues, which complete the wrath of God, are awful, but they are poured into beautiful golden bowls. As the angels hold these bowls, there is an

order and structure of the event, which gives the sense that everything will be alright even though the earth is about to suffer. There is a beauty in this moment despite the plagues that are about to transpire.

What does this beauty mean for us? It means that we can still see some of God's beauty in the world even if tragedy is occurring all around. For God's people, it will be ok in the end. Throughout seals, trumpets, and plagues, God's people will make it through. This is a great relief and a great warning. For those who are persevering and endurance, this gives strength to keep fighting the good fight. For those who have fallen into disobedience and laziness, this message serves as a warning. Come back to God (and come out of Babylon as we will read in a couple of weeks). Horrible tragedies can have beautiful moments. It is in that beauty that we can hold on to the promise that God is still here with us.

Friday, September 16 - Exodus 7:14-18

Eugene Peterson, in this commentary on Revelation, *Reversed Thunder*, says that there is nothing new in Revelation. There is nothing new, but only the same thing told from a different perspective. This is an interesting thought and has a lot of truth to it. As I told you a few weeks ago, Revelation alludes to the Old Testament over 500 times. God has always fought for his people. Revelation is just one more promise that God is fighting on behalf of God's people.

When we are reading about plagues in Revelation, we should remind ourselves that God delivered 10 plagues on Egypt when Pharaoh would not release Israel from slavery. Plagues that are very similar to some of the seals, trumpets, and plagues of Revelation. When God turned the Nile River into blood, it ruined the water supply and killed the fish. God's plague made food and water scarce while also disrupting the economy with no fish to sell and no ability to sail down the river. The plagues on Egypt were devastating just like the events of Revelation. And all because Pharaoh would not recognize God as God.

If Egypt in Exodus or Babylon/Rome in Revelation would have recognized God as God, then no plagues would be necessary. It really is that simple. However, people are sinful beings and continue to ignore God. Ignoring God and his will for the world affects the entire world. To repeat what I said yesterday: plagues are a comfort to those who are on God's side and terrifying to those who oppose God. God takes care of his people and fights on their behalf. He always has and always will.

Saturday - Sunday, September 17-18 - Revelation 15:3-4

Let us take time this weekend to worship the "King of the nations!"