

Come

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Preacher: Rev. Thomas Hinson

[0 : 00] Good morning, especially if you're visiting or new here for the first time, good morning. I'm Tommy. I'm one of the pastors here.

This is an exciting morning. It's a beautiful morning, but I'm particularly excited because we are coming to the end of a series that we started all the way back just after Easter, looking at this very mysterious, fascinating, beautiful, at times frustrating book, the last book of the Bible called Revelation.

Revelation, or the Revelation of St. John, or the Revelation of Jesus Christ. And we are in the final chapter of the book of Revelation. So this is it, the last chapter.

And I'm very excited. It's been an amazing journey. As we have said time and time again, this is a book that most people are familiar with, and yet very few people really understand.

It's gotten a lot of attention in pop culture from the inspiration of the Left Behind series to speculations about the precise timing and dating of the end time to speculations over who the Antichrist might be.

[1 : 11] All of these things have captured popular imagination. So what's this book actually about? That's what we've been looking at. John is writing to Christians in the first century.

And the people that John wrote this book to have faced suffering. They have faced horrendous persecution. They are people who feel hopeless and powerless.

And at the time that John is writing this, he is in exile on the prison island of Patmos. And so that's the context. And this book seems outlandish to us because it has all kinds of crazy images of the heavens opening up and dragons and beasts coming up out of the sea and stars falling out of the sky.

So when we read it from our vantage point, it seems like wild stuff. And yet what we have hopefully realized is that if we were first century Christians and we were immersed in the Jewish Scriptures as they undoubtedly would have been, we would immediately recognize that Revelation makes reference to virtually every book in the Old Testament.

Almost the entire Old Testament canon shows up in the book of Revelation. And here's what's so amazing. John is not simply quoting the Old Testament.

[2 : 37] He is reinterpreting all of Scripture through the lens of Jesus Christ. One of the things that Revelation shows us is that the life of Jesus is the exegesis of the Old Testament.

So everything that happens, the entire story of the Old Testament is told through the lens of Jesus Christ. And so Revelation, because John is first and foremost a pastor and a poet, his approach is to aim at our hearts and our imaginations.

And so every chapter brings wave after wave of Christ-saturated imagery crashing on the shores of our imagination. John is retelling the story of God's people again and again and again with each successive wave, a new retelling of our story, because he's laying out a vision of what was and what is and what is to come.

And the purpose of this entire book is to show us the way things really are, to pull back the veil and allow us to see reality for what it is.

He uses the extraordinary to reveal the ordinary and enable us to see it as it's meant to be seen. So this book is meant to teach us how to see, you know, to truly see ourselves, one another, the world, and especially God, as revealed in Jesus Christ.

[4 : 15] And so what we're going to do now is we're going to look at chapter 22, but seeing as how we've just spent months looking at all of the preceding chapters, we're going to pull some of that in as well.

So what I want to do is to briefly draw out seven, which is very appropriate for Revelation, seven major themes that we have seen over the course of this study.

And then once we've done that very briefly, we're going to ask the most important question.

Anytime we're looking at Scripture, the most important question, so what? What difference does this make?

What do we do with this information that we've been given? So let's pray, and then we'll dive into God's Word. Lord, we thank you for your Word, and we thank you for the times when it is clear and straightforward.

But we also thank you for the times when it seems obscure or hard to understand or unclear, because we know those times remind us that our only hope, our only hope of really seeing what you want us to see and hearing what you want us to hear is if your Holy Spirit makes that possible.

[5 : 23] So Lord, we hold out our hands. We depend on you. We cry out to you to be the God who fulfills your promise to speak and to be in our midst and to bring us face to face with the living Word, Jesus Christ.

And it's in his name that we pray. Amen. So seven themes that we have seen over the course of this study. So if this is your first time with us, you'll get a little bit of a review.

And if you want to go back and listen to the sermons, you can do that on our website. But for now, the first theme that I want to talk about briefly is the theme of the revelation of Jesus Christ.

In the opening chapter, we see Jesus as he truly is. We see the risen Christ. And what's so striking about this is he's no longer the meek, soft-spoken Galilean that we have so many paintings of in church basements.

He's a towering and fearsome king. In Revelation, he is a towering and fearsome king, awesome to behold, the Lion of Judah who refuses to be domesticated.

[6 : 30] And right off the bat, John sets the tone, this is a very different Jesus, not in his heart or in his character, but in his role. He is no longer the suffering servant.

He's taken the throne. And because of that, the message to us is this, that no matter what your life may look like, no matter how out of control or random it may seem, Jesus is always in control.

He's always in control because he sits on the throne. So it reveals Jesus as he truly is. The next thing we see in Revelation is that it inspires...

There's craziness happening up here. It inspires our worship. Revelation inspires our worship.

There's this amazing place in chapters 4 and 5 of Revelation where John is disoriented. He's suffering. He's in exile. And God reorients him, not by giving him lots of explanations and answers and spreadsheets, but by inviting him to a heavenly worship service, showing us that the purpose of worship, one of the main reasons we gather here, is to be reoriented around what truly matters, the throne of God.

[7 : 44] And it shows us that every time Christians gather, whether it's thousands in a megachurch or just a few men and women around a kitchen table, we are joining in to eternal heavenly worship where all things are centered around the throne of God.

So it inspires our worship. That's what's happening right now. We're joining in to something that's always happening in the heavenly sanctuary. The next thing we see in Revelation is Revelation shows us how Jesus sees the church.

Right? Chapters 2 and 3, we see these letters that Jesus writes to his church. And it's amazing to see Jesus' perspective on us. And here's what matters about that.

Jesus knows better than we do how broken, how imperfect the church is.

He knows better than we do how flawed the church is. Right? And no matter how much you think you might have been hurt by the church, and I say that with an enormous amount of respect because I know a fair number of you have been hurt by the church.

[9 : 04] And that's real pain. And there are a lot of people out there who would never darken the door of our church because they've been hurt by some other church somewhere, the church. No matter how bad we may have been hurt by the church, Jesus has been hurt worse.

And yet what we see in Revelation is that Jesus loves his church as his bride. He is eternally committed to his church.

He gives his life for his church. And he will not stop until his church is fully restored, perfected, beautified, and made whole.

And I look at this who had my own struggles with the church, believe it or not. And I say, well, if it's good enough for Jesus, it's good enough for me.

So it shows us how Jesus views the church. Revelation also exposes the true nature of evil, which is very important in this day and time.

[10:08] It shows us images of the dragon or the beasts. And it reminds us that our struggle is not against flesh and blood.

So the true battle that needs to be fought is not ideological. It's not sociological. It's not political. Even though those feel like the ultimate battles, the true battle is none of those things.

The true battle being fought is a spiritual battle against spiritual evil, spiritual enemies. And that kind of battle has to be fought with spiritual weapons like prayer and the Word of God.

We could spend a lot of time on that, but something just to think about. We need to fight fewer battles online and more battles on our knees.

If we really understand the nature of evil. The fifth thing that we see in Revelation is Revelation announces the good news of God's judgment.

[11:14] Which I know is a funny way to phrase it. But when you read Revelation, you see why God's coming judgment is actually such good news for the world. God's coming judgment confirms that sneaking suspicion we all have that our actions actually matter.

That there is such a thing out there as right and wrong. But beyond that, the coming judgment of God means that God loves the world so much that He can't turn a blind eye to evil.

He can't look, for instance, at the genocide in Rwanda. A country tearing itself apart. And just shrug it off. God's love. God's love compels Him to bring justice.

God's love compels Him to respond. And Revelation promises us that one day justice is going to be done. One day victims are going to be vindicated.

One day creation will be renewed. So it's good news. The sixth theme we see in Revelation is that it emboldens the church's witness.

[12:30] It emboldens our witness in the world. One of the strongest themes in Revelation is the role of the church. And again and again and again, we are referred to as martyrs.

And the word martyr originally simply meant to bear witness. But because so many Christians were killed for bearing witness, we've come to associate that word with dying.

And Revelation pulls all of those themes together. You're called to bear witness and very possibly that will cost you your reputation, your job, or your life.

It will bring lots of discomfort into your daily experience. But what we recognize is that if Christ is coming to judge and renew the world, we should stop at nothing to make the gospel known to everyone, everywhere.

We talked about the various views of eschatology. And we don't have time to get into that now. But the various Christian views on the end times. And one of the things we said at the end was, regardless of your view, one thing is clear.

[13:35] We need to be proclaiming the gospel to anyone who will listen. The good news that Jesus has come and what he has done for us. Right? And then the seventh theme that we see is that Revelation promises the victory of Christ over suffering and evil and death.

We started this church in the neighborhood Columbia Heights. God willing, if we're able to buy a building, we may end up there again. But we started this church there.

And I don't know if you read a few days ago, there was a shooting in Columbia Heights. Several people were injured. One person was killed. We should grieve that. We should stand in solidarity with the people who are suffering as a result of the violence in our city.

And yet we do that with hope because we know if Revelation is true, one day Jesus himself will wipe away the tears shed over that violence.

And one day violence like that will be no more. Zechariah's description of the New Jerusalem is of a city where the streets are filled with the sounds of children playing.

[14:56] It's safe. It is secure. It is peaceful. It's a great place to live. It's a great place to grow up. Right? So these are themes we could talk about so much more.

But these are, I think, some of the major themes that we focused on over the course of our time together. So Revelation 22 brings all of this together and it asks the \$64,000 question.

John is saying, now that you've seen behind the curtain, now that you've seen things as they really are, what are you going to do with that knowledge? What are you going to do with it? In John's

mind, the worst thing we could do, the worst thing we do would be to tamper with this. He makes it very clear. Don't add anything to it. Don't take away anything from it. Verses 18 and 19, don't touch it. And, of course, you know, this helps us understand that even though there was a lot more context and things may have made more sense in certain ways, it was no easier for God's people to read God's Word in the first century than it is in our century. In other words, there are always things that are going to be comforting and inspiring and uplifting and encouraging and things that are going to be downright challenging and offensive and frustrating and troubling.

[16:16] And there's always a temptation to add or subtract, to say, if I could just clarify this part, or if I could just cut this part out, then I could believe it.

If I could just skip over this place, then I could believe it. John's saying, no, no, no, don't touch it. Why? Well, if you believe in an eternal, all-powerful, all-knowing, omnipresent creator being who brought all of this into existence, and that being so happens to agree with you on every issue, that being is probably a figment of your imagination.

If you're dealing with a real God who really made all of this, chances are that God is going to have certain positions that you find challenging. But John says, are you interested in knowing the God that you made up, that you created in your image, or do you want to have a chance at knowing the God who made you in his image?

Don't touch it. The worst thing we could do would be to tamper. The second worst thing we could do, this is what we'll spend the remainder of our time on, would be to read this and then to say, well, you know, that was very interesting.

What's next? Interesting study, interesting book, interesting points, things to think about. What's next? John wants us to see, and he wants us to see things as they really are.

[17:48] And he writes chapter 22 with this sense of urgency, right? This book was written for a purpose. John is hoping for and actually calling out of us a response.

What are you going to do with this? You know, some things, once you see them, you can't unsee them. Some things demand a response. And C.S. Lewis famously said, I believe in Christianity as I believe the sun has risen.

Not only because I see it, but because by it I see everything else. And John wants us to take that approach with Revelation. By it I now see everything else.

And that's why the divine messenger in chapter 22 comes to John, and he says, these words are trustworthy and true. And then he says, Blessed is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book.

And by keep, what this messenger means is, allow this book to help frame and make sense of our lives, past, present, and future.

[18:52] In other words, map our lives onto these themes. Because this is what human beings do. We live life, and we have brains that are hardwired to make meaning out of our experiences.

And John says, when you go to make meaning out of your experiences, this is where you should go. So what does that look like in our past, present, and future? With the time we have left, we'll look briefly at each of those.

So I'll ask you this question first. When you look back in your life, what do you see? In other words, is your life just random and meaningless?

Is it just disconnected events with moments of serendipity here and there? Or can you see a thread? Can you see divine fingerprints?

Can you recognize the sovereign presence of God in your story? Because this shows us that no matter how it might seem, Jesus is always in control.

[19:56] You know, 20 years ago, Laura and I had a plan. I had, I, we recruited some friends, and I wanted to go across country in the car. I wanted to move out to Seattle.

I had a job lined up. We had some friends going out. We were going to have a couple of houses of people we knew. And I wanted to build a life there. I was Seattle bound. I was hoping to get into university out there and get a PhD in psychology.

And this was my post-grad plan. And we're driving, and we made it as far as Iowa, and we had a horrendous accident. And we lost control of our suburban, which was loaded with everything we owned.

And we rolled three times into a cornfield. All the glass was shattered. All of our stuff shot out of the car like popcorn. It just went all over the highway, all over everything.

So all of our clothes, you know, electronics, all of that, getting smashed by cars on the highway as everybody's coming to a halt. You know, highway patrol came. People assumed we were dead.

[20 : 58] We miraculously survived, Laura and I, and then my friend who was asleep in the back seat. I've never really felt like I could ever make that up to him. I'm so sorry you woke up as the car was rolling into a cornfield.

That's not a good way to wake up. I don't think you can fall asleep in cars anymore. And I felt horrible about that. But we had this horrible accident. The car was totaled. We lost all of our, most everything we owned was destroyed, covered in mud, torn apart.

It took what remaining money we had to get back to North Carolina. Suffice to say, I never made it out to Seattle. And I was deeply depressed that summer because life felt meaningless.

And worse, it felt like I had meaning, but life had then been derailed. I don't know if you feel like that, that you're going along, and at some point you feel like you're kind of on track, and then at some point you look back and you say, I think I got derailed somewhere.

And you sort of feel like your life does not look like what you thought it would look like, like maybe God was doing this, but you weren't listening, or maybe there is no God, maybe God doesn't care about you, and you're just sort of like wandering in the wilderness.

[22 : 06] That's how I felt. And I had no idea what I was going to do, and I was deeply, deeply, deeply depressed. I think I even was on antidepressants. Just I couldn't, I could hardly get out of bed. But because I was in North Carolina, instead of Washington State, my pastor convinced me, against my better judgment, to go to, to take part in a ministry internship that was being started at our church.

And I said, well, I don't want to go into ministry. Why would I do this? And he said, what else are you doing? I mean, that's pretty good. I was like, okay, you got me. So I started doing this ministry internship.

They had me serving and trying to teach and love middle school kids in our church. And I had been a Christian about a year. So I had no idea what I was doing.

But because of this ministry internship, that actually led me to decide to go to seminary because I loved it so much that I thought I'd go to seminary. And so a few years later, I go to seminary, which never otherwise would have happened.

And because I went to seminary, I discovered the Anglican tradition and fell in love with it. And the Anglican tradition led me to come to Washington, D.C. And that's what led me to begin meeting with a group of a couple of dozen men and women in a little house in Columbia Heights on Friday nights.

[23 : 30] And those meetings then gave rise to the church that became Church of the Advent. And if you think of Church of the Advent, if you think of all the people who have come to faith here, all of the people who have been strengthened in their faith here, all of the friendships that have been formed here, all of the married couples who met here, all of the children who were born as a result of those marriages in this church, if you think about all that, praise God for that wreck.

And praise God, praise God, praise God that I am not in control. And praise God that things sometimes have to get utterly derailed because what's happening is that I'm on the wrong rail. And God says, no, no, no, I want you over here. And praise the Lord that we get to be together as a family this morning as a result of the fact that Jesus is in control.

Right, so when you look back, is it just random and meaningless or do you see some thread that maybe God is there and maybe Jesus is in control and maybe good things and bad things and random things are happening and yet somehow it makes sense in the divine mind of God?

Is that possible? Look at the present in your life, this moment right here. Right, when we all think about things that we most care about in this church, right, when we think about racial tension, we look around this church and we realize how racially divided the church still is, especially in Washington, D.C.

[25 : 05] And we grieve that. Right, when we look at the political division, when we look at school shootings, you know, is this all just human evil or is this, as revelation reveals to us, symptomatic of deeper underlying spiritual forces?

You know, when we look at our own hearts, when you look at your own insecurities or struggles that you're sitting with right now, the things that are needling away at you, the things that when you lay

down at night and it's dark and you can't sleep, the things that come into your mind, what is that? What are you thinking or feeling in the early hours of the morning? What haunts you? Whatever that is, how do we make sense of it?

Is it just that we need to read some self-help? Is it just that we need to dig deeper into our Enneagram type? Is it just that we need a little counseling?

Now, all of those things are good, minus the self-help. Counseling is great. You know I love the Enneagram. Enneagram. But is there more to it?

[26 : 21] Is there something real and malignant at work in our lives? When I look at the things that I value most, the things that cause me to say and do things that aren't me, right?

You know, is it possible that we allow good things to become ultimate things in our lives? Is it possible that maybe what the Bible says about idolatry is true and that we can take things like success or comfort or approval or our own kids or our ideals about marriage and enthrone them, allow them to become idols that we worship?

We say, unless I have that, my life is not worth living. Twice in Revelation, including here in chapter 22, John sees an angel and then what does John do? He sees the messenger of God and then he falls on his face to worship the angel as God.

And it's amazing, as soon as John does it, the angel rebukes him. The angel says, you must not do that. I'm a fellow servant with you and your brothers, the prophets, and with those who keep the words of this book.

And then he says, worship God, not me. Get up off your feet. This is a great picture of the human condition. This is a room full of smart, well-educated, sophisticated people.

[27 : 44] We have minds that are full of knowledge and we're highly educated and we have gullible hearts. Wise, well-educated, even cynical minds, gullible hearts.

I'll go after anything if it even half promises me a good life. Right, so this is what Revelation shows us about the present.

Now, lastly, just let's take a couple of minutes and look at the future. How do we see our future? What matters as we look into the future? What are the things that we're focused on? One of the things that happened to me soon after I moved to D.C.

is I was in Columbia Heights and I was at the metro station at Columbia Heights and I wanted to take the metro down to Navy Yard. And I wasn't really paying attention and so I just jumped on the first train I saw.

And as I'm going down, I realize I'm heading south, good, and I'm seeing all the right stops. I'm seeing, you know, stops like U Street and Mount Vernon and Archives and I'm like, okay, I'm headed in the right direction.

[28 : 50] But then something really weird happened. Then I'm seeing daylight and then I'm looking down and I'm going over the Potomac River and I'm leaving, I'm looking, I'm like, we're leaving the city.

And I start looking around and then I start seeing these bizarre stops like Pentagon and Pentagon City and Crystal City. It was terrifying. And it turns out what had happened is that I had gotten on a yellow line car instead of a green line car and it seemed fine at first.

It seemed like we were headed in the right direction but at some point the tracks diverged and I ended up in a very different place than I expected. And I think that one of the things that Revelation shows us is that all of this, all of life, is going somewhere.

All of history is progressing inexorably somewhere. Right? And right now we're all moving through history together.

We're all together and it doesn't really seem like it matters much what we believe. It really, that's a matter of personal preference. Most people are not really paying attention.

[30 : 05] But John's trying to wake us up to the fact that one day the tracks are going to diverge. And if we're not paying attention we might end up in Northern Virginia.

Just kidding. If we're not paying attention we may end up in a place that we don't want to be. The image Send all emails to admin at adventdc.org The image of the end that we really need to focus on is of this great city.

The New Jerusalem. And the New Jerusalem is breathtaking. It's illuminated by the glory of God Himself. The streets are filled with the sounds of children playing of laughter and singing.

The tree of life stands in the center with leaves for the healing of the nations. A river of life is flowing where you can come and drink without price as much as you want.

And verse 14 says Blessed are those who wash their robes so that they may have the right to the tree of life and that they may enter the city by the gates.

[31 : 23] And this is making clear that anyone and everyone who desires to have their robes washed who desires to be cleansed of all of their sin everyone who knows they need the mercy of God.

Everyone who's willing to come to God and say I don't have it. I can't earn this. I can't repay this. I'm simply asking you to give it to me out of the goodness of your heart.

Everybody who's willing to do that is welcomed into the city. And here's the thing that's striking about this image. In the previous chapter it tells us the gates of the city are never shut.

The gates of the city stand open. There's never a point at which the door is slammed. The gates of the city remain open and yet there are still people outside.

They're outside the city. At some point they thought they were moving in the right direction and then at some point the track went in a different direction and at some point they realized they were not going into the city they were going outside of the city.

[32 : 27] And we see that these are all of the people who refuse to admit they need to be washed. These are people who refuse to accept mercy.

People who hold on to their pride. People who as it says hold on to falsehood. I prefer this way of seeing reality not this way of seeing reality. I prefer my take.

People who are demanding what they believe they're owed. You know I read this passage and I can't help but think of the prodigal son. You know the ending that we read a little while ago.

At the end of the story the younger brother is you know the prodigal son has washed his robe. You know he comes to his father he falls on his knees and he says I've sinned against God and against you.

I'm not even worthy to be a servant in your house. And the father before he could even get the words out wraps his arm around him. The father who when he saw him coming ran in a very undignified way down the road to embrace his son before his son can even utter a word he's wrapped his arms around his son.

[33 : 35] He's drawn him to himself and this son who slapped him in the face who gave him one of the gravest insults possible in the ancient world who took his inheritance and basically said to his father I wish you were dead.

Give me what I'm owed. When his son comes back he wraps his arm around him he puts a ring on his finger and a robe around his shoulders saying you're right you'll not be a servant in my house you'll be a son.

And he throws him a lavish feast. And the elder brother at the end of the story the real point of the story is standing outside the party. There's a great feast going on inside the doors are open the elder brother is outside and the father comes out to the elder brother and he it says entreats him he begs him to come into the party but the older brother remains outside and he's refusing to go in because he believes that because he has lived such a good life because he's been faithful he's owed something.

Give me what I'm owed father give me what I deserve God and he remains outside because of his pride.

So all of history our past present and future all of history is moving inexorably toward this final scene. So I think here is the message of revelation to the world.

[35 : 04] If we could summarize all of this in one sentence one day soon Jesus is going to come to us.

That's the final cry come Lord Jesus. And so now is the time for us to come to him. Let's pray. Lord we thank you we thank you for your word and we thank you for your son and we thank you for your spirit and we ask that that spirit would now parse our words out from yours and do what you will with this offering.

That as we will see with the bread and the wine in a little while you would take these words and bless them and break them and then give them to us as you see fit in your son's name.

Amen. God bless and ■■■■ you and