**SERMON 12-15-2019**

**REVELATION 7:9-17**

Back in the 1800's, Thomas Huxley was rushing to catch a train in Dublin.

He ran out into the street, climbed aboard a horse drawn carriage, and cried

          out to the driver: "Hurry! I'm almost late! Drive as fast as you can!"

The driver set off at a furious pace.

Huxley sat back and closed his eyes as he caught his breath.

After a few minutes, Huxley opened his eyes and glanced out the window.

Suddenly he recognized they were going in the wrong direction.

Then he realized he hadn't told the driver where to take him.

Urgently he called out to the driver: "Do you know where you are going?"

The driver replied "No your honor, but I am driving very fast."

When we read Revelation we often feel as if we do not know where we are going.

As we struggle through it, with all the strange images

          we can easily get the feeling of being lost and going in the wrong direction.

We are familiar with fairy tales.

We recognize the symbols of wicked witches and trolls under the bridge.

We know we should stay away from the witches or they will put a bad spell on us.

When we see a troll under the bridge, we know we should not go under the bridge.

We understand the language, we recognize the symbols.

But the book of Revelation doesn't speak in language we can easily understand.

We are not familiar with the symbols.

The book of Revelation was meant to be hard to understand.

The writer used coded language to protect himself.

He would use a word like "Babylon" when criticizing Rome,

          just in case his writings fell into the wrong hands.

Codes can be very effective.

The codes and symbols in Revelation are so effective,

          that few people today agree on exactly what they mean.

Christians were being brutally persecuted, and John wanted to encourage

          them to stand firm in their faith, even against government opposition.

But to write, or read, anything which seemed to oppose the Roman government

          would have been dangerous.

So the book was written in language which would seem harmless

          to any official who saw it,

          yet it would have meaning to those who understood the symbols and codes.

Some of the symbols are explained in the book.

          For example, the dragon is Satan.

Others, such as the creatures in heaven,

          or the Lamb, can be identified from other parts of the Bible.

The woman probably represents the church.

We get into difficulty when we try to match every detail of the symbolism

          with current history,

          or use it to predict exactly the schedule of events at the end of the world.

Though it has a bearing on the end of the world,

          Revelation first speaks to the situation at the time when it was written.

The primary message of the book is that:

          Christians can expect many troubles,

          these hardships will eventually serve God's purpose,

          and God will bring victory to all who are faithful.

Revelation symbolically pictures the ultimate destruction of evil,

          and the triumph of good.

We encounter two dangers when we read this book:

          because of all the conflicting theories about Revelation,

          readers are tempted to respond in one of two ways.

Some judge the book so perplexingly weird that they can find

          no reason to read it at all.

          How can anyone be sure of its meaning?

Others fall prey to the opposite danger.

They pore over Revelation and conclude

          they have discovered the secret explanation of each obscure detail.

To this group, it may be humbling to learn that every generation since

          the first century has come up with different interpretations of the prophecies.

So why is this book included in the Bible?

Why should we read this strange book?

John gives us a clue in the first phrase which introduces

          this book as "The revelation of Jesus Christ.

Revelation gives a unique picture of Jesus Christ.

The Gospels describe the life of Jesus on earth from 4 different viewpoints.

The letters discuss the deep significance of the resurrected Christ

          and what he accomplished.

But Revelation shows Jesus Christ from a new perspective:

          as the mighty ruler of the cosmic forces of good.

The Christians being persecuted did not need

          a precise calendar of future events.

They needed a word of encouragement and hope.

They needed faith that, no matter how things looked,

          God was in charge of history, and good would ultimately triumph. Revelation provides this hope, for them, and for us.

John stresses the promise that the time of tribulation does not last forever.

One day the faithful will no longer hunger or thirst,

          and there will never again have reason to cry,

          followers of Christ will be made safe at last:

“God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.”

Much of Revelation remains shrouded in mystery,

          but the final results shine out clearly.

Jeremy was just a little fellow.

His mother had died before he was five years old.

His father tried very hard to be both mommy and daddy.

One day Dad planned a picnic.

The little boy had never been on a picnic.

So they made their plans, fixed the lunch, and packed the car.

Then it was time to go to bed, so they could enjoy their picnic the next day.

But Jeremy just couldn't sleep.

He tossed and he turned, and the excitement got to him.

Finally, he got out of bed, ran into his father's bedroom

          where his father was already sound asleep.

He shook his father until he woke up and saw his son.

Dad asked Jeremy: "What are you doing up? What's the matter?"

Jeremy answered: "I can't sleep."

"Why can't you sleep?" Dad asked

“Daddy, I'm too excited about tomorrow.”

His father said: "Jeremy, I'm glad you are happy and excited.

          Tomorrow is going to be a great day,

          but it won't be great if we don't get some sleep.

          Go back to bed and get a good night's rest."

Jeremy went back to his room and got in bed.

Before long, sleep came, well, sleep came to his father.

But it wasn't long before the little boy was back.

He pushed and shoved his father, and finally his father opened his eyes.

Harsh words almost blurted out until he saw the expression on the boy's face.

Dad asked, "What's the matter now?"

The boy said, "Daddy, I just want to thank you for tomorrow."

When we think about what our Heavenly Father has planned for us,

          we can't help but say, "Daddy, I just want to thank you for tomorrow."

We are living expectantly when we thank God for all he has planned for us.

Never again will we hunger.

Never again will we thirst.

The sun will not beat down on us, nor any scorching heat.

For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be our shepherd.

He will lead us to springs of living water.

And God will wipe away every tear from our eyes.

AMEN