

Sermon Notes 2023

Kian Hwee

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Foreword

Herein contains my summary of the sermons for 2023. These sermons notes are mostly typed out during the sermon as the pastor preaches. Sometimes I will add in some of my own clarifications/notes/thoughts to the points given by the pastors, hence one can safely assume that any theological errors found herein are to be attributed to me, not the pastors.

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1st January 2023: The True Way Misison statement - Establishing and Equipping

Text: Ephesians 4:7-16

[7] But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift. [8] Therefore it says,

"When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men."

[9] (In saying, "He ascended," what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower regions, the earth? [10] He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.) [11] And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, [12] to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, [13] until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, [14] so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. [15] Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, [16] from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

Notes

- In Ephesians 2, there is the imagery of Christ as the cornerstone, the apostles and prophets as the foundation, and then we are built up on the prophets and the apostles. In our text, a similar thing happens, but now the imagery is that of a human body, made up of many parts but working together, and all these parts are built up in love and grow due to Christ giving the church apostles and teachers and prophets and evangelists.
- True way has a mission statement and a vision statement. The vision statement is what our church aspires to be, and the mission statement is what our church wants to do everyday to achieve that vision statement. The mission statement is that: compelled by the love of God, we engage the community, evangelise the lost, establish the faith of the saints, and equip the saints to do mission work.
- Firstly, let's talk about the motivation aspect in our mission statement, the "love of God that compels us". Here "love of God" can mean two things, either God's love for us or our love of God. For the former, we have 1 John 4:9 as an example. And for the latter, we have 1 John 2:4-5 as an example. The latter is also an echo to the great commandment. How are the former and latter connected? The former leads to the latter; we love because He first loved us (1 John 4:19). God loving us is the starting point to us loving God. This motivation is important; if the task is too difficult, the sacrifice too great, it is this motivation that keeps us going.
- Next, let's talk about the "mission" aspect of our mission statement. The rest of our mission statement is just an elaboration of the great commission (Matt 28:18-20). In the great commission text, we have the "going", the "make disciples", the "baptising" and the "teaching". The first two words above are related to the "engage and evangelise" part of our mission, and the next two words are related to "establish and equip" part of our mission.
- Lastly, let's talk about the means that are given to us to carry out the mission. The key here is Eph 4:7. As the Father sends the Spirit through the Son to us (in the economy of salvation),

the Spirit gives us all individual gifts that we use to build up the body of Christ, to build each other up in love.

- The method by which the body of Christ is built up is that God gives the Church prophets and the apostles, which are the foundation of the Church. Then God also gives the Church evangelists and pastors and teachers which build upon this foundation of the church, who preach and teach the rest of the saints to **equip** the saints.
- But what are the rest of the saints equipped to do? They are equipped to do the work of ministry. So it is not that all the work that God wants us to do is done by the evangelists and pastors, the majority of God's work is actually done by the rest of the saints! The pastors and evangelists are just the ones that equip the rest of the saints. It is as if the pastors and evangelists are just the blacksmiths and the war academy, but the actual army is the rest of the saints. But of course, we don't discount the work of the pastors and the teachers and the evangelists. These teaching ministries help us to be mature in Christ, which help us to discern truth from heresy for example, and ultimately help us to **speak the truth in love to one another**, which helps us to build up the body of Christ (the establishing and equipping part of our mission).
- Examples: after the sermon by the pastors, we (the congregation) can share with each other a lesson from the sermon. This is the best example of how the pastor equips us to build up the church. We can also listen to each other's conversion story, we can also pray for each other, we can also share how God has been working in our lives. If we are in a DG, we can prepare for the BS and participate. We can also remind each other, to rebuke each other in love. We can also serve one another using the gifts God has given us, we can welcome each other and love each other.
- We should not come to church expecting to be served, with a consumer mindset. That leads to much complaining. But we should come to church as builders, as establishers, so we will want to solve problems in Church when they arise (which they will)!
- Conclusion: motivation → mission → means → method. And what is the goal? The goal is in v13-15 of our text, and basically it is to make more people members of the Church and make each member of the Church more like Jesus.

8th January 2023: The True Way Misison statement - Engaging and Evangelising

Text: 2 Corinthians 5:10-21

[10] For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.

[11] Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade others. But what we are is known to God, and I hope it is known also to your conscience. [12] We are not commending ourselves to you again but giving you cause to boast about us, so that you may be able to answer those who boast about outward appearance and not about what is in the heart. [13] For if we are beside ourselves, it is for God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you. [14] For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; [15] and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised.

[16] From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard him thus no longer. [17] Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. [18] All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; [19] that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. [20] Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. [21] For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Notes

- As per last week, we are equipped by the pastors and the teachers to do the work of ministry. And part of the work of ministry is the *ministry of reconciliation*, which is the key theme in today's text (the word reconciliation appears like 5 times).
- The purpose of engaging and evangelising those who are not Christians yet is so that we can help them be reconciled with God.
- In this ministry of reconciliation, the **message** of reconciliation is key. And the key message is found in v21 of our text, which can be paraphrased as: "For God made CHrist, who never sinned, to be the offering for oursin, so that we could be made right with God through Christ". The ministry of reconciliation implies that that is something that needs reconciliation, and that something is sin; because of the Fall, all of us are born with sinful human natures and are by nature enemies of God, unless God reconciles us to himself. And God has extended this offer of reconciliation through the death of His Son for our sins.
- After we have been reconciled, we have a new **master**. In the past while we were sinners, we lived for ourselves. We were our own master. Now, God is our master, and we are to live for Christ rather than for ourselves. If our Master then has given us the ministry of reconciliation, shouldn't we take this task seriously? This ministry of reconciliation is difficult. We will be rejected, and we will get hurt. But we must still do it. When Jesus was on earth, He was similarly rejected by those He was sent to; we should similarly expect rejection.

- What compels us to live for Christ rather than for ourselves? What is our **motivation** for doing this ministry of reconciliation despite how difficult it is? The motivation is the love of Christ! In fact, when we love Jesus, we will be motivated to love other people too. And the best way to love another person is to tell the person about the message of Jesus. This is the primary motivation.
- Another secondary motivation though is that at the end of our lives, we all have to appear before the judgment seat of Christ. This judgment is not for our salvation, but to determine our reward. In short, the secondary motivation here is the fear of the Lord. Of course, this secondary motivation is related to the primary motivation; the fear of the Lord is related to the love of the Lord!
- As ambassadors of Christ, we are like high ranking diplomats sent to a foreign country. We are in the world but not of the world; as diplomats, our citizenship is in the Kingdom of heaven. Hence, as ambassadors of the Kingdom of heaven, we are to live our Kingdom values, to make the Kingdom of God an attractive place to others.
- Now, being an ambassador means that the model of ministry is “incarnational”. Just like how diplomats are more useful if they go out of the embassy and talk to others, we are more useful if we go out into the world to live among the world and serve them. Our service is part of how we *engage* the lost, and this engagement is the stepping stone to *evangelism*.
- In True Way, we have organised ministries like the Tuition ministry, the Ukelele ministry, etc. These are opportunities for us to engage and evangelise. But apart from these organised ministries, we can also be ambassadors wherever God places us in our lives. We should always be praying for and on the lookout for opportunities for spiritual conversations with whoever God brings into our lives. We can have these spiritual conversations in an impromptu manner with whoever crosses our paths, but we should also have these spiritual conversations in a more intentional manner. Being intentional would mean things like having a list of people that we want to engage, and then constantly reaching out to them in an intentional manner.
- Closing remarks:
 - What if people are not interested? Ans: continue to be their friend! Don't make them feel like you have an ulterior motive, that you only want to share the gospel with them. Let us be genuinely interested in our lives and let us love them truly.
 - What if we don't feel adequate? For example, what if we feel that we are not good at explaining the gospel, or what if we feel that we don't know how to direct the conversations to spiritual conversations? Ans: this is where the “equipping and establishing” comes in. There are programmes in church that equip us to do stuff. Or in a less formal setting, we can ask other more experienced Christians to help us!
 - What if we don't see any results? Ans: don't measure our results by how many people we bring to Christ, but measure our results by how much we can **show** and **share**. As long as we are effective in **showing** the gospel through how we live, and as long as we are effective in **sharing** the gospel through the conversations that we have, we can consider ourselves to have had good results.

15th Jan 2023: True Way Vision statement

Text: Ephesians 3:14-21

[14] For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, [15] from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, [16] that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, [17] so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, [18] may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, [19] and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

[20] Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, [21] to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

Notes

- The understanding of TWPC is this: if we are faithful in our mission, we will be able to reach our mark, i.e to achieve our vision. Church's new vision statement: to be like Jesus, by the power of His Spirit, for the glory of God.
- To be like Jesus means to be like Jesus in His being (His character) and in His actions. For the former, our text says that the church is to be rooted and grounded in love. To be rooted and grounded in love implies that we will be growing in love (a plant is rooted and grounded to grow). Growing in love makes us more like Jesus, since God is love.
- How to grow in love? Through service!
 1. The one being served experiences God's love.
 2. The one who is serving experiences God's love.
 3. The one who is serving while being stretched grows in love. Serving is hard, and we can only serve by depending on the Spirit. So when we serve more, we depend more on the Spirit and we grow in love.
 4. Lastly, we can all share how we have experienced God's love. That's why the text says that when we understand God's love, we have to do so with "all the saints". Understanding God's love is a group effort.
- The end goal in this text is this: "to be filled with all the fullness of God"
- To be like Jesus also means to grow to be like Jesus in his doing. Tangibly, this looks like: When we carry out the mission of pursuing the 4Es (John 20:21, Matthew 28:19).
- We are not doing all the above alone though, we are doing the above by the power of His Spirit. Jesus Christ is in our midst, as per Matthew 28:20. Jesus dwells with us through the person of the Spirit in us. Jesus is also with the church, Rev. 2:1. From our text, we see this concept of the Spirit helping us through verses like v16 and v20.
- Prayer is what helps us to rely on the Spirit working through us.
- Fell asleep from here onwards...had too little sleep the previous night...

22nd Jan 2023: The worship of the creator

Text:

[1] After this I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven! And the first voice, which I had heard speaking to me like a trumpet, said, "Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this." [2] At once I was in the Spirit, and behold, a throne stood in heaven, with one seated on the throne. [3] And he who sat there had the appearance of jasper and carnelian, and around the throne was a rainbow that had the appearance of an emerald. [4] Around the throne were twenty-four thrones, and seated on the thrones were twenty-four elders, clothed in white garments, with golden crowns on their heads. [5] From the throne came flashes of lightning, and rumblings and peals of thunder, and before the throne were burning seven torches of fire, which are the seven spirits of God, [6] and before the throne there was as it were a sea of glass, like crystal.

And around the throne, on each side of the throne, are four living creatures, full of eyes in front and behind: [7] the first living creature like a lion, the second living creature like an ox, the third living creature with the face of a man, and the fourth living creature like an eagle in flight. [8] And the four living creatures, each of them with six wings, are full of eyes all around and within, and day and night they never cease to say,

"Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!"

[9] And whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to him who is seated on the throne, who lives forever and ever, [10] the twenty-four elders fall down before him who is seated on the throne and worship him who lives forever and ever. They cast their crowns before the throne, saying,

[11] "Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created."

Notes

- Chapter 4 opens with "after this", hence we know chapter 4 marks a new point in the book of Revelation. Also, there is a change in setting; chapters 1-3 have the setting of the island of Patmos. Now in chapter 4, John is "spirited away" into the heavenly throne room. John is seeing a vision of God's heavenly throne room generated by the Holy Spirit.
- Chapters 4-5 are meant to be one unit, and they are the basis of what happens in the rest of the book (much like how the vision of the Son of Man is the basis of chapters 1-3).
- Chapter 4 is purely descriptive. So, what does this text tell its readers? Instead of trying to tell us something, chapter 4 is trying to show us something. And what chapter 4 is showing us evokes a certain response from us. Chapter 4 shows us the glory of God in display, so that we can respond in true worship. The Christians of John's day need to see God's glory, because they were either under persecution or being tempted by the lures of the world. They need to be reminded that God is worthy of worship and hence they should persevere in their faith despite persecution or temptations.
- For us, our world today is highly volatile. Many things can change very quickly. An example was the covid-19 pandemic. This leads to us having fear and anxiety, because despite our best attempts to control our future, we can't. For us, we need a vision of God that is majestic so as to remind us that God is in control and that we can continue trusting in God. The glorious

vision of God in chapter 4 compels us to worship God and hence trust God with our future, since true worship leads to trust.

- John's description in chapter 4 is less like a photograph of heaven, and more like a surrealist painting of heaven. I.e, it is not literal. We know this is not literal because John describes God the Father as a human figure sitting on the throne, but theologically, we know God is Spirit. If we try to take John's description literally, instead of trying to see what the description points to, we will be missing the point.
- The images that John describes in chapter 4 are very familiar to his first century Christian audience (intertextuality!).
 - First of all, John sees only one mega throne. What this is trying to say is that there is only one God, something that harks back to the shema.
 - Next of all, John sees the throne made of jasper and carnelian, both precious stones. These stones emphasise that God is glorious.
 - Next of all, John sees a rainbow that has the appearance of emerald. The rainbow could be a reference to the Noahic covenant, or it could be just something that elaborates that God is glorious. The reference to the Noahic covenant could be a reference to how in the later chapters, God will judge the earth yet preserve it through judgment.
 - Next of all, John sees the sea of glass, and lightning and thunder that issued from the throne. The lightning and thunder that issues forth from the throne reminds the readers of the Exodus, and it brings across the awesomeness and fearsomeness of God. While we might find lightning and thunder frightful, they are under God's control.
 - The seven torches around the throne refer to the seven spirits of God, and this is the same imagery that is found in Zechariah 4. Hence, the seven spirit of God refer to the sevenfold Spirit of God, the Holy Spirit (the number seven is just used to symbolise completeness).
 - The four living creatures are almost the same as those in Ezekiel. Possibly, the lion represents the greatest wild animal, the ox represents the greatest domesticated animal, the human represents man, and the eagle represents the greatest flying animal. Hence, this shows us that since even the greatest living creatures are made to continually praise God, hence all living creatures are to continually praise God. Nature is suffused with God's glory, and reflect God's glory. The marvellous aspect of nature in John's description are fitting to describe the glory of God.
 - Forming an outer ring around the mega throne are 24 elders around the throne. This is a re-enactment of an ancient court. In the gospel, Jesus said that Christians are the ones who would be given white robes, crowns, and will be seated on thrones. Hence, the 24 elders could be a reference to the people of God. And the number 24 is because the number 12 has always been used to refer to God's people. We have $24 = 12 + 12$, and the first 12 is a reference to the OT saints (12 tribes), and the other 12 is a reference to the NT saints (12 apostles). The 24 elders continually affirm that God is the one who creates everything and sustains everything, and hence God has control over the all creation.
- Now, to focus on the last point above, we note that we do not worship sheer power. Sheer power is not worthy of worship. Hitler was a powerful man, but people wouldn't spontaneously worship him. Hitler could only coerce people to worship him. In our text, we see the 24 elders spontaneously worshipping God. This means that there must be something apart from sheer power in God that is worthy to worship, and that something else would be

His goodness (see also chapter 5). From this chapter itself, we also see that God's goodness is displayed through His act of creation. God does not need to create; He exists as a triune community of love with His Son and His Spirit. Creation is not necessary to God, yet God created out of love so that we can enjoy the good creation that He created and so we can enjoy His goodness.

- Hence, our posture as Christians today must be the same as the 24 elders, we must worship God with true worship. And trust is necessary to true worship of God; hence despite all the anxiety and chaos of daily life, we must trust God instead of ourselves.
- Now, with all that has been said about the goodness of creation, we see that right now, the world is not as perfect as it should have been. That is the source of anxiety and chaos that we see in our lives. This is not because God is absent, but this is because of human sin (the fall). John's vision shows us that what we see today, raging seas and crashing waves, is not what things should be, or what things will be (compare raging seas with crystalline, still sea). In the new creation, all the chaos will come to an end, and we can truly see creation as the reflection of God's glory, as it should be.

29th January 2023: The Redeeming Lamb

Text: Revelation 5

[1] Then I saw in the right hand of him who was seated on the throne a scroll written within and on the back, sealed with seven seals. [2] And I saw a mighty angel proclaiming with a loud voice, "Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?" [3] And no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll or to look into it, [4] and I began to weep loudly because no one was found worthy to open the scroll or to look into it. [5] And one of the elders said to me, "Weep no more; behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered, so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals."

[6] And between the throne and the four living creatures and among the elders I saw a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain, with seven horns and with seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth. [7] And he went and took the scroll from the right hand of him who was seated on the throne. [8] And when he had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each holding a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. [9] And they sang a new song, saying,

"Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, [10] and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth."

[11] Then I looked, and I heard around the throne and the living creatures and the elders the voice of many angels, numbering myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands, [12] saying with a loud voice,

"Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!"

[13] And I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, saying,

"To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!"

[14] And the four living creatures said, "Amen!" and the elders fell down and worshiped.

Notes

- Three points for today: disappointment, solution, and response.
- Verse 4 tells us at the start, there was a scroll that was sealed completely (7 seals, 7 is the number of perfection). Unfortunately, nothing in creation (in heaven, on earth or under the earth) could open the scroll. This scroll was important because it contained God's plan of salvation and judgment. If nobody could open the scroll, then the plan of salvation and judgment could not be carried out. Hence, the weeping.
- We live in a world that is VUCA (volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous). We face many disappointments in life, from people, from unanswered prayers, etc. And that is because of sin and the fall of Man. Verse 4 tells us that creation cannot save itself. This means that

when we look to someone or something for hope, we can't look to someone or something in creation for hope. We must look outside.

- Verses 5-9 give us the solution to the problem in v4. An elder told John that \exists (there exists) someone who can break the seals and open the scroll, and that someone was the Lion from the tribe of Judah (c.f Gen 49:9-10), from the root of Jesse. Obviously, this someone was the long-promised messiah.
- But shockingly, when John turned around, he saw a lamb instead! The expectation of the Lion of Judah that was to come was fulfilled by the Lamb of God. Lion represents an animal that is strong, and Lamb represents an animal that is meek. A few questions that comes to mind:
 1. Who is the Slain Lamb? (Jesus as the fulfilment of the passover Lamb).
 2. Why is He worthy to open the scroll and the seals? (He has made all of us sinners a people for God through His blood. He has already triumphed over evil by taking on the world's evil on himself, dying and resurrecting.)
 3. How did He conquer? (Not with might and strength like the rulers of the world, but with the sacrificial meekness of a Lamb. This is mind-blowing! This Lamb is actually very powerful, with seven horns. This Lamb is also all knowing, with seven eyes. THis Lamb is very powerful, but He wins the victory through His sacrificial death and through His resurrection.)
 4. What does it mean for us today? (We are redeemed to be witnesses of Christ, to live like Christ. This means that for us Christians today, the way we win is the same way Christ wins; we win not by strength, military or political, but we win by self-sacrificial meekness that touches the hearts of others.)
- Also, Christ has redeemed people from every tribe and nation and tongue and tribe. This means that God, from the start, desires a multi-cultural body of Christ. There is unity in diversity, rather than uniformity. True worship focuses on something more important than ourselves, it is focused on Christ. All races stand in need of a saviour, and all races have the same savior. The savior is what unites us.
- Our savior Jesus died for our sins but He rose again, and He will come again to reign. When we follow Jesus' example, we don't need to be afraid of dying. For like Jesus, it is through death that we overcome, and like Jesus, God will raise us up to reign with Jesus through His Holy Spirit.
- Verses 8-14 is the response of all creation. They sang a new song, just like Psalm 98. When we know the magnitude of what Christ has done for us, and when we know that Christ can do what He was done only because of His worthiness, we will naturally worship and celebrate. The worship of the Lamb here in chapter 5 is the same as the worship of the one on the throne in chapter 4. Just like how the figure on the throne in chapter 4 is in the middle of all things, the Lamb is also in the middle of all things. Hence, Jesus, like the Father, is central to all creation. Hence, all creation's appropriate response to God is worship. The ultimate destiny of Mankind can only either be to join the eternal worship chorus, or to rebel against God.
- This vision of the throne room in chapters 4 and 5 is meant to give the seven churches a sight of the true spiritual realities.
 1. For churches like Smyrna and Philadelphia who are persecuted, this vision reminds them that Rome is not the centre of creation, but God is. Only God is worthy, and God has the power to destroy evil. Hence, this would encourage the Christians there to

continue holding on to their faith in the midst of suffering, because one day, their faith in God who is worthy will be vindicated.

2. For churches like Laodicea and Sardis, this vision reminds them that they must repent and turn back to God, because only God is worthy. If not, one day, they will be destroyed when the Lamb opens the scroll.

5th February 2023: To be Salt and Light

Text: Matthew 5:13-20

[13] “You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people’s feet.

[14] “You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. [15] Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. [16] In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

[17] “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. [18] For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished. [19] Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. [20] For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

Auxiliary texts:

1. Psalms 112:1-9

2. Isaiah 58

3. 1 Corinthians 2:1-12

Notes

- Today happens to be the fifth Sunday of Epiphany. Epiphany puts the focus on Jesus and what He revealed about himself in His identity and His mission.
- There are four passages that we will look at today. The text from Psalms tells us about how the righteous man behaves. The text from Isaiah tells us about how the righteous man seeks God. The text from 1 Corinthians 2 tells us about how Paul wants to know nothing except Christ crucified and His glory. The text from Matthew tells us how we are to live in light of this knowledge of Christ crucified and His glory.
- The whole idea is that the more we know about the ministry and identity of Jesus, in our lives we will be able to reflect Jesus.
- In the previous sermons, we saw that Jesus is God’s Son, God’s messiah, and God’s anointed Lamb. We also saw that in order to follow Jesus, we must encounter Jesus. Then we must know Jesus. Only then can we know how to follow Jesus. We also saw how Jesus called His first disciples; the disciples heard that they will become fishers of men, rather than fishermen. But in their idea, the thought of the disciples was that they will be the 12 rulers over the kingdom of God. Their assumption of the idea of the messiah was of one that would be a political figure to overthrow the Romans. That is why they asked to be on Jesus’ left and right. As we all know now, that is wrong lol.
- Hence, in today’s sermon, we see that to know Jesus, we must know Jesus through how Jesus fulfils the Law and the Prophets. We see that to know Jesus, we must know Christ crucified.

From v17-18 of the Matthew text, we see that Jesus comes not to abolish the Law and the Prophets, but to fulfil them. So we see how God's word in the OT will be fulfilled in the NT. So when the NT writers are referring to the Law and the Prophets, they are referring to the OT scriptures, since the NT hasn't been fully written yet.

- For example, for baptism and the Holy Communion elements, the bread and the cup, are the fulfilment of the Passover, and that baptism is the fulfilment of circumcision. It is not that circumcision has been abolished, but it is fulfilled in baptism. Baptism, just like circumcision, is an entrance into the covenant community of God. Likewise, it is not that the Passover has been abolished. Just like how the Passover commemorates the deliverance from Egypt through the slain lamb, the holy communion commemorates our deliverance from sin through Christ crucified. Similarly, the temple in the past prefigures how the Holy Spirit dwells in us to make us temples of God so that we can worship in Spirit and in Truth.
- For us today, what distinguishes us as God's people is that we are baptised, we partake of the holy communion, and we gather as God's people. When we do this, we are fulfilling the OT, and hence we can meet Jesus.
- With all of the context about how we can know Jesus through our fulfilment of the OT and through Christ crucified, we know how we can be salt and light in the world. To be salt and light is to be more than just "good people". Other religions also teach us to be "good people". To be salt and light, for us, is to be more like Jesus and to continue the ministry of Jesus. We are salt because we are to function as salt. Salt preserves food from preserving it from being spoilt. Similarly, if we know Jesus and are following Jesus, we fight against the corruption caused by sin in the world, both individually and corporately. Hence, as Jesus says, if we aren't functioning as salt, we will be thrown away. Just as how salt functions as salt, Christians are to function as Christians.
- Prior to the text in Matthew, we have the beatitudes. There are 8 beatitudes, first four telling us how we are to relate to God, and the next four telling us how we are to relate to others. Christians are to function according to these beatitudes, and hence we will be blessed. If as Christians we aren't functioning as how these beatitudes describe, we need to return to Jesus to rediscover who Jesus is and to recommit to follow Jesus.
- We are to be light in the sense of how we walk in the light, and in the sense of how we are to illumine the darkness in the world. The darkness is due to people's ignorance of Jesus, and due to hardness of heart due to sin. Through our lives and our words, we are to be the light to illumine that darkness. Hence, a new challenge for us in this new year; if there are people around us who aren't Christians, we are to illumine the darkness in their lives.
- To reiterate, to be salt and light is more than just doing good works. It is to live out our function and identity as Christians, to reveal Christ to the world. We are to function as salt and light, and if our functioning as salt and light is correct, then it cannot be hidden. The final goal of this is to glorify God.

12th February 2023: Seven seals

Text: Revelation 6:1-7, 8:1-6

Revelation 6:1-7

[1] Now I watched when the Lamb opened one of the seven seals, and I heard one of the four living creatures say with a voice like thunder, "Come!" [2] And I looked, and behold, a white horse! And its rider had a bow, and a crown was given to him, and he came out conquering, and to conquer.

[3] When he opened the second seal, I heard the second living creature say, "Come!" [4] And out came another horse, bright red. Its rider was permitted to take peace from the earth, so that people should slay one another, and he was given a great sword.

[5] When he opened the third seal, I heard the third living creature say, "Come!" And I looked, and behold, a black horse! And its rider had a pair of scales in his hand. [6] And I heard what seemed to be a voice in the midst of the four living creatures, saying, "A quart of wheat for a denarius, and three quarts of barley for a denarius, and do not harm the oil and wine!"

[7] When he opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature say, "Come!" [8] And I looked, and behold, a pale horse! And its rider's name was Death, and Hades followed him. And they were given authority over a fourth of the earth, to kill with sword and with famine and with pestilence and by wild beasts of the earth.

[9] When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the witness they had borne. [10] They cried out with a loud voice, "O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?" [11] Then they were each given a white robe and told to rest a little longer, until the number of their fellow servants and their brothers should be complete, who were to be killed as they themselves had been.

[12] When he opened the sixth seal, I looked, and behold, there was a great earthquake, and the sun became black as sackcloth, the full moon became like blood, [13] and the stars of the sky fell to the earth as the fig tree sheds its winter fruit when shaken by a gale. [14] The sky vanished like a scroll that is being rolled up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place. [15] Then the kings of the earth and the great ones and the generals and the rich and the powerful, and everyone, slave and free, hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains, [16] calling to the mountains and rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who is seated on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb, [17] for the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?"

Revelation 8:1-6

[1] When the Lamb opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour. [2] Then I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and seven trumpets were given to them. [3] And another angel came and stood at the altar with a golden censer, and he was given much incense to offer with the prayers of all the saints on the golden altar before the throne, [4] and the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, rose before God from the hand of the angel. [5] Then the angel took the censer and filled it with fire from the altar and threw it on the earth, and there were peals of thunder, rumblings, flashes of lightning, and an earthquake.

[6] Now the seven angels who had the seven trumpets prepared to blow them.

Notes

- A quick question that might arise after this passage: what is going on? Why is there so much destruction? To answer this, we must first go back to chapter 5. In chapter 5 and 6, we see that nobody was worthy to open the scroll, except the Lamb that was slain. When initially John saw that nobody could open the scroll, he wept. He wept because that scroll was very important; if nobody could open the scroll, then God's plan on earth cannot be fulfilled. And God's plan is to bring in His Kingdom on the earth.
- Three points for today: what are God's priorities in implementing His plan? What is the process by which the plan is to be implemented? And who are the participants in bringing in God's plan?
- First point: what are God's priorities? John was taken up to heaven to see what is to come. But before God showed John what is to come, John had to see the glorious vision of God in chapter 4 and 5. From there, we see that one of God's priority is to be known as the only one true God, and to consequently to eliminate idolatry on earth. Another of God's priority is to be known as the one Lord. When we worship the one true God, not only do we say that God is the creator, we say that God is the one Lord over all. This is depicted by the throne of God in the centre. What are the priorities of the Lamb? First of all, the Lamb's priority is to save us from idolatry. To summarise, when God brings in His plan, His priorities is to be known as one creator God, one Lord, and through the Lamb, one saviour.
- The next point: what is the process? Clearly, there are still idolators on earth and there will still be idolators on earth. Hence, part of the process of bringing in His plan includes judgment. We see that in these seven seals, we can split the judgment into two parts; God's passive judgement in seals 1-4, and God's active judgement in seals 5-7. Passive judgment refers to God giving people up to the consequences of their sins and to their subsequent hardness of hearts. This is best explained in Romans 1, "God gave them up to their passions...". Theologically, it is God withholding His restraining grace on sinners and letting sinners do what they like.
- For example, the first seal depicts how people would give in to their innate desire to conquer and for authority. The second seal depicts how people would die because of this warfare that is a consequence of people's desire to conquer. The third seal depicts how there would be hyper-inflation. A denarius is a labourer's daily wage, and ordinarily, that would be able for him to feed his family. However, after the third seal, there would be famine due to the war and now, a labourer can only afford a quart of wheat. From ancient calculations (c.f Heroditus), we know that a quart of wheat is enough only to feed one single person. I.e, a labourer can no longer feed his family, but only himself! Barley is cheaper, and hence the labourer can buy three quarts. The fourth seal depicts how there would be much death due to the first three seals.
- The sixth seal depicts God's active judgement. This where God directly intervenes to actively judge sinners. And this is depicted as something very fierce.
- Hence, we see that judgment is part of God's process for bringing in His kingdom. In today's world, we don't like to talk about God as judge. Yet we as a society know that we need judges (and hence we have a judiciary). And yet we as a society balk when there is injustice, for example when a criminal gets away due to a loophole in our human justice system etc. So in a sense, we as humans all crave for some sort of final justice so that those who got away from

the human justice system will eventually be held accountable. So why do people hate the idea of God as judge despite them all wanting just judgement? This is because they don't like what God is judging. People all want to think that they are righteous and beyond judgment, and they don't like the idea that they too are so bad as to warrant God's judgment! This is why we need the gospel of the Lord Jesus to convict the world of sin.

- The last point: the participants. Here, we look at seals 5 and 7. Seal 5 tells us why God has to judge the world. Not only do the people of the world want to be king and rulers and hence unleash a chain of bad consequences on the world, they also want to persecute the remnant who actually speak out for justice. The remnant are here are those who are faithful in their witness to God's word. Here, we see that while God gives the world up to their sinful passions through His act of passive judgement, He also leaves a remnant on earth to speak His truth. So in this sense, we are the participants of God's judgment in the sense that we participate by witnessing to God's Word and His justice, even if we might lose our lives in the process. Also, seal 5 also shows us that God has His own timeline. While sometimes we want God to act immediately to redress our injustice, we must realise that God has His own timeline.
- Seal 7 is interesting because it is quite anti-climatic. Seal 6 leads to so much crying and groaning from the peoples of the earth, yet seal 7 leads to silence. If we look at the sequel, we see that after the seventh seal, there are seven trumpets and seven bowls. So we must think of the seven trumpets and the seven bowls as part of the seventh seal. The silence in a sense, is meant for the angels to prepare (see chapter 8 verse 6) and for prayers. In chapter 8 verse 3, we see the angel taking the incense which represents the prayers of the saints. And when the angel pours the prayers of the saints on the earth, we see "peals of thunder, rumblings, flashes of lightning, and an earthquake". These are the same things that appear after the end of the trumpet series, and after the end of the bowl series.
- God did not just save us, He co-opted us as workers in His harvest field. When God brings in His kingdom, He could have done it alone, but He chose to do it through us. The seventh seal reminds of this; God's kingdom will come, God's righteous judgment will come to right the world, through the prayers of the saints. The prayers of the saints comes as the climax of the seal series, which reminds us how important our prayers are. It is God's desire that in our prayer, we resonate with God's heartbeat. In our prayer, our will should be conformed to God's will, so that we want to will the same thing God wills.
- We participate in God's process of bringing in the Kingdom through our prayers for God's righteousness to be revealed and for His justice to be done. God is pleased to work through our prayers. We participate in God's process of bringing in the Kingdom through our witnessing for God's Word and perhaps losing our lives in the process. Witnessing for God's Word mean putting God's priorities as our priorities. The fact that God uses our work and prayers in His process of bringing in His kingdom is a good reminder for us that our work for Him is not futile, and in fact is very important. So we can take heart and be courageous, joyful and willing witnesses for God.
- After the sixth seal, we see the kings of the earth trying to flee from God. That is futile, as we can see from Psalm 139. What they should have done instead is to flee to God. It is counter-intuitive, but it is true.

19 February 2023: Who can stand?

Text: Revelation 7:1-17

[1] After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth, that no wind might blow on earth or sea or against any tree. [2] Then I saw another angel ascending from the rising of the sun, with the seal of the living God, and he called with a loud voice to the four angels who had been given power to harm earth and sea, [3] saying, "Do not harm the earth or the sea or the trees, until we have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads." [4] And I heard the number of the sealed, 144,000, sealed from every tribe of the sons of Israel:

[5] 12,000 from the tribe of Judah were sealed, 12,000 from the tribe of Reuben, 12,000 from the tribe of Gad, [6] 12,000 from the tribe of Asher, 12,000 from the tribe of Naphtali, 12,000 from the tribe of Manasseh, [7] 12,000 from the tribe of Simeon, 12,000 from the tribe of Levi, 12,000 from the tribe of Issachar, [8] 12,000 from the tribe of Zebulun, 12,000 from the tribe of Joseph, 12,000 from the tribe of Benjamin were sealed.

[9] After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, [10] and crying out with a loud voice, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!" [11] And all the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, [12] saying, "Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen."

[13] Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, "Who are these, clothed in white robes, and from where have they come?" [14] I said to him, "Sir, you know." And he said to me, "These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

[15] "Therefore they are before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will shelter them with his presence. [16] They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any scorching heat. [17] For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of living water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."

Notes

- Last week, we looked at the breaking of the seven seals on the scroll by the Lamb, which brings forth the judgment of God on the idolatrous and the sinful world. But right after the seventh seal is broken, there is an interlude. The interlude here focuses on God's people.
- When the sixth seal was broken, there was a great earthquake, a great flood, etc. In short, it was a cosmic disaster. All the kings of the world, all the slave and the free, went to hide in the caves to try to hide from the wrath of the Lamb.
- Who can stand? When the wrath of God is poured out in judgment on this idolatrous and wicked world. The answer, from our text, is:
 1. The servants of God who are sealed (v3)
 2. The 144000 who are sealed (v4-8)

3. The great multitude from every nation (v9-10)

These groups of people all refer to Christians of all ages, the universal Church.

- Verse one of this chapter starts with “after this”. The “after this” shouldn’t be taken to mean chronological order, but it could mean a different view of the same event. I.e, it just signals a change of scene, nothing to do with chronology. Recall that the four horseman in the previous chapter is a throwback to Zechariah 6:1-5. And in Zechariah 6:1-5, the four horsemen are going out to the four winds of heaven. Hence, if we identify the four horsemen from chapter 6 with the four angels in this chapter, the fact that the angels are still holding back the winds means that the judgment hasn’t started yet.
- Now, when we identify the 144000 with the Church, then we are saying that the Church is the true Israel (c.f Romans 9-11). Also, when we identify the 144000 with the Church, then we are interpreting the number symbolically. 12 has always been a number used for the people of God, e.g 12 apostles or 12 tribes of Israel. Hence, $12 \times 12 = 144$ represent the entirety of the redeemed church, then 144×1000 represent a great multitude.
- Now, when John **hears** about the declaration of the sealing of this 144000 by God, he **looked** and he saw a great multitude. What John hears is the declaration of this total, what he sees is a great multitude. This is a throwback to chapter 5, where John **heard** about the Lion of the tribe of Judah but He saw a Lamb. Just like how in that case we identify the lion with the lamb, we should also identify here the 144000 with the multitude.
- The great multitude is said to come out of the great tribulation. This great tribulation refers not to a specific point in time, but it refers to the entire church age. As Jesus said, in this world we will have trouble. The great tribulation is already upon us, and it will only get more intense as we get closer toward Christ’s second coming. Yet all of us who are sealed will make it out of this great tribulation, even if not physically, then surely spiritually.
- Now, how are we sealed? Similarly to our scripture reading of Ezekiel 9, we are sealed on our foreheads. And similar to the reading of Ezekiel 9, the mark is to be given to God’s faithful only. That is from the OT. From the NT, we see that we are sealed by the Holy Spirit (c.f 2 Corinthians 1:21-22, Ephesians 1:13-14). Later on, we will see that the beast will also give his followers a mark on their forehead, to parody this sealing that faithful believers in God will get.
- What is the consequence of this sealing that we have received? Just like how a seal identifies an object belongs to, us being sealed by the Holy Spirit tells us that we belong to God. When we are sealed, we will not be harmed by the calamities brought about by the horsemen/winds. It does not mean we will not suffer (we will still suffer sickness and death and poverty and etc), but through this suffering, our faith will be protected and preserved. As the Heidelberg Catechism puts it, “all things are subservient to our salvation”. Essentially, those who are sealed will persevere to the end in their faith. No matter how bad things get, God will always give us the way out and will give us the faith.
- Now, what is the outward sign and seal of this reality that we have been sealed with the Holy Spirit? It is Holy Baptism! In Acts, we see that conversion and baptism and being sealed by the Spirit all happen at the same time (Acts 2:38). And as people who are sealed by the Spirit grow in their faith, what would characterise them? As Jesus said, “The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.” Being born of the Spirit is mysterious, but the effects of being born of the Spirit is obvious and can be felt (like wind). The marks of being sealed are the Spirit are, according to Jonathan Edwards:

1. Esteem Jesus as Son of God and Saviour
 2. Oppose the reign of Satan and turn from sin
 3. Have an increased interest in God's Word
 4. Have a good grasp of sound doctrine and a desire to defend it against error
 5. Demonstrate love
- So ya, who can stand? The sealed can stand before the throne of God forever.
 - The 144000 can also be more specifically identified with the Church militant, because they look like the census of fighting men from the book of Numbers. The Church militant is the Church on earth facing persecution and opposition, and once those who are in the Church militant pass from death into eternal life, they become part of the Church triumphant, which can be more specifically identified as the multitude in heaven.
 - And as we can see in v9-13, the multitude are seen to be wearing white robes (v9,13). This is because the blood of Jesus washes us clean from our sin. The multitude are also seen to wave palm branches (v9), which is a sign of triumph. This waving of palm branches is a throwback to the feast of tabernacles in the past, where the people praised God for the harvest that have come in.
 - The saints above sing "salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb". Our salvation is the will of the Father, the work of the Son, and the conviction of the Spirit, and hence they are truly worthy of our praise. But there is no reason to wait till heaven to sing this, since our salvation now on earth is as secure as the saints in heaven. The saints in heaven are "more happy, but not more secure".
 - Not only is our salvation secure, from the last part of the text, we can also look forward to God's protection. God will shelter us from the sun and from scorching heat, and we will be provided for such that the Lamb our shepherd will guide us to springs of living water. While this protection will be realised in its fullness in the New Creation, right now we already experience a foretaste of this. For example, David experienced something like this in Psalm 23.
 - This text today gives us many things to be excited about; salvation, sealing and security, provision, protection and presence. No wonder the heavenly hosts and the four living creatures and etc all bow down and marvel at God's wisdom and mercy, and sing "Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen."
 - In conclusion, who can stand in the day of God's wrath? All who have placed their trust in Jesus and have been sealed with the Holy Spirit. So if you haven't put your faith in Jesus yet, do not tarry any longer. We, the Church militant, belong to the 144000. Though we might have to face tribulation and persecution, we will hold fast to the end through the sealing of God's Spirit, and we will make it to the end as the Church triumphant. This should give us many reasons to worship God now, right now, right here. As the church in Singapore, we kinda face less calamities and less tribulations. But the Christians in other places face persecution, execution, natural disasters, famine, slander, etc. In Singapore, we should be grateful for God's mercies as we navigate not so much the outward persecution that the other Christians around the world face, but as we navigate the more subtle persecution. And we can have faith that we'll make it out safely, with God's help.