

Sermon to the Saints which are at Topeka, Kansas -- Sunday, December 8, 2013.

Good afternoon, beloved friends; those of like faith and order with me and with those who have from every generation of mankind been loved, predestinated, called, justified, and soon to be glorified. My heart has been pregnant with thoughts and motions for some many months now, related to the beautiful events contained in the book of Revelation. It is compelling to my spirit that the Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him is introduced with this comforting expression:

"Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand."

(Revelation 1:3)

I take that to mean, without equivocation, that the only ones who will read, hear, and keep these things are those who God has blessed as an integral part of the Covenant of Grace. With such assurance, I have confidence that just as the Angel of the Lord said unto Abraham **"Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do" (Genesis 18:17)**, so too will our God reveal, in His Word and through his providential opening up of this **"more sure word of prophecy" (2 Peter 1:19)**, what these amazing things written mean for us **"upon whom the ends of the world are come."** **(1 Corinthians 10:11)**

It may very well be that some, or many, of those in this meeting house this afternoon have already attained to the place where I desire to take you jointly today, and Lord willing, next week. If so, I believe you will find it a journey well worth another round. I think, if you will listen and/or read along here, you might find your heart burns within you as our Saviour walks with us in this way. I am convinced that it would be to your great satisfaction if you would follow me through my thought-provoking wanderings through this blessed book, rather than for me simply to describe for you where I ended up.

It is my sincerest hope that when this journey is complete, you will have an increased boldness in your testimony to our generation; you will be given that much more plainness of speech; you will be given **"sound speech, that cannot be condemned; that he that is of the contrary part may be ashamed, having no evil thing to say of you."** **(Titus 2:8)**

To begin the journey, let me lay down some propositions for you that will help you to see why the journey felt so utterly important to me.

First, that after the introductory language of John's Revelation, and beginning at the 9th verse of the 1st chapter, you spend the remainder of Revelation chapters one through three in the matter of the Bride of Christ preparing herself. The church. The Gentile church that is in existence running up to the days -- the dispensation, if you will -- that are relatively immediately preceding the return of Christ.

So, if you were to draw a mental line hard between Revelation 3:22 and Revelation 4:1 you can say that everything on the front side of that line -- or before that line -- is the church getting prepared, or as Paul wrote:

"For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in." (Romans 11:25)

At the close of Revelation chapter three, the fullness of the Gentiles has come in, the Church -- the Bride of Christ -- has reached her perfection of charity and is prepared. When Christ is preparing to go into battle at Armageddon, in Revelation 19, you find this language suggesting His church is prepared already, and waiting for him:

"And I heard as it were the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunderings, saying, Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth. Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, *and his wife hath made herself ready*. And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints. And he saith unto me, Write, Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb. And he saith unto me, These are the true sayings of God." (Revelation 19:6-9)

As I say, if you will grant me some consideration that we can make a demarcation in dispensations at that line -- between Revelation 3:22 and Revelation 4:1, it will make this journey somewhat more edifying, I believe.

The second thing I wish for you to consider is that chapter six of Revelation, and running through chapter 19, is variably a description of events that belong in a distinct dispensation of God's dealings with the heaven, earth, and all the things contained therein -- both living and dead, animate and inanimate. That the amazing events in the natural world, and involving all the creatures on the earth, under the earth, in the sea, and in the firmament, are prophesied of and variously described in the writings of the prophets as comprising the Day of the Lord.

This "day", or period, has unique characteristics that previously no time has seen but weak adumbrations of. In fact, with regard to these adumbrations, there are remarkable words found in Zechariah -- relating to these same events -- that instructs us more specifically about these adumbrations and the proper handling of them.

"Moreover the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house; his hands shall also finish it; and thou shalt know that the LORD of hosts hath sent me unto you. For who hath despised the day of small things? for they shall rejoice, and shall see the plummet in the hand of Zerubbabel with those seven; they are the eyes of the LORD, which run to and fro through the whole earth. Then answered I, and said unto him, What are these two olive trees upon the right side of the candlestick and upon the left side thereof?" (Zechariah 4:8-11)

This language is in the context of talking about the two witnesses John references in Revelation 11, where he references the same "plummet in the hand of Zerubbabel" but with different terms, to wit:

"And there was given me a reed like unto a rod: and the angel stood, saying, Rise, and measure the temple of God, and the altar, and them that worship therein. But the court which is without the temple leave out, and measure it not; for it is given unto the Gentiles: and the holy city shall they tread under foot forty and two months. And I will give power unto my two witnesses, and they shall prophesy a thousand two hundred and threescore days, clothed in sackcloth. These are the two olive trees, and the two candlesticks standing before the God of the earth." (Revelation 11:1-4)

The language in Zechariah "for who hath despised the day of small things", is referencing these adumbrations of God's wrath to come in the Day of the Lord. Characteristics of this "Day of the Lord" include:

1. Being of a fixed duration;
2. Being distinct from "the Judgment Day"
3. Being characterized by perpetual upheavals among nature and among men

Now there is much, much more to be said of this period, and well beyond any ability to give it justice in a single sermon. In fact, Joseph Seiss spent a good many years drafting and delivering "sermons" or "lectures" on the subject of these chapters, which you are able to read in his work "The Apocalypse". There, Seiss makes a case that this dispensation spans a timeframe of seven years. One hebdomadal cycle (if you will) of years. He strains some points to make the argument, so I am not vouching for that measurement precisely.

What is clear, and repeatedly articulated, is that it culminates in a three and one half year period, to wit:

"And from the time that the daily sacrifice shall be taken away, and the abomination that maketh desolate set up, there shall be a thousand two hundred and ninety days. Blessed is he that waiteth, and cometh to the thousand three hundred and five and thirty days." (Daniel 12:11-12)

"And I will give power unto my two witnesses, and they shall prophesy a thousand two hundred and threescore days, clothed in sackcloth." Revelation 11:3)

"And the woman fled into the wilderness, where she hath a place prepared of God, that they should feed her there a thousand two hundred and threescore days." (Revelation 12:6)

"And to the woman were given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness, into her place, where she is nourished for a time, and times, and half a time, from the face of the serpent." (Revelation 12:14)

But for purposes of this journey, I will say that I believe the evidence is solid for the proposition that it will be for a fixed and relatively short time, considering those words just given, and these words of Christ:

"For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be. And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened." (Matthew 24:21-22)

The language contained in the prophesy of God's treatment of the rebel human creation throughout this dispensation -- Revelation chapters six through 19 -- cannot be described by any rational creature as anything short of horrific! Wars, pestilences, famines, earthquakes, blackness, darkness, death, hell, creatures of unimaginable horror and torment being set loose on them, blood to drink, boils and blains; all in successively greater volume and intensity.

Retribution? Certainly. He says in so many ways that they will be rewarded for their trespasses. But does not hell itself provide such retribution? Is an eternity of everlasting destruction before the presence of the Lamb not utterly sufficient for this purpose? I cannot fathom an argument to suggest it is not, without finding yourself quarreling with the capacious nature of God's judgments ... which judgments begin with the Great Assize described in these words of Revelation 20:

"And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works. And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire." (Revelation 20:11-15)

So I found myself seeking to understand what this is that starts at the close of the Gentile church age, and culminates in the return of our Christ in power and glory.

It was not satisfying just to have an understanding (variously) of the nature and scope of these outpourings of God's wrath on the children of disobedience.

Now let me be very clear on this point. I have absolutely nothing but joy at seeing the vengeance of God on such audacious rebels. I, to the very depth of my soul, wash my feet in the blood of these enemies, upon whom God pours out His wrath. That is not the question. The question is -- is there a purpose in this work of God in the dispensation between the church age and the thousand-year reign of Christ? Is there a purpose that can add to the rejoicing of anticipating it, and the joy in seeing it coming to pass?

Yes! Yes, there is a very well articulated purpose. There is a purpose that wraps around the whole of the gospel with a golden cord! There is a purpose that very literally upholds the entirety of the creation! There is a purpose so integral to the Covenant of Grace, to the very integrity of the Godhead, that I cannot sufficiently articulate it, if I spent the remainder of my days in the earth articulating it with all the powers of the English language.

It puts me in mind of the song "The Love of God", which we will sing to close this service, which include these lyrics:

Could we with ink the ocean fill,
And were the skies of parchment made,
Were ev'ry stalk on earth a quill,
And ev'ry man a scribe by trade;
To write the love of God above
Would drain the ocean dry;
Nor could the scroll contain the whole,
Though stretched from sky to sky

Of course, the love of God is wrapped up into the purpose I am preparing to lay out for all my friends here, as the spring source of all the gifts His elect remnant have received and will receive. More specifically though, the purpose behind the events spanning from Revelation six through Revelation 19 is found in the amazing words that are contained in Revelation chapters four and five.

"After this I looked, and, behold, a door was opened in heaven: and the first voice which I heard was as it were of a trumpet talking with me; which said, Come up hither, and I will shew thee things which must be hereafter. And immediately I was in the spirit: and, behold, a throne was set in heaven, and one sat on the throne. And he that sat was to look upon like a jasper and a sardine stone: and there was a rainbow round about the throne, in sight like unto an emerald. And round about the throne were four and twenty seats: and upon the seats I saw four and twenty elders sitting, clothed in white raiment; and they had on their heads crowns of gold. And out of the throne proceeded lightnings and thunderings and voices: and there were seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God. And before the throne there was a sea of glass like unto crystal: and in the midst of the throne, and round about the throne, were four beasts full of eyes before and behind. And the first beast was like a lion, and the second beast like a calf, and the third beast had a face as a man, and the fourth beast was like a flying eagle. And the four beasts had each of them six wings about him; and they were full of eyes within: and they rest not day and night, saying, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come. And when those beasts give glory and honour and thanks to him that sat on the throne, who liveth for ever and ever, The four and twenty elders fall down before him that sat on the throne, and worship him that liveth for ever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying, Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created. And I saw in the right hand of him that sat on the throne a book written within and on the backside, sealed with seven seals. And I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, Who is worthy to open the book, and to loose the seals thereof? And no man in heaven, nor in earth, neither under the earth, was able to open the book, neither to look thereon. And I wept much, because no man was found worthy to open and to read the book, neither to look thereon. And one of the elders saith unto me, Weep not: behold, the Lion of the tribe of Juda, the Root of David, hath prevailed to open the book, and to loose the seven seals thereof. And I beheld, and, lo, in the midst of the throne and of the four beasts, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent forth into all the earth. And he came and took the book out of the right hand of him that sat upon the throne. And when he had taken the book, the four beasts and four and twenty elders fell down before the Lamb, having

every one of them harps, and golden vials full of odours, which are the prayers of saints. And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation; And hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth. And I beheld, and I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne and the beasts and the elders: and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands; Saying with a loud voice, Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing. And every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, heard I saying, Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever. And the four beasts said, Amen. And the four and twenty elders fell down and worshipped him that liveth for ever and ever.

Consider this scene, set in heaven, to which our beloved brother John was taken (in the spirit) up to see what things must follow the closing of the Gentile age, the preparation of the Gentile church, purged of all of her spiritual imperfections and a body full with charity, without spot or wrinkle.

Please read through these words between now and next week. I will take up then to further lead you on this path of my discovery of a truth I find in the mystery of the gospel that causes me to exclaim time and again in the heat of my spirit:

"O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!" (Romans 11:33)

I love all you whose names are written in the book of redemption.

Amen