

HEAVEN – Part Seven
“What Did John See?” #4
Sermon – March 31, 2019

Over the past several weeks we looked at five of the six main events that will occur in the end-times: The Rapture, the Tribulation, the Second Coming, the Millennium, and the Great White Throne Judgment. What we have not yet done is look at what is happening on the earth after we, as believers, are resurrected and taken to heaven. These events occur after the Rapture, which I believe takes place prior to the Tribulation. Though I don't believe will be on the earth to experience these events I think it is important to know what is happening in our absence as they very much relate to what Christ plans to do with the earth after the Millennium ends and the judgment of Satan is complete.

We will see the events unfold from the perspective of the apostle John. Although he was removed from the earth and ushered into heaven, John was given the ability to see the effects of the tribulation occurring on the earth while he is in heaven. The events as John describes them in the book of Revelation take place over the course of 14 chapters. So for the sake of time I will only give you a short synopsis of what John saw; but this should be enough to convince anyone that they do not want to be on the earth to experience the wrath of God when it comes.

After being taken up to the throne of God in Heaven, John describes the opening of a book which no one is worthy to open except the Lamb. As the Lamb opens the book the wrath of God is poured out upon the earth. The first thing John sees is that authority was given to conquer and take peace from the earth, as well as to cause a world-wide famine. He then sees a fourth of the people of the earth being killed by the sword, famine, pestilence, and wild beasts. This was followed by the martyrdom of believers and a great earthquake. The sun then became black as sackcloth, the full moon became like blood, and the stars of the sky fell to the earth. John said, *“The sky vanished like a scroll that is being rolled up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place”* (Revelation 6:14-ESV). As if this wasn't terrifying enough John goes on to describe what else he sees.

When the seven trumpets of God are sounded hail and fire mixed with blood was thrown to the earth; and a third of the earth was burned up, and a third of the trees were burned up, and all the green grass was burned up. Then a great mountain burning with fire was thrown into the sea and a third of the creatures which were in the sea and had life, died; and a third of the ships were destroyed.

A great star from heaven, burning like a torch then fell on a third of the rivers, springs, and waters. Many men died from these waters because they were made bitter. A third of the sun and a third of the moon and a third of the stars were also struck, so that a third of them would be darkened and the day would not shine for a third of it, and the night in the same way (about 4 hours each).

The bottomless pit was then opened and smoke went up from it and the light that still remained from the sun and the stars was darkened by the smoke. Out of the pit came a demonic host described as locusts whose sole purpose was to harm those who did not have the seal of God on their foreheads. They did not have the power to kill but they could provide torment for five months which was like the torment of a scorpion when it stings. Then a third of mankind was killed by three plagues - fire, smoke, and brimstone. John describes what is happening to the survivors of these cataclysmic events.

REVELATION 9:20-21

“The rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands or give up worshipping demons and idols of silver and bronze and stone and wood, nor did they repent of

their murders or their sorceries or their sexual immorality or their thefts.”

The survivors of these disasters are in obvious need of help to recover from these events. But it does not appear from these verses that anyone is reaching out to God for help; neither are they making any connection between their evil deeds and the wrath which they are experiencing. They continue to worship demons and idols and maintain their immoral lifestyle. Since they are not willing to acknowledge God they have no recourse but to look to themselves. So, after experiencing all of these sequential disasters happening around the world they look for some political or charismatic person who can rescue them and bring order back to their disordered lives.

It is at this point that John describes the rise of the Antichrist, his beast, and his false prophet who were given power over the earth for a period of time. He describes their seven year peace treaty with Israel which they break after three and a half years, their ultimate destruction and their requirement to put the mark of the beast on their flesh in order to buy and sell as a sign of worship.

John then describes the seven bowls of wrath which cause malignant sores on the people who had accepted the mark of the beast and worshiped his image; He sees the seas, rivers, and springs turning to blood killing every living thing in them. The sun was given the ability to scorch men with fierce heat, the kingdom of the beast and the antichrist is plunged into darkness, and the waters of the Euphrates River are dried up so that the kings of the east could descend upon Israel to destroy it.

The last plague John saw unleashed upon the earth had flashes of lightening and sounds and peals of thunder; and a great earthquake accompanied it, such as there had not been since man came to be upon the earth. The great city called Babylon where the antichrist had established his kingdom was split into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell. Every island fled away, and the mountains were not found. Huge hailstones, about one hundred pounds each, came down from heaven upon men, and the people continued to blaspheme God because the plague was extremely severe. John then saw the kingdom of the beast being destroyed and the beast and his false prophet thrown alive into the lake of fire burning with brimstone. It is at this point that Jesus descends to earth to reign for a thousand years.

I have just given you a broad, though somewhat detailed look at what will happen on the earth between the time Jesus comes to take us home (which occurs at the Rapture) and when He returns with us to reign on the earth for a thousand years. But before we move on there are two things I want to expand on because I have been asked some questions about them. The first concerns the Tribulation. The second concerns the Antichrist, the beast and the false prophet. Let's start with the Tribulation.

As we have seen, many destructive things are happening on the earth while John is in Heaven. Jesus did say there would be birth pangs (Matthew 24:8) so some of these events may happen prior to and lead up to the start of the Tribulation. On the other hand, all of these events may be triggered by the beginning of the Tribulation. Scripture does not specify. But I believe they do not start until after the church is Raptured when there is no Holy Spirit restraining the evil in the world and God is free to exercise His wrath on the unbelieving. Whether that is before or at the start of the Tribulation I do not know. What I do know is this.

The Tribulation is a seven year period of history during which the antichrist makes a covenant with Israel which brings peace to the Middle East. This seven year tribulation period consists of two three-and-a-half year periods. The first half of the tribulation is when the nations of the earth, including Israel, are deceived into believing that one man and his one-world government are able to solve the problems occurring in the world at that time. They will follow him and join in his attempts to unify the world under his leadership.

The second half is known as the Great Tribulation. It is during these final three and a half years that things really get ugly. What had appeared to be the answer to peace in the world through one man and his one world government will suddenly turn into the world's worst nightmare. Though the one world ruler befriends Israel and finds a way for that nation to build their third temple in Jerusalem, when the temple sacrifices are once again started this deceptive ruler will enter the temple and declare himself to be God, declaring that all the sacrifices to be made are to be made for his honor, and his honor alone. Like Satan he desires to be worshipped in place of the one true God.

It is at this point that the nation of Israel will be in serious trouble. Believing they could worship the true God once again through their Temple sacrifices as part of their peace treaty and signed covenant with the Antichrist, they instead find their Temple desecrated by the very one they thought was their protector. Faced with this person's false claim to be God and the desecration of their Temple, the Jewish people rebel and begin to suffer the wrath of the antichrist. Through a series of miraculous events the Jewish people are protected from his wrath; but this so enrages him that he immediately sets out to kill all those who refuse to worship him. Only the Second Coming of Christ will put an end to this Great Tribulation.

Let's talk now about the antichrist, the beast and the false prophet. The term Antichrist simply means "against Christ". He is the opposite of Christ. According to the website *Active Christianity*, "Just as Jesus came to earth to do the will of God; the Antichrist will come to do the will of Satan. And just as God manifested Himself in the form of a man, Satan will manifest himself in the form a of man as well. The identity of the indwelling of God in man was Jesus. The identity of the man of Satan is unknown at this time. However, His intention will be to replace God, and he will send the Antichrist as a means to do this. The Antichrist will deny mankind's necessity for God, and assert himself as ruler of this world."

In his first letter John tells us that the spirit of the antichrist is already in the world (1 John 4:2-3). He says that we can know when someone has the Spirit of God within them because they will confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh; but that every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God and is instead speaking from the spirit of the Antichrist.

John tells us that the Antichrist will eventually perform signs and wonders to prove to the world that he has the power and authority to rule over the entire world and that he also has the knowledge to solve the world's problems. John also says that he will eventually open his mouth and speak blasphemous things against God, blaspheming His name, His tabernacle, and those who dwell in heaven (Revelation 13:6). While the antichrist may himself perform false signs and wonders these are normally attributed to the false prophet who is in league with the antichrist to deceive the world. Both the Antichrist and the false prophet draw their deceptive power from the one who is known in Scripture as the dragon, the serpent of old also called the devil, and Satan, the one who deceives the whole world (Revelation 12:19).

In 1Thessalonians Paul says that the only thing that restrains the spirit of antichrist today is the presence of the Holy Spirit on earth. Once that Spirit is removed from the earth at the time of the Rapture, then the antichrist will be revealed and be free to perform powerful signs and false wonders through his false prophet with all the deception of wickedness. Many will believe; in fact most on earth will be deceived and believe the Antichrist can do what he has promised to do because of these false wonders, They will be deluded and believe what is false which will eventually result in their being judged because, as Scripture says, "they did not believe in the truth but rather took pleasure in wickedness" (1 Thessalonians 2:6-7).

Some speculate that when the man in whom the Antichrist indwells comes to prominence in the world he will appear to get rid of any pretense of religion and will do away with God altogether. Since the

goal of Satan has always been to supplant God it makes sense that he would promote the idea that man is self-sufficient and has no need of God. This is also a very attractive premise for those who seek to do what is right in their own eyes, having no desire to conform to an authority higher than their own. Eventually though all who dwell on the earth will be required to follow the dictates of the antichrist who will ultimately set himself up as God and demand to be worshipped. Those who refuse to conform will be killed.

Then an image of the beast will be made and this image will be given breath so that it would speak and cause as many who do not worship the image of the beast to be killed. The ultimate goal of the antichrist is to rule the earth. He does this through false worship and control of the monetary system. In Revelation we are told that if people do not worship the beast they will not be able to buy or sell anything.

REVELATION 13:16-18

“And he causes all, the small and the great, and the rich and the poor, and the free men and the slaves, to be given a mark on their right hand or on their forehead, and he provides that no one will be able to buy or sell, except the one who has the mark, either the name of the beast or the number of his name.”

If you do not worship the beast in this evil world it will be as if you have no cash, no credit, no ability to borrow, and have nothing with which you can trade or barter for sustenance. It is a black and white deal. You accept the mark of the beast, worship him and survive, or you do not and either starve to death or are killed.

Eventually the Antichrist, the beast and the false prophet are all defeated when Christ returns to earth along with His angels and His resurrected saints. Christ then establishes His millennial kingdom on earth for a thousand years. As we saw a few weeks back, while Christ reigns on the earth Satan is thrown in to the abyss. Then, when His thousand year reign is complete, Satan will be released and allowed once again to deceive the nations into waging war against God and His people. Satan is defeated for the final time and is then thrown into the lake of fire where the beast and the false prophet have already been thrown.

As we can see from this overview, God has brought much destruction upon the earth as judgment for sin. This is the earth upon which Jesus and His saints will reign for the Millennium and it is quite a mess. What God intendeds to do with this destruction is part of what we will look at after we take a break for Psalm Sunday and Easter. But today I want to close with something that determines whether we are able to escape the wrath to come or whether we will have to endure all the things occurring on earth which I have shown you today. And I want to use an illustration to do so.

Wendy and I like to watch the singing competition shows on Television. One of the ones we watch is called “American Idol”. Though we don’t always appreciate the comments some judges make we do enjoy the different voices, personalities and songs. A few weeks ago one contestant was interviewed. He said that he grew up in a Christian home and that his father was a preacher. But he said his family was disappointed in him because he had chosen to live the lifestyle of a homosexual. He then proceeded to sing a song he had written which said, “I wonder if there’s a place for us in heaven?” Meaning I wonder if there is a place in heaven for homosexuals?

When he sang his song you could see the turmoil rising within as he sought a positive answer to his question. But I suspect he already knows the answer to that question and it is not the one he is hoping for. As a child growing up in a Christian home he is surely aware of this Bible verse which conflicts with his own wishes.

1 CORINTHIANS 6:9-10

“Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God.”

The Bible is explicitly clear that there is no place reserved in heaven for those who practice these types of behavior. Does that mean God does not love them? Of course not! God so loved the world (including every person who has ever done vile and evil things) that He gave His only begotten Son so that whosoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life (John 3:16). That is why, right after listing those who cannot inherit the kingdom of God, Paul goes on to say this:

1 CORINTHIANS 6:11

“Such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.”

What Paul is saying is that no matter what you have done in your life, no matter how perverted or evil, God loves you and has provided a way for you to be with Him in heaven. The difference between those who can inherit the kingdom of God and those who cannot is not the evil they have done but their lack of repentance. If they would repent they could inherit salvation. But as long as they cling to their sin they also cling to their destruction.

You know, it is real easy to condemn others who do things which we have not done nor thought of doing. Our society today is full of people who quickly judge and label others for something they may have done years or decades ago. But we are not the ultimate judge. God is. And each one of us has done something which may not have displeased others but has certainly displeased God. None of us can justify ourselves in the sight of God by our own deeds regardless of whether they are more or less evil than those done by others.

This is why Paul reminds us that we too have done these evil things. We too were once lost. But we have become washed in His cleansing blood, sanctified by His Holy Spirit, and justified by His mighty name - all because of the mercy of God showered upon us and our acceptance of that mercy. When Paul wrote to Titus, a fellow worker with him in spreading the message of the gospel, he speaks of this underlying principle.

TITUS 3:3-7 6:11

“Remind them... to be obedient, to be ready for every good deed, to malign no one, to be peaceable, gentle, showing every consideration for all men. For we also once were foolish ourselves, disobedient, deceived, enslaved to various lusts and pleasures, spending our life in malice and envy, hateful, hating one another...”

“But when the kindness of God our Savior and His love for mankind appeared, He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit.”

I believe the young man who wondered if there was a place in heaven for those who practice homosexuality was truly hoping there was such a place for he and his partner. But I also believe by his upbringing and in his heart of hearts that he knew the truth - that there would be no place reserved for him in Heaven until he repented of his sin. Unfortunately it appears he is more willing to forsake the word of the Lord than he is to forsake his sin.

As believers we are instructed not to judge others by their sin no matter what form it takes, but

simply to tell the truth about sin, any sin, whether it is popular or not. Unfortunately, when the song was finished, instead of having the truth of the Bible reinforced, one of the judges who herself was a child of a pastor, spoke directly to him and affirmed his lifestyle, saying she accepted him just the way he was.

Over the next several weeks we saw his boyfriend join him in Hollywood and he seemed to become more relaxed and accepting of his lifestyle. This may have been the result of the assurance from those around him that there was nothing wrong with who he was and what he was doing.

We should pray for this young man; for there is much deception going in in the world and we have all fallen victim to it at one time or another. But how sad it would have been for us if someone had not loved us enough to risk the relationship and tell us God's truth about what we were doing. Those who warned us of Hell and encouraged us toward Heaven were the ones who truly loved us. Those who said there was nothing wrong with what we were doing were the ones who did not know or love the truth, nor did they desire to follow it. Deceived themselves, they wanted us to take their hand and follow them down the wide path to destruction. Though they tried to label it as such, this was not true love.

Thankfully, no matter what sin we were enslaved to, we responded to the gospel that was preached to us and repented of our sin. As a result we are now among those who are told, *"Such were some of you; but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God."* Acknowledging our sin, repenting of our evil deeds, and accepting God's forgiveness has cleansed us from all our unrighteousness so that we now can say, "Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord, who has given us the victory over sin. For we know that there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Romans 7:25; 8:1).

The point of my teaching about the Rapture, the Tribulation, the Second Coming, the Millennium, and the Great White Throne Judgment has been to prepare all of us for what lies ahead. For believers it is to get us excited about what God has in store for us. For unbelievers it is to warn them of the coming judgment and show them how they can escape the coming wrath of God just as we as believers will.

If you are a believer today I hope you have been encouraged. Even though much will happen to the earth and its inhabitants, we who believe will be raptured out of this world prior to God expressing His wrath upon the unbelieving world. If there are any here who do not yet believe, I pray you will take the events I spoke of as a warning to repent of your sins before it is too late; for the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night and no one knows the hour or the day when that will occur.

There is an old hymn written in 1912 which speaks of this unknown day. "Jesus is coming to earth again – what if it were today? Coming in power and love to reign – what if it were today? Coming to claim His chosen Bride, all the redeemed to purify, over this whole earth scattered wide – what if it were today?" What if it were today? Would you be ready?

MATTHEW 24:42-44

"Therefore be on the alert, for you do not know which day your Lord is coming. But be sure of this, that if the head of the house had known at what time of the night the thief was coming, he would have been on the alert and would not have allowed his house to be broken into. For this reason you also must be ready; for the Son of Man is coming at an hour when you do not think He will."

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