

Weekly Devotional Guide

Monday – Numbers are common symbols in the book of Revelation. The particular numbers that are important in Revelation are 3,4,7,10,13, and 3 ½. It is essential that we always apply the symbolic meaning to a number when we read the book of Revelation. Three designates the realm of the spirit; four is associated with the created order. *Seven represents wholeness or completeness.* Ten is similar to seven, but ten typically represents a completeness that is associated with inclusiveness. Twelve signifies the people of God, and three and one half represents the amount of time that evil is allowed to persecute the people of God. Sometimes numbers are combined to symbolize a really big point that John wants to make. For example, the number 144,000, of which so much has been made, is really a clear symbol; it is a combination of a multiple of ten and a multiple of twelve, thus signifying the full or total number of the people of God.

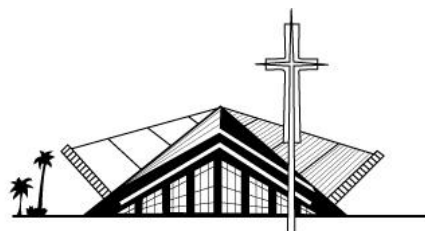
Tuesday – Read chapter six of Revelation. As you read chapter six, keep a few things in mind. The four horsemen are a significant part of the cycle of seven seals. When the Lamb opens the first seal, a rider on a white horse appears. This rider is seen as a conqueror who demands victory. For the Christians in Asia Minor in 95 AD this figure could only be the Emperor Domitian. The following three horsemen represent what ensues when an evil ruler demands obedience. The second horse is red, the apocalyptic symbol for war or strife, and it “takes peace from the earth.” This conflict leads to difficult times, symbolized by the black horse and its rider. Black symbolizes a lack of something. In this case, it is food. Christians were persecuted by being deprived of food. Finally all of this evil, strife, and deprivation lead to death, which is symbolized by the pale horse. Evil always leads to death. The fifth seal, shows, however, that those who resist evil and are martyred will be rewarded, and the sixth seal clearly shows that those who ally themselves with evil will receive the full judgment of God. Out of the seventh seal another cycle of seven begins.

Wednesday – Today read chapter seven. This chapter is an “interlude” between the sixth and seventh seals. This interlude symbolizes the sealing of the people of God. The act of sealing represents God’s special protection on the communities of faith who remain faithful to him. The number 144,000 appears in this chapter and it symbolizes the totality of the people of God. It does NOT mean 144,000 people and not one more! The entire people of God will survive persecution. In verses 9-17 we see the scene shift from the earthly community to the heavenly realm. In this scene we see what happens to those who have been martyred for their faith in the midst of the persecution. They wear white robes and take their place around the throne of God, and discover their reward.

Thursday – Read chapters eight and nine of Revelation. The cycle of seven seals showed how evil is self-destructive. The cycle of seven trumpets show that nature itself is also involved in judgment. The images and figures are borrowed from Exodus, and they show us that God can and does intervene to assist God’s persecuted people. The people of God suffer, but God will not allow them to be ultimately defeated. Their witness is important to the final triumph of God’s will.

Friday – Read chapters ten and eleven. We are introduced to the seventh trumpet. It announced that Christ has won, and he will reign forever and ever. The cycle of trumpets demonstrates God’s active participation in judgment, describes the hideousness of evil, calls the church to be faithful to God’s will, and it concludes with a great praise of assurance that God’s victory is certain. The world is ruled by Christ, even though the final battles have not been fought.

-A helpful book when preparing this guide and one that would be very helpful for anyone who would like a further study on Revelation is “Revelation for Today” by James Efird.



PASADENA COMMUNITY CHURCH

a United Methodist Congregation

227 - 70th Street South ♦ St. Petersburg FL 33707

727-381-2499

email: pasadena@pccumc.org

www.pasadenacommunitychurch.org



Revelation Revealed: A Message of Decision

Sunday, October 3, 2010

Sermon by: Rev. Dr. Charley Reeb, Senior Pastor

Scripture Lesson: Revelation 11: 15-19

Famous Last Words

A while back I came across some famous last words. They are very funny.

Lord Kelvin said in 1895: “*Machines that fly are impossible!*”

Western Union memo from 1876: “*This telephone has too many shortcomings to be seriously considered as a means of communication. The device has no value to us.*”

Marechal Foch, professor of military strategy said: “*Airplanes are interesting toys but they have no military value.*”

Charles Duell, former commissioner of US office of patents said in 1899: “*Everything that can be invented has been invented.*”

No Absolutes?

When we hear these words we think, “Well, there are no absolutes.” When someone makes an absolute statement, just give it time and they will be proven absolutely wrong! Nothing is written in stone, right?

This attitude is indicative of our culture. We are living in a numb world of relativism, where there are so many philosophies, ideals, ways of thinking, so many views and perspectives that it is just easier to give them all merit and say, “It is all relative. Truth is in the eye of the beholder. You have your truth, and I have my truth, and we will be politically correct and not offend each other.” Before long, we are down this slippery slope where good and evil are relative, where no one is accountable for anything, where sin is explained away as a mental problem, and if it feels good when you can do it. When we walk

out the door today, this is the kind of culture we will face! The truth is elusive, so anything goes. And whenever we try to proclaim the truth of the gospel, the culture does not want to hear it. It rains on their parade of sin; “Oh, you can go to church and all that, but that is your truth. I have my own truth. Don’t bother me with all that stuff about God.” This is the culture we live in!

I remember a parable by Soren Kierkegaard about a traveling circus. The circus tent caught on fire and a clown ran into the crowd and yelled, “The tent is on fire! The tent is on fire!” But the crowd just laughed because they thought it was part of the clown’s act.

This is why we need the book of Revelation because it runs into our lives and shouts, “There are absolutes!” It reveals to us in powerful ways that God and evil are real just as sure as we are sitting here. And it goes even further and says, “You have to decide between the two. You are either with evil or with God. There is no middle ground.” Each of us must decide.

As you read through Revelation it is very clear which side leads to death and which side leads to life. It is very clear which side leads to brokenness and destruction and which side leads to wholeness and fulfillment. It is very clear which side is defeated and which side has won. And one of the ways this clear message is given is through number 6 and the number 7.

The Numbers

Numbers play an important role in the book of Revelation. Numbers have a symbolic meaning; they are not to be taken literally. I don’t have time to go into all the numbers this morning, but for my

message today two numbers are very important: The number 6 and the number 7.

We hear and see 666 and 777, and most of us know their associations. They are all over the book of Revelation, especially the number 7. In chapters 6-11 we have the cycle of seven seals and the cycle of seven trumpets. Last week we read where the Lamb had seven horns and seven eyes. The week before that we saw seven churches highlighted, and then seven times Christ says, "Listen to what the Spirit is saying." The number 7 is all over the place.

What does 7 mean? It symbolizes one absolute that you can take to the bank: In God there is wholeness, completeness, and fulfillment. 7 means completeness. So this means that 6 means incompleteness, brokenness. 6 is the symbol for all evil. Evil leads to death and unfulfillment. 6 is all those things that never satisfy and leave us wanting.

This was a message that the persecuted churches in Asia Minor needed to hear, and it is a message that we need to hear. Of course, we need it for different reasons than the churches in 95 AD. They needed it for courage and strength. We need it to open our eyes to the truth. We need it so we can stand on something that is certain in this uncertain world. We need it so we can stand on a promise that can never break, like the others do. We need it so we can start acting like Christians ought to act and to be the church that Christ has called us to be.

Onward Christian Soldiers

I like graduation ceremonies. I love their sense of pageantry and hope and achievement. One of my colleagues told me about the time he went to a military graduation. One of his nephews was graduating from a military academy. He said he was amazed at how well the graduates marched, all together and in order.

As my friend stood amazed at the marching, he started to tap his foot to the music they were marching to. And soon it dawned on him what song the military band was playing. It was, "Onward Christian Soldiers." That it is a great old hymn. Now, we don't sing it much anymore because some are offended by the militant language. But I must say that the church could use a little more of these marching hymns because the reality is that the church is marching against evil and injustice in this world. But let us remember that as Christian soldiers our weapon is not guns and grenades; it is love of Jesus Christ. And when we think of it that way, it really is a powerful hymn.

Hear the words of the second verse of "Onward Christian Soldiers:" "Like a mighty army

moves the church of God, brothers we are treading where the saints have trod." That is great! It says the army and the church have something in common. It says the church should move like an army. Because of what Christ has done and will do, we should move like an army!

But the reality is the church does not march like an army, it does not march like it should. In fact, some days the church does not march at all, it strolls and meanders. I mean, imagine what it would be like if we took the idea of the army and brought it into the church. Suppose we have all the soldiers line up for a special morning drill and they were to be as disciplined as the average church. Can't you see how the calling of the roll would go?

"Jones?" "Jones isn't here, sir. He has company for the weekend."

"Smith?" "Uh, sir, Smith will be here in a minute. He had to take care of things at the office."

(I am an equal opportunity offender, so I will go through all of these)

"Johnson? Johnson isn't here sir."

"What's wrong with Johnson?"

"Well, he doesn't like the commanding officer."

"Brown?" "Brown isn't here sir. He's looking at another unit to join. His children like it better over there."

"Davis?" "Sir, Davis will not be here today. He had to take his kids to their soccer game. They play on Sunday now."

Then a few come in late, wondering why they couldn't get a good parking space, and they fall in line and say, "Do you want me to do something?"

No. We don't act like a well-disciplined army. But the question I have this morning is: Why don't we! If we believe the message of Revelation, that God has the last word, that the faithful will be rewarded, why don't we act like we believe it? If the Bible is true, why don't we do more? If the Bible is true, faith can move mountains...the waters can be parted...the broken can be made whole...Jesus is the Son of God...Why doesn't the church do more?

The reason why the church does not do more is that there are too many people in the church today who do not have a vital relationship with Jesus Christ. And when you remove Christ from the church, you don't have a church! The central question of the New Testament and especially of Revelation is not, "What do you think of our

doctrine, of our social action, of our political position? The central question of the New Testament is not, "Are you a blue church or red church? Do you sing praise choruses or hymns? Does your preacher wear a tie or golf shirt? The central question of the New Testament is "What do you think about Jesus Christ?" Jesus was very clear who he was: "I am the way the truth and life. The Father and I are one." Someone who says that is either a lunatic or the Son of God. Who do you say that he is?

Jesus is Vital!

You see, Jesus is vital! The only time we are living like we should is when Jesus is at the center of our lives. The only time the church is powerful is when Jesus is at the center of the church! 127 times in Paul's letters do we see the words, "In Christ!" A relationship with Jesus Christ is critical!

The churches in Asia Minor knew this. It was Christ that sustained them through painful persecution. Just study church history and the experiences of the early church and you will discover that it was only the power of Christ that kept the church alive. The Roman persecution of the Christians in Asia Minor was so bad that they would take Christians, chain them together, and put them on slave ships and force them to work in the copper mines of North Africa. The Romans were so evil that they would chain the Christians in such a way that they could not stand up straight. They would leave them in these copper mines and never let them out unless they renounced their faith. They would live, eat, and sleep in these mines.

Archeologists have been in those copper mines and have found Christian symbols all over the walls. But over and over again on the wall is the word "viva!" "Life, life!" Even in the midst of the persecution they had life because Christ was with them and in them!

When I reflect on the character, integrity, faith, and commitment of the early church in the Bible, and in church history books and compare it to the church in America, I am disappointed. People are so casual with their faith. Many of them religious tourists, popping in and out of churches as though churches are free religious entertainment on Sunday morning. Many are just religious consumers, judging churches by whether they stand, sit, sway, traditional or contemporary. It is such a scandal! I can see Christ on the cross right now weeping over what we have done with his sacrifice.

But what if we would take our faith seriously and take Christ seriously? It would transform our church so that everything we did would reflect the

presence of Christ. It would transform our sense of mission so that we would realize that Christ saved us not so that we would be comfortable and feel good, but so we could go out and change the world with the gospel. It would transform our worship so that we would see that all forms of worship are legitimate, not just what fits us. Most of all, it would transform our lives so that we would live life with an attitude of gratitude over what Christ did for us on the cross.

Archbishop of Paris

The Archbishop of Paris was preaching at Notre Dame Cathedral, and he told the story of some high school students who decided that they would play a joke on the priests of Notre Dame. One of the students was chosen to go into the confessional and confess all kinds of sins to the priest. He just made everything up and made fun of the priest.

When he had finished, the priest said, "Young man, with confession comes penance and I'm going to tell you what to do. I want you to go stand in front of the high altar, and look at the Christ on the cross. And I want you to say, "You gave your life for me I don't give a ... (you add the word)." The young man said, "Okay." He went and stood before the high altar, and he looked up and said, "You died for me, but I-I can't say it." Then he fell on his knees. Then the Archbishop said, "I was that young man. I was converted here, and today I'm your Archbishop."

Do we live our lives like we give a care over what Christ has done for us? Does your life reflect that Christ matters to you?

Who's On Trial?

In the Louvre in Paris there is the Salon Carre. The Salon Carre has the finest collection of art in western civilization in one place. One tourist looked around and said, "They don't look so great to me." One of the guides standing there to protect the art heard him say this, and the guide said, "Sir, this art is not on trial. You are."

Jesus is not on trial. He is the greatest, and he has conquered the world. We are on trial and the question each of us has to answer is, "What will you do with Jesus?" Will you live like he matters to you, or will you pass him by? It is your decision. The message of Revelation is that your decision about Jesus will determine your destiny. Amen.