

Re-Reading the Apocalypse

Lesson 4: “The Final Reign of God”

Overview:

At last we reach the final section of Revelation. Here we bear witness to the hope that has long been promised, the final reign of God. This is not an earthly reign but is instead one marked by the fulfillment of all God has done. The glories of heaven and God’s immense creation (and self) are revealed and the faithful will live forever in paradise. As we consider these final images and vision, we receive a glimpse of the promises God has yet to reveal, as well as understanding that we are but a small part of God’s creation.

1. As we have studied Revelation, what has brought you hope?
2. Why do you think the final reign of God is so important? What does it tell us about God?
3. How do you see hope in today’s passage?

(Open with prayer)

Background on our Passage:

Throughout the gospels, the Pauline epistles, the Pastoral epistles, and into Revelation, there is a consistent and forward motion towards “the final reign of God”. In the Synoptic Gospels (Mark, Matthew, and Luke) this is seen with a strong view towards the future. Jesus *will* return and when he does, God will reign. In John, however, there is a quite different view as the impression is given that Jesus has *already* brought the reign of God to earth. Through Paul and the epistles, we see a slow change from a “it’s very soon” to “it’s not for a long time.” This transition is codified in Revelation. The writer of Revelation sees the reign of God as a “now and not yet” concept. The faithful are indeed already part of God’s reign the *final reign* has not yet arrived. That final reign will consist of God ruling over all creation, judging all humanity, and welcoming the faithful into the eternal reign of God.

What this means in a larger sense is that the hope of Revelation is not bound in an immediate sense of relief, but rather as one for the people of God throughout all time. The writer sees in a great vision the promise of God’s deliverance, despite all that the people have endured.

1. Why do you think the early church wrestled with Jesus’ return?
2. What is the most important aspect of God’s final reign?
3. Why do you think the Gospel writers and Paul disagree about Jesus’ return?

Scripture lesson: Revelation 21:9-10, 21-26

⁹Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues came and said to me, “Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb.” ¹⁰And in the spirit he carried me away to a great, high mountain and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God. ²¹And the twelve gates are twelve

pearls, each of the gates is a single pearl, and the street of the city is pure gold, transparent as glass. ²²I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. ²³And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb. ²⁴The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it. ²⁵Its gates will never be shut by day—and there will be no night there. ²⁶People will bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations.

1. What is the main point of this passage?
2. What imagery stands out to you? What brings you the most hope?
3. What stands out most in this passage? How do you understand God's reign?

Discussion

Chapter 21 serves as the culmination of all of God's judgements upon creation. Following up from many difficult passages, packed with deep imagery and seemingly dark intentions, the focus shifts to the faithful and how they are prepared for Christ. Harkening back to the prophets, the writer uses marriage language, connecting the church and the faithful as being the "bride of the lamb" (Christ). At the end of the passage, the nature of the final reign is revealed. The light of God and the Lamb shines into all corners of creation and throughout all of heaven.

1. Why do you think the writer uses marriage language regarding the relationship between Christ and the faithful?
2. How do these images and language give you hope after much more difficult sections?
3. Why does God's final reign matter to us as Christians?

Conclusion

During our first lesson and sermon, I said that Revelation is a book of hope. Throughout the work, it can be hard to discern that hope. It can seem as though the hope is buried so deep that we cannot find it. However, in chapter 21 we find the hope: the final reign of God. In the end, God still reigns over all creation. Whatever difficulties we are facing are small in comparison to the glory of God that is still yet to come. The people of Revelation endured much, but they hoped for much more through the reign of God.