

Sermon Notes 2023

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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 fulfills 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.

19th 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 who 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.

26th February 2023: Seven Trumpets

Text: Revelation 8:1-9:21, 11:14-19

[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.

[7] The first angel blew his trumpet, and there followed hail and fire, mixed with blood, and these were thrown upon the earth. And a third of the earth was burned up, and a third of the trees were burned up, and all green grass was burned up.

[8] The second angel blew his trumpet, and something like a great mountain, burning with fire, was thrown into the sea, and a third of the sea became blood. [9] A third of the living creatures in the sea died, and a third of the ships were destroyed.

[10] The third angel blew his trumpet, and a great star fell from heaven, blazing like a torch, and it fell on a third of the rivers and on the springs of water. [11] The name of the star is Wormwood. A third of the waters became wormwood, and many people died from the water, because it had been made bitter.

[12] The fourth angel blew his trumpet, and a third of the sun was struck, and a third of the moon, and a third of the stars, so that a third of their light might be darkened, and a third of the day might be kept from shining, and likewise a third of the night.

[13] Then I looked, and I heard an eagle crying with a loud voice as it flew directly overhead, "Woe, woe, woe to those who dwell on the earth, at the blasts of the other trumpets that the three angels are about to blow!"

[1] And the fifth angel blew his trumpet, and I saw a star fallen from heaven to earth, and he was given the key to the shaft of the bottomless pit. [2] He opened the shaft of the bottomless pit, and from the shaft rose smoke like the smoke of a great furnace, and the sun and the air were darkened with the smoke from the shaft. [3] Then from the smoke came locusts on the earth, and they were given power like the power of scorpions of the earth. [4] They were told not to harm the grass of the earth or any green plant or any tree, but only those people who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads. [5] They were allowed to torment them for five months, but not to kill them, and their torment was like the torment of a scorpion when it stings someone. [6] And in those days people will seek death and will not find it. They will long to die, but death will flee from them.

[7] In appearance the locusts were like horses prepared for battle: on their heads were what looked like crowns of gold; their faces were like human faces, [8] their hair like women's hair, and their teeth like lions' teeth; [9] they had breastplates like breastplates of iron, and the noise of their wings was like the noise of many chariots with horses rushing into battle. [10] They have tails and stings like scorpions, and their power to hurt people for five months is in their tails. [11] They have as king over them the angel of

the bottomless pit. His name in Hebrew is Abaddon, and in Greek he is called Apollyon.

[12] The first woe has passed; behold, two woes are still to come.

[13] Then the sixth angel blew his trumpet, and I heard a voice from the four horns of the golden altar before God, [14] saying to the sixth angel who had the trumpet, "Release the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates." [15] So the four angels, who had been prepared for the hour, the day, the month, and the year, were released to kill a third of mankind. [16] The number of mounted troops was twice ten thousand times ten thousand; I heard their number. [17] And this is how I saw the horses in my vision and those who rode them: they wore breastplates the color of fire and of sapphire and of sulfur, and the heads of the horses were like lions' heads, and fire and smoke and sulfur came out of their mouths. [18] By these three plagues a third of mankind was killed, by the fire and smoke and sulfur coming out of their mouths. [19] For the power of the horses is in their mouths and in their tails, for their tails are like serpents with heads, and by means of them they wound.

[20] The rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands nor give up worshiping demons and idols of gold and silver and bronze and stone and wood, which cannot see or hear or walk, [21] nor did they repent of their murders or their sorceries or their sexual immorality or their thefts.

[14] The second woe has passed; behold, the third woe is soon to come.

[15] Then the seventh angel blew his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever." [16] And the twenty-four elders who sit on their thrones before God fell on their faces and worshiped God, [17] saying,

"We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty, who is and who was, for you have taken your great power and begun to reign. [18] The nations raged, but your wrath came, and the time for the dead to be judged, and for rewarding your servants, the prophets and saints, and those who fear your name, both small and great, and for destroying the destroyers of the earth."

[19] Then God's temple in heaven was opened, and the ark of his covenant was seen within his temple. There were flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, an earthquake, and heavy hail.

Notes

- What are the relationships between the seals, trumpets and bowls? Are they describing the same set of judgment in three different ways? Or are they describing different judgments? For our church, we shall take there to be three set of judgments that all end together with the vision around the throne. Like, the seven trumpets are part of the seventh seal, and the seven bowls are part of the seventh trumpets. And thus when the bowls end, the trumpets also end and hence the seals also end (see Figure 1).

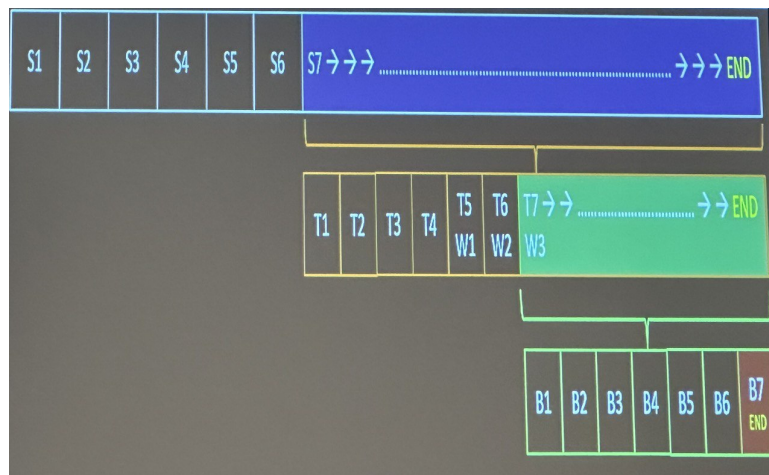


Figure 1: Relationship between the seven seals, seven trumpets and seven bowls.

- Trumpets had many uses in the OT. Trumpets, in Joel 2:1, announces the “day of the Lord”. Trumpets also in 1 Kings denote the crowning of a new king. Trumpets are also a call to bring together the people (Numbers 10:2-4), and to warn and to call to war (Numbers 10:9). Trumpets also were used in worship. So here, the trumpets serve to warn the people of the earth that a new king has been crowned, and then judgment (and war) is coming. For the people of the world, it is a call to repent. And for those who have been sealed, it is a call to worship God for His righteous judgment.
- The water turning into blood is a throwback to the ten plagues during the Exodus. Actually a lot of the trumpets are throwbacks to the ten plagues (quite clear in the first four trumpets).
- For us, we must remember that our prayers are heard by God, and they do rise like incense before God’s throne. Blessed are who seek for God’s righteousness, for they will be satisfied, as per the Beatitudes.
- The next three trumpets were described as three woes. For the fifth trumpet, we see that the key to the bottomless pit was given to the star fallen from heaven to earth. If we recall, Jesus has the keys to death and the grave. Hence, we know Jesus is still in control. Anyway, the locust plagues in the first woe is again a throwback to the Exodus. Also, the imagery of locusts come from Joel. The king of the locusts is called “Abaddon” or “Apollyon”. These locusts, unlike actual locusts, don’t destroy crops, but they were sent to torment (but not kill) those who weren’t sealed with the seal of God (c.f Revelation 7). For the sixth trumpet, we have death. This again is a throwback to the ten plagues in the Exodus event.
- Just like how there was an interlude after the sixth seal and before the seventh seal, there is also an interlude after the sixth trumpet and before the seventh trumpet. The interlude here is in chapter 10 and in the first half of chapter 11.
- Now, the scary thing is that after the sixth trumpet, even while God is judging, the unsealed people still alive still don’t repent. They are still committing their evil deeds. For us today, how should we respond to these six trumpets? As Hebrews says, “How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation”? We must keep watch of our soul and make sure that no root of bitterness springs up like Esau, so that on the day of the Lord, we may be found to be sealed.
- After the seventh trumpet was blown, we have a proclamation of victory and worship in heaven. Here, we see the ark of the covenant, which is a reminder of God’s presence with His people. Hence, we can be assured that if we are on Jesus’ side, we don’t need to be afraid of all

of these judgments. And then we also see lightings, rumblings, peals of thunder, earthquake and heavy hail, which are related to the prayers of the saints.

- In conclusion, today's sermon had three points:

1. Angels and trumpets
2. Effects of judgment
3. Declaration of victory

Just like an AED, if our hearts are dead today, hopefully today's message of judgment will wake us up and cause us to repent, lest we be found among the unsealed people on the day of judgment.

5th March 2023: The role of God's people

Text: Revelation 10:1-11, 11:1-13

[1] Then I saw another mighty angel coming down from heaven, wrapped in a cloud, with a rainbow over his head, and his face was like the sun, and his legs like pillars of fire. [2] He had a little scroll open in his hand. And he set his right foot on the sea, and his left foot on the land, [3] and called out with a loud voice, like a lion roaring. When he called out, the seven thunders sounded. [4] And when the seven thunders had sounded, I was about to write, but I heard a voice from heaven saying, "Seal up what the seven thunders have said, and do not write it down." [5] And the angel whom I saw standing on the sea and on the land raised his right hand to heaven [6] and swore by him who lives forever and ever, who created heaven and what is in it, the earth and what is in it, and the sea and what is in it, that there would be no more delay, [7] but that in the days of the trumpet call to be sounded by the seventh angel, the mystery of God would be fulfilled, just as he announced to his servants the prophets.

[8] Then the voice that I had heard from heaven spoke to me again, saying, "Go, take the scroll that is open in the hand of the angel who is standing on the sea and on the land." [9] So I went to the angel and told him to give me the little scroll. And he said to me, "Take and eat it; it will make your stomach bitter, but in your mouth it will be sweet as honey." [10] And I took the little scroll from the hand of the angel and ate it. It was sweet as honey in my mouth, but when I had eaten it my stomach was made bitter. [11] And I was told, "You must again prophesy about many peoples and nations and languages and kings."

[1] Then I was given a measuring rod like a staff, and I was told, "Rise and measure the temple of God and the altar and those who worship there, [2] but do not measure the court outside the temple; leave that out, for it is given over to the nations, and they will trample the holy city for forty-two months. [3] And I will grant authority to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy for 1,260 days, clothed in sackcloth."

[4] These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands that stand before the Lord of the earth. [5] And if anyone would harm them, fire pours from their mouth and consumes their foes. If anyone would harm them, this is how he is doomed to be killed. [6] They have the power to shut the sky, that no rain may fall during the days of their prophesying, and they have power over the waters to turn them into blood and to strike the earth with every kind of plague, as often as they desire. [7] And when they have finished their testimony, the beast that rises from the bottomless pit will make war on them and conquer them and kill them, [8] and their dead bodies will lie in the street of the great city that symbolically is called Sodom and Egypt, where their Lord was crucified. [9] For three and a half days some from the peoples and tribes and languages and nations will gaze at their dead bodies and refuse to let them be placed in a tomb, [10] and those who dwell on the earth will rejoice over them and make merry and exchange presents, because these two prophets had been a torment to those who dwell on the earth. [11] But after the three and a half days a breath of life from God entered them, and they stood up on their feet, and great fear fell on those who saw them. [12] Then they heard a loud voice from heaven saying to them, "Come up here!" And they went up to heaven in a cloud, and their enemies watched them. [13] And at that hour there was a great earthquake, and a tenth of the city fell. Seven thousand people were killed in the earthquake, and the rest were terrified and gave glory to the God of heaven.

Notes

- In chapter 7, we see an interlude between the sixth and seventh seal. Here, we also see an interlude between the sixth and seventh trumpet. First, chapter 10 starts with a vision of a glorious angel. The angel here reflects God's power and God's glory, and that would help us to remember God's acts of salvation and of God's faithfulness. First, we see that the angel here has a rainbow (throwback to Noahic covenant), the angel here also has legs like a pillar of fire (throwback to Sinai).
- The latter half of chapter 10 has a vision of John eating the little scroll. This is a throwback to the OT prophets like Ezekiel. This scroll eating is God commissioning the prophet as His speaker, because it is like the scroll contains the words God wants to say, and hence after eating the scroll, everything that the prophet says will be God's word. So here John is being commissioned to speak like the OT prophets of old. The sweet but bitter scroll here could be analogous to how the gospel message is sweet yet the experience of a Christian after accepting the gospel is often bitter (persecution, rejection by friends and family, etc). Like John and the prophets of old, we too have received God's word through His Spirit speaking to us through the Bible. And similarly, like John and the prophets of old, we must be a prophetic voice to the world around us, to tell them to repent and turn from their sins, and to turn to God, and that their sins will be fully forgiven in Christ if they do so.
- John's measuring of the temple symbolises God's commitment to preserve His church during tribulation (since a temple is just a symbol for God's people). The nations of Revelation 11 here who are trampling the outer court refer to non-Christians who despise God's people and profane what is holy. The two witnesses here refer to the Church's witness through the power of the Holy Spirit. The vision of the two witnesses here is a throwback to Zechariah 4 (not elaborated upon in the sermon). Cool quote: "we are all immortals until our work here is done". Until we have finished our work in witnessing for God, God will keep us safe and preserve us and give us the strength to do our work. Here, we see that the beast only kills the two witnesses after the two witnesses finished their testimony. After the church has finished her testimony, the beast temporarily overwhelms the church and then the people of the world rejoice over the fall of the church. But that is not the end, in the end, we see God raising up the two witnesses and bringing them up to heaven. In the end, we will be victorious, though the world persecute us.
- Three points for today:
 - **Remember God's faithfulness.**
 - **Evangelise to everyone.**
 - **Depend on the Holy Spirit, God will defend and protect His people.**

12th March 2023: Triad of Evil

Text: Revelation 12:1-13:18

[1] And a great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars. [2] She was pregnant and was crying out in birth pains and the agony of giving birth. [3] And another sign appeared in heaven: behold, a great red dragon, with seven heads and ten horns, and on his heads seven diadems. [4] His tail swept down a third of the stars of heaven and cast them to the earth. And the dragon stood before the woman who was about to give birth, so that when she bore her child he might devour it. [5] She gave birth to a male child, one who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron, but her child was caught up to God and to his throne, [6] and the woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, in which she is to be nourished for 1,260 days.

[7] Now war arose in heaven, Michael and his angels fighting against the dragon. And the dragon and his angels fought back, [8] but he was defeated, and there was no longer any place for them in heaven. [9] And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world—he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him. [10] And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, “Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God. [11] And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death. [12] Therefore, rejoice, O heavens and you who dwell in them! But woe to you, O earth and sea, for the devil has come down to you in great wrath, because he knows that his time is short!”

[13] And when the dragon saw that he had been thrown down to the earth, he pursued the woman who had given birth to the male child. [14] But the woman was given the two wings of the great eagle so that she might fly from the serpent into the wilderness, to the place where she is to be nourished for a time, and times, and half a time. [15] The serpent poured water like a river out of his mouth after the woman, to sweep her away with a flood. [16] But the earth came to the help of the woman, and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed the river that the dragon had poured from his mouth. [17] Then the dragon became furious with the woman and went off to make war on the rest of her offspring, on those who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus. And he stood on the sand of the sea.

[1] And I saw a beast rising out of the sea, with ten horns and seven heads, with ten diadems on its horns and blasphemous names on its heads. [2] And the beast that I saw was like a leopard; its feet were like a bear's, and its mouth was like a lion's mouth. And to it the dragon gave his power and his throne and great authority. [3] One of its heads seemed to have a mortal wound, but its mortal wound was healed, and the whole earth marveled as they followed the beast. [4] And they worshiped the dragon, for he had given his authority to the beast, and they worshiped the beast, saying, “Who is like the beast, and who can fight against it?”

[5] And the beast was given a mouth uttering haughty and blasphemous words, and it was allowed to exercise authority for forty-two months. [6] It opened its mouth to utter blasphemies against God, blaspheming his name and his dwelling, that is, those who dwell in heaven. [7] Also it was allowed to make war on the saints and to conquer them.

And authority was given it over every tribe and people and language and nation, [8] and all who dwell on earth will worship it, everyone whose name has not been written before the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who was slain. [9] If anyone has an ear, let him hear:

[10] If anyone is to be taken captive, to captivity he goes; if anyone is to be slain with the sword, with the sword must he be slain.

Here is a call for the endurance and faith of the saints.

[11] Then I saw another beast rising out of the earth. It had two horns like a lamb and it spoke like a dragon. [12] It exercises all the authority of the first beast in its presence, and makes the earth and its inhabitants worship the first beast, whose mortal wound was healed. [13] It performs great signs, even making fire come down from heaven to earth in front of people, [14] and by the signs that it is allowed to work in the presence of the beast it deceives those who dwell on earth, telling them to make an image for the beast that was wounded by the sword and yet lived. [15] And it was allowed to give breath to the image of the beast, so that the image of the beast might even speak and might cause those who would not worship the image of the beast to be slain. [16] Also it causes all, both small and great, both rich and poor, both free and slave, to be marked on the right hand or the forehead, [17] so that no one can buy or sell unless he has the mark, that is, the name of the beast or the number of its name. [18] This calls for wisdom: let the one who has understanding calculate the number of the beast, for it is the number of a man, and his number is 666.

Notes

- All the numbers and imagery here are symbols and should not be taken literally. However, the struggle between good and evil here are spiritual realities.
- First, the woman represents the community of the true Israel (those from the visible covenant community of God with true faith). Here, the twelve stars are like a throwback to Joseph's dream, and hence represent the twelve tribes of Israel. We know this because the woman's Son is Jesus. The woman doesn't need to be specifically identified with Mary, because while it is true that Mary was the one who gave birth to Jesus, it is also true that Jesus came out of Israel. The birth pains here then refer to the sufferings of the community of the true Israel. By the way, since the Church is the true Israel (c.f Romans 11), the woman can also be identified with the Church. And yes, the second character here is the woman's Son, who is Jesus. The third character here is about the dragon, who is the primordial evil. The dragon here has two subordinates, and as we will see in chapter 13, one is from the sea and one is from the land.
- Three points for today:
 - Rage of the dragon. The dragon wants to take out his rage against the woman and her Child because he lost a decisive battle.
 - Resemblance of the beast to the dragon and to what is real and good.
 - Refuge. God has provided a place of refuge for the woman (who is a representation of the elect from God's visible covenant community).
- The rage of the dragon; one interpretation is that the dragon tried to get rid of Jesus via King Herod and etc etc, but he failed. In fact, he was defeated by the "blood of the lamb" (v11). I.e, Jesus death on the cross and his subsequent resurrection and exaltation defeated the beast. So after his failure to kill the woman's Son, he tried instead to persecute the woman. I.e, the

dragon now persecutes the true people of God. The dragon here is said to have swept down a third of the stars of heaven, which could be bad angels or just people who have pledged their allegiance to the dragon. The imagery of the flood here represents evil and chaos, which the dragon uses to persecute the people of God.

- The dragon does not act alone though; the dragon has two lieutenants, the beast from the sea and the beast from the land. The first beast from the sea is a throwback to Daniel 7, and the first beast has a big resemblance to the dragon, since the dragon gave his authority to the beast. The first beast also persecuted the people of God just like what the dragon did.
- The beast from the sea also copies what God does in Revelation 7 to mark his followers with a mark. Only those who have been marked by the first beast can buy and sell things. That is a cheap imitation of what God did. But in the end, it will only be shown to be a cheap imitation. This sea beast is also able to perform signs like healing and things like that, which is how he is able to scam the people of the world to believe him.
- The sea beast is to be represented with a man. I.e, in verse 18 of chapter 13, the number 6 is to be identified with a man, and the sea beast has the number 666. Hence, the sea beast is to be identified with a very outstanding man. The sea beast here is then the Antichrist (with a big A). In the past, popular interpretations of this man were the Roman emperors, and etc. We don't need to fret too hard about the specific identity of this Antichrist, but we just need to be aware that even now, the spirit of the Antichrist is at work through the mini antichrists (small A) that are already now at work as John says in 1 John.
- The dragon also has a beast from the land. The land beast is like the subordinate to the sea beast, and can hence be identified with a false prophet. The land beast here promotes worship of the sea beast, and the land beast here exercises the authority of the sea beast. The land beast also creates images of the sea beast and causes people to worship the sea beast. The land beast is the purveyor of all false teaching. Even now, we have such people in our churches who preach false gospels.
- Now, as the people of God, how can we stand in the presence of this triad of evil (Dragon, sea beast, land beast). Just as the woman fled into the wilderness (throwback to Israel's exodus journey) where she has a place prepared by God, we must do the same when there is danger. Whenever we feel tempted or persecuted, we must flee to God where God will protect us. We note that the woman is to be nourished for 1260 days, and we note also that the beast was allowed to exercise authority for 42 months (1260 days). That is, for as long as the beast is persecuting us, God will be our refuge.
- In short, though we know that evil will come, we can have confidence that God will protect us when we flee to Him. And we must also be discerning to discern good from evil, because the evil that the beast brings will look a lot like good. We should not be too awed by false teachers who might be exceptional men, full of charisma, but we should listen to faithful teachers who might not be as exceptional.

19th March 2023: Truth about Judgment and Salvation

Text: Revelation 14:1-20

[1] Then I looked, and behold, on Mount Zion stood the Lamb, and with him 144,000 who had his name and his Father's name written on their foreheads. [2] And I heard a voice from heaven like the roar of many waters and like the sound of loud thunder. The voice I heard was like the sound of harpists playing on their harps, [3] and they were singing a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and before the elders. No one could learn that song except the 144,000 who had been redeemed from the earth. [4] It is these who have not defiled themselves with women, for they are virgins. It is these who follow the Lamb wherever he goes. These have been redeemed from mankind as firstfruits for God and the Lamb, [5] and in their mouth no lie was found, for they are blameless.

[6] Then I saw another angel flying directly overhead, with an eternal gospel to proclaim to those who dwell on earth, to every nation and tribe and language and people. [7] And he said with a loud voice, "Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come, and worship him who made heaven and earth, the sea and the springs of water."

[8] Another angel, a second, followed, saying, "Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great, she who made all nations drink the wine of the passion of her sexual immorality."

[9] And another angel, a third, followed them, saying with a loud voice, "If anyone worships the beast and its image and receives a mark on his forehead or on his hand, [10] he also will drink the wine of God's wrath, poured full strength into the cup of his anger, and he will be tormented with fire and sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. [11] And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever, and they have no rest, day or night, these worshipers of the beast and its image, and whoever receives the mark of its name."

[12] Here is a call for the endurance of the saints, those who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus.

[13] And I heard a voice from heaven saying, "Write this: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on." "Blessed indeed," says the Spirit, "that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow them!"

[14] Then I looked, and behold, a white cloud, and seated on the cloud one like a son of man, with a golden crown on his head, and a sharp sickle in his hand. [15] And another angel came out of the temple, calling with a loud voice to him who sat on the cloud, "Put in your sickle, and reap, for the hour to reap has come, for the harvest of the earth is fully ripe." [16] So he who sat on the cloud swung his sickle across the earth, and the earth was reaped.

[17] Then another angel came out of the temple in heaven, and he too had a sharp sickle. [18] And another angel came out from the altar, the angel who has authority over the fire, and he called with a loud voice to the one who had the sharp sickle, "Put in your sickle and gather the clusters from the vine of the earth, for its grapes are ripe." [19] So the angel swung his sickle across the earth and gathered the grape harvest of the earth and threw it into the great winepress of the wrath of God. [20] And the winepress was trodden outside the city, and blood flowed from the winepress, as high as a horse's bridle, for 1,600 stadia.

Notes

- This chapter gives us a preview of the end times. And this is to encourage the believers in the battle against the evil one.
- Three points today:
 - Encouragement for the redeemed.
 - The message.
 - Judgment of the rebels.
- From the first point, we see the 144000 are the ones who are standing with Mt Zion with the Lamb, they sing a new song, they are not defiled, and bear the mark/seal of the Lamb, and they are followers of the Lamb. These 144000 are also singing a song that nobody else could learn. This makes sense because its like the world doesn't understand the gospel message, it is foolishness to the Jew and the Greek.
- These 144000 are a symbol for the people of God, and if we recall from the previous sermon, if we take the 144000 to be the Church militant on earth (i.e the Church on earth who is still fighting against the powers of darkness), then the phraseology "have not defiled themselves with women" is a throwback to how in the OT the fighting men were not supposed to have relations with women. Hence, when this phraseology is applied to the 144000, then it means that the 144000 are both pure and ready for war. But even though the 144000 are preparing for war with evil, they are also kept secure by God and the Lamb, through the seal that is put on them. These 144000 are also the firstfruits for God and the Lamb, which is a reference to how they have been dedicated to God.
- From the second point, the good news here (gospel) is about how God's kingdom is now established for all eternity, and that judgment is coming on the earthly sinful kingdoms who carry out injustice (and this is all earthly kingdoms btw). This would be good news to those who await the coming of God and hence are oppressed for that.
- But for those who are part of the earthly sinful kingdoms, of which Babylon is an archetype, this gospel is bad news (unless they repent). The news is this; because of God's judgment and the establishment of His Kingdom, Babylon is fallen. Babylon is the archetype for all earthful sinful kingdoms who don't worship God. And when the kingdom doesn't worship God, the kingdom will have all sorts of thefts, sexual immorality, oppression, etc. The judgment on Babylon is this; they will be tormented forever, and they will have no rest.
- From the third point, we see that there are two types of harvests. These two harvests occur when Jesus comes again (v14). The first harvest is a gathering of the saints. On the other hand, the second harvest is much more brutal. The image of the winepress here in the second harvest signifies how the second harvest is for those who rebel against God, because the wicked will be pulverised and trampled on. We can also see this from how the winepress is outside the city. This judgment on the rebels is because of the evil that they do due to their rebellion against God.
- The message of this chapter is this; for the redeemed, it is to endure because God will not forsake them (they are sealed by God and by Jesus) even when the challenges of life come due to persecution and the brokenness of the world and etc. The endurance here would be to continue to trust in God and to obey God and to keep His commandments. And we do this not with our own strength, but by a continued reliance on God's Spirit, since we are sealed with the Spirit of God (c.f Romans 8).

REDEEMED	REBELS
Bear the mark of the Lamb	Bear the mark of the Beast
Sing praises to God, their praises rise	Smoke rises from their torment
Eternal Rest	Eternal Torment
Mt Zion	Sea
Without Blemish	Defiled
Followers of the Lamb	Followers of the Beast
Speak truth	Speak lies
Gathered in the city	Trampled outside the city

Figure 1: Summary of the differences between the redeemed and the rebels

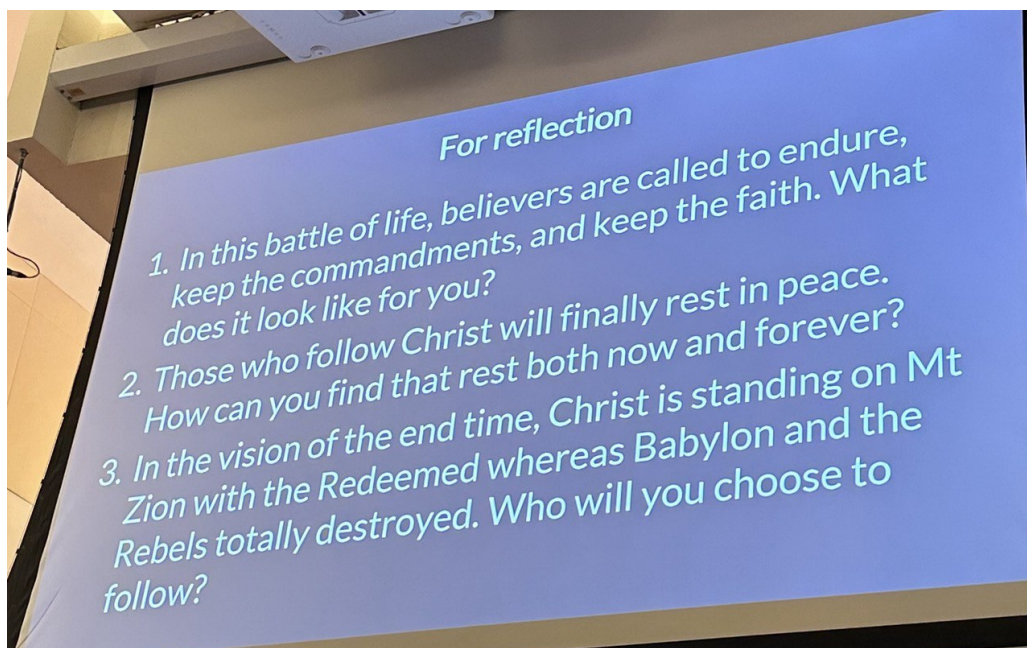


Figure 2: Reflection questions for this sermon

26th March 2023: Seven bowls of God's wrath

Text: Revelation 15,16

[1] Then I saw another sign in heaven, great and amazing, seven angels with seven plagues, which are the last, for with them the wrath of God is finished.

[2] And I saw what appeared to be a sea of glass mingled with fire—and also those who had conquered the beast and its image and the number of its name, standing beside the sea of glass with harps of God in their hands. [3] And they sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying,

“Great and amazing are your deeds, O Lord God the Almighty! Just and true are your ways, O King of the nations! [4] Who will not fear, O Lord, and glorify your name? For you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship you, for your righteous acts have been revealed.”

[5] After this I looked, and the sanctuary of the tent of witness in heaven was opened, [6] and out of the sanctuary came the seven angels with the seven plagues, clothed in pure, bright linen, with golden sashes around their chests. [7] And one of the four living creatures gave to the seven angels seven golden bowls full of the wrath of God who lives forever and ever, [8] and the sanctuary was filled with smoke from the glory of God and from his power, and no one could enter the sanctuary until the seven plagues of the seven angels were finished.

[1] Then I heard a loud voice from the temple telling the seven angels, “Go and pour out on the earth the seven bowls of the wrath of God.”

[2] So the first angel went and poured out his bowl on the earth, and harmful and painful sores came upon the people who bore the mark of the beast and worshiped its image.

[3] The second angel poured out his bowl into the sea, and it became like the blood of a corpse, and every living thing died that was in the sea.

[4] The third angel poured out his bowl into the rivers and the springs of water, and they became blood. [5] And I heard the angel in charge of the waters say,

“Just are you, O Holy One, who is and who was, for you brought these judgments. [6] For they have shed the blood of saints and prophets, and you have given them blood to drink. It is what they deserve!”

[7] And I heard the altar saying,

“Yes, Lord God the Almighty, true and just are your judgments!”

[8] The fourth angel poured out his bowl on the sun, and it was allowed to scorch people with fire. [9] They were scorched by the fierce heat, and they cursed the name of God who had power over these plagues. They did not repent and give him glory.

[10] The fifth angel poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast, and its kingdom was plunged into darkness. People gnawed their tongues in anguish [11] and cursed the God of heaven for their pain and sores. They did not repent of their deeds.

[12] The sixth angel poured out his bowl on the great river Euphrates, and its water was dried up, to prepare the way for the kings from the east. [13] And I saw, coming out of the mouth of the dragon and out of the mouth of the beast and out of the mouth of the false prophet, three unclean spirits like frogs. [14] For they are demonic spirits,

performing signs, who go abroad to the kings of the whole world, to assemble them for battle on the great day of God the Almighty. [15] (“Behold, I am coming like a thief! Blessed is the one who stays awake, keeping his garments on, that he may not go about naked and be seen exposed!”) [16] And they assembled them at the place that in Hebrew is called Armageddon.

[17] The seventh angel poured out his bowl into the air, and a loud voice came out of the temple, from the throne, saying, “It is done!” [18] And there were flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, and a great earthquake such as there had never been since man was on the earth, so great was that earthquake. [19] The great city was split into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell, and God remembered Babylon the great, to make her drain the cup of the wine of the fury of his wrath. [20] And every island fled away, and no mountains were to be found. [21] And great hailstones, about one hundred pounds each, fell from heaven on people; and they cursed God for the plague of the hail, because the plague was so severe.

Notes

- Chapter 6-16 of Revelation covers the three series of judgments and the interludes in between. Some recap:
 - Revelation is more of a letter than a book. John wrote the letter to the seven churches to encourage the churches who were facing persecution and opposition and temptations, and the purpose was to ask them to remain firm in their commitment to God. It was to remind them that Christ will come back soon to right all the wrongs that were happening to them.
 - Since the genre of the letter is also apocalyptic, it is full of symbols and should not be taken literally. The symbols and the visions are not just about the future, they are relevant to the entire church age. Maybe kind of in an “already but not yet” kind of way.
 - The key to the chapters 6-16 is in chapters 4-5, which is the throne room vision of God and the Father. In this vision, we see the phrase “every creature” giving praise to God. But for the seven churches currently receiving the letter, this is currently not their reality. The purpose of the three judgments would then be to judge and eradicate evil so that God’s final purpose of universal worship will be fulfilled.
 - The three judgments are neither linear nor cyclical, they are following the so-called “modified linear approach” (c.f Figure 1 of 26th February 2023 sermon). As we can see, all three judgments end with the throne room vision of God, with a vision of worship. There are other similarities between the other series; all three series of judgments end with an earthquake, all three series end with “flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, earthquake and heavy hail”. In this “modified linear approach”, the intensity gradually increases. The seals and the trumpets only have an earthquake, but the bowls have “a great earthquake” for example. This means that the intensity of the judgments become greater and greater towards the end.
 - For us the Church right now, we continue to preach the gospel despite the presence of evil in the world currently existing right now. There will be casualties on our end (some will be martyred), we will face persecution, but we can stand firm and have confidence that in the end, all the evil will be judged and we will be vindicated by God.
- Three points for today:

- Avenging angels
 - Armageddon
 - Anthem
- For the first point about the avenging angels, we see that as the bowls of God's wrath are poured out, the unbelievers will suffer. The bowl series is the end of the seals and the trumpet series. This means that the unbelievers had time to repent, but they didn't. Those who continue to harden their hearts will have to face the wrath of an angry God. We see that the sufferings/plagues that occur in these two chapters are like a throwback to the Exodus, the plagues that the Egyptians went through. This is similar to the seal and trumpet series of judgment. It seems like for John, the best way to bring across the severity of the plagues was to point them to something familiar.
 - For the first point, it is clear that God is angry against sin. Some people cannot accept the concept of an angry God. We must first here note that God's anger is not like human anger. Us humans get angry for self-centred reasons mostly, e.g when our pride is wounded. On the other hand, the wrath of God is his steady, unrelenting, unremitting, uncompromising antagonism to evil in all its forms and manifestations. In fact, we humans also sometimes experience this sort of righteous anger when we see injustice. This is an intuition we have because we are moral beings. If we are intuitively angry at injustice, what more about God, who is the perfectly moral being? God's wrath is holy (out of his moral perfection), and God's wrath is just. In fact, God's wrath is but a consequence of God's justice. God's wrath against sin is necessary to purge the creation of sin, so that all creation will willingly glorify God.
 - For the second point about the Armageddon, there is a significance of the drying up of the Euphrates river. This was a throwback to the past, to how Cyrus the great conquered the Babylons, by damming up the Euphrates river so as to make it dry. For the Romans, the Euphrates river also separated Rome from the barbarians; if the river were dammed up, then Rome would be in trouble. Armageddon also just means "mount megiddo". Throughout history, Megiddo and the Jezreel valley have been the ground zero for great battles. Hence, Megiddo is a good place to symbolise the battle between God and the forces of evil throughout the church age, culminating in the final battle between God and Satan, Christ and the antichrist on the great day of God. For the great battle, we know that in the end, God will be victorious. We can get that from the vision of Daniel 2; the kingdom of God was inaugurated during the Roman empire anyway (the Roman empire is the legs of iron). In the end, the rock in Daniel symbolising the Kingdom of God will fill the whole earth. There are four application points for this point:
 - Unbelievers should not tarry any longer in putting their faith in Jesus. The wrath of God against sin is coming!
 - Believers must get ourselves ready for Christ's return. As per v15, we see that Christ will come like a thief. We need to stay awake and be fully alert.
 - Believers are to fear God and obey Him. But if we do succumb to sin from time to time, we are to confess our sins to God and repent, for by doing so we can find forgiveness and strength to continue fearing God and obeying Him.
 - Believers are to fulfill our role as witnesses of the gospel. We need to tell people of the coming wrath to come and the way of deliverance from this wrath.
 - The third point here, the anthem of God, is actually the key point of this chapter. The anthem of God is found in Revelation chapter 15:1-8, and it is the worship of God through the Song

of Moses and the Song of the Lamb. In both songs, the people of God acknowledge the attributes and actions of God the Almighty through our music and singing. And this is what we do today too in our worship services. As we worship, we will be motivated to remain firm in our commitment to God. And we can worship confidently and commit confidently because we know how all of these is going to end. When the day comes, "...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 honour and glory and might forever and ever!"



Figure 1: Reflection questions for this sermon

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2nd April 2023: Fall of Babylon

Text: Revelation 17:1-18:24

[1] Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and said to me, "Come, I will show you the judgment of the great prostitute who is seated on many waters, [2] with whom the kings of the earth have committed sexual immorality, and with the wine of whose sexual immorality the dwellers on earth have become drunk." [3] And he carried me away in the Spirit into a wilderness, and I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast that was full of blasphemous names, and it had seven heads and ten horns. [4] The woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and jewels and pearls, holding in her hand a golden cup full of abominations and the impurities of her sexual immorality. [5] And on her forehead was written a name of mystery: "Babylon the great, mother of prostitutes and of earth's abominations." [6] And I saw the woman, drunk with the blood of the saints, the blood of the martyrs of Jesus.

When I saw her, I marveled greatly. [7] But the angel said to me, "Why do you marvel? I will tell you the mystery of the woman, and of the beast with seven heads and ten horns that carries her. [8] The beast that you saw was, and is not, and is about to rise from the bottomless pit and go to destruction. And the dwellers on earth whose names have not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world will marvel to see the beast, because it was and is not and is to come. [9] This calls for a mind with wisdom: the seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman is seated; [10] they are also seven kings, five of whom have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come, and when he does come he must remain only a little while. [11] As for the beast that was and is not, it is an eighth but it belongs to the seven, and it goes to destruction. [12] And the ten horns that you saw are ten kings who have not yet received royal power, but they are to receive authority as kings for one hour, together with the beast. [13] These are of one mind, and they hand over their power and authority to the beast. [14] They will make war on the Lamb, and the Lamb will conquer them, for he is Lord of lords and King of kings, and those with him are called and chosen and faithful."

[15] And the angel said to me, "The waters that you saw, where the prostitute is seated, are peoples and multitudes and nations and languages. [16] And the ten horns that you saw, they and the beast will hate the prostitute. They will make her desolate and naked, and devour her flesh and burn her up with fire, [17] for God has put it into their hearts to carry out his purpose by being of one mind and handing over their royal power to the beast, until the words of God are fulfilled. [18] And the woman that you saw is the great city that has dominion over the kings of the earth."

[1] After this I saw another angel coming down from heaven, having great authority, and the earth was made bright with his glory. [2] And he called out with a mighty voice, "Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great! She has become a dwelling place for demons, a haunt for every unclean spirit, a haunt for every unclean bird, a haunt for every unclean and detestable beast. [3] For all nations have drunk the wine of the passion of her sexual immorality, and the kings of the earth have committed immorality with her, and the merchants of the earth have grown rich from the power of her luxurious living."

[4] Then I heard another voice from heaven saying,

"Come out of her, my people, lest you take part in her sins, lest you share in her plagues; [5] for her sins are heaped high as heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities. [6]

Pay her back as she herself has paid back others, and repay her double for her deeds; mix a double portion for her in the cup she mixed. [7] As she glorified herself and lived in luxury, so give her a like measure of torment and mourning, since in her heart she says, 'I sit as a queen, I am no widow, and mourning I shall never see.' [8] For this reason her plagues will come in a single day, death and mourning and famine, and she will be burned up with fire; for mighty is the Lord God who has judged her."

[9] And the kings of the earth, who committed sexual immorality and lived in luxury with her, will weep and wail over her when they see the smoke of her burning. [10] They will stand far off, in fear of her torment, and say,

"Alas! Alas! You great city, you mighty city, Babylon! For in a single hour your judgment has come."

[11] And the merchants of the earth weep and mourn for her, since no one buys their cargo anymore, [12] cargo of gold, silver, jewels, pearls, fine linen, purple cloth, silk, scarlet cloth, all kinds of scented wood, all kinds of articles of ivory, all kinds of articles of costly wood, bronze, iron and marble, [13] cinnamon, spice, incense, myrrh, frankincense, wine, oil, fine flour, wheat, cattle and sheep, horses and chariots, and slaves, that is, human souls.

[14] "The fruit for which your soul longed has gone from you, and all your delicacies and your splendors are lost to you, never to be found again!"

[15] The merchants of these wares, who gained wealth from her, will stand far off, in fear of her torment, weeping and mourning aloud,

[16] "Alas, alas, for the great city that was clothed in fine linen, in purple and scarlet, adorned with gold, with jewels, and with pearls! [17] For in a single hour all this wealth has been laid waste."

And all shipmasters and seafaring men, sailors and all whose trade is on the sea, stood far off [18] and cried out as they saw the smoke of her burning,

"What city was like the great city?"

[19] And they threw dust on their heads as they wept and mourned, crying out,

"Alas, alas, for the great city where all who had ships at sea grew rich by her wealth! For in a single hour she has been laid waste. [20] Rejoice over her, O heaven, and you saints and apostles and prophets, for God has given judgment for you against her!"

[21] Then a mighty angel took up a stone like a great millstone and threw it into the sea, saying,

"So will Babylon the great city be thrown down with violence, and will be found no more; [22] and the sound of harpists and musicians, of flute players and trumpeters, will be heard in you no more, and a craftsman of any craft will be found in you no more, and the sound of the mill will be heard in you no more, [23] and the light of a lamp will shine in you no more, and the voice of bridegroom and bride will be heard in you no more, for your merchants were the great ones of the earth, and all nations were deceived by your sorcery. [24] And in her was found the blood of prophets and of saints, and of all who have been slain on earth."

Notes

- Here, we have an elaboration of the seventh bowl, which contains a judgment of Babylon. It is as if God drew back a curtain to reveal what Babylon really was; the city looked very splendid from the outside, but the city was actually very wicked.
- Three points for today:
 - Disposition of the city
 - Demise of the city
 - Decision of God's people
- On Rev 17:5, was written on the forehead of the woman who personifies the city: "And on her forehead was written a name of mystery: Babylon the great, mother of prostitutes and of earth's abominations". The name here reveals the true character and disposition of Babylon. The city, from an external POV, was really great, spanning many mountains. But internally, the city was full of rot. The epithet "mother of prostitutes" means that Babylon is the source of all prostitutes. In the city for example, there is a lot of decadence and a lot of debauchery. But the metaphor of a prostitute means that Babylon is guilty of more than just sexual immorality. The metaphor of a prostitute means that Babylon was also guilty of enticing people to sexual immorality. And as we all know, sexual immorality in the Bible (especially the OT) is linked to idolatry; idolatry is described with the metaphor of sexual immorality (c.f Hosea). The outward appearance of the city was also described in very alluring terms, unlike the beast who had a fearsome appearance. This describes how the city could be very tempting to other people. The woman personifying the city is also described as "drunk with the blood of God's people". This city was built on the suffering of the saints. Babylon here, as described by John, is not exactly the Babylon of the OT. Babylon here is the name for all earthly world powers/systems who set themselves against God. It is a reminder to God's people that in every age, there will be a Babylon that is bent on opposing God and instigating ungodliness and enticing God's people to idolatry.
- As God's people, we must be wary of the seduction of power, wealth and pleasure (which Babylon exemplifies) lest we end up being unfaithful to God. To guard against being enticed by Babylon, there are these things we can do:
 - We can cultivate contentment. We need to crucify this consumeristic spirit that is so rife in the modern world. To do so, we can be more intentional with thanksgiving.
 - We can count the 'cost'. When we are tempted to fall into the ways of the world (which are very enticing), we should count the 'cost' of doing so. How would our actions affect our soul, and the people around us? How would it affect our Christian witness? Etc.
- Now that we have described the disposition of the city, we shall describe the demise of the city. One very interesting thing to see here is that Babylon will be betrayed by the beast which once supported her. We see how in God's judgment, God's enemies will be treacherous to each other. This tells us that when we take evil as an ally, the evil will eventually betray us and let us down (compare this with the faithfulness of God). Also, we see that when the city is judged by God, the "merchants of the earth weep and mourn for her, since no one buys their cargo anymore". We see that through God's judgment, the idols of the world are exposed. Also, we see that when Babylon was judged, there was much silence in the city. No more harpists etc. On the other hand, there was much rejoicing in heaven. Through God's judgement, God's people are vindicated. Note that the rejoicing of God's people here is not them laughing at their enemies. It is them feeling vindicated that the faithful life that they led will finally

vindicate them, and it is them rejoicing that justice has been meted out.

- For us then, given the certainty of God's judgement, God's people are not to be overcome by evil but overcome evil with good by being faithful to God. We must show the world that there is a better way to live.
- Now, what is the decision that God's people must make? It is to "come out of her, my people, lest you take part in her sins, lest you share in her plagues...". As God's people, we must consecrate ourselves. We must remind ourselves first and foremost that we belong to Christ, and that we have been purchased by the blood of the Lamb. One easy way to do this is to gather as God's people for worship on the Lord's day! The harder thing to do is to live holy lives, to deny ourselves (in contrast to the world's mantra to love yourself). That is how we can consecrate ourselves.
- Another thing we can do is to call out wrongdoing. We are to call out injustice when we see it. We are badgered by the world not only to tolerate sin, but sometimes to celebrate sin. We must resist that and be firm in our convictions and also be firm in speaking out our convictions. This command to "come out" is not a legalistic command, it is more of an invitation to a life of freedom and fullness in Christ. Living like the world, living in Babylon, is bondage and burdensome. Living in Babylon will never satisfy, and it will drive us to chase things that are vanity. The invitation to "come out of Babylon" would then be an invitation to fullness of life in Christ, though in a practical sense, there will also be suffering. But yet the suffering in this world is to be counted as nothing in light of the eternal joy and bliss we will have when Jesus comes again. So let us live with eternity in mind, and come out of Babylon.

For reflection

1. What are some reasons why some Christians are easily enticed by worldliness?
2. What motivates you to "not be overcome by evil but to overcome evil with good" (Romans 12:21)?
3. What is one area of your life that you struggle to consecrate to God? What are some steps you can take to increasingly experience the freedom and fullness of life that Christ came to give?

Figure 1: Reflection questions for this sermon

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9th April 2023: How does Easter bring us hope?

Text: Luke 24:1-12

[1] But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they went to the tomb, taking the spices they had prepared. [2] And they found the stone rolled away from the tomb, [3] but when they went in they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. [4] While they were perplexed about this, behold, two men stood by them in dazzling apparel. [5] And as they were frightened and bowed their faces to the ground, the men said to them, "Why do you seek the living among the dead? [6] He is not here, but has risen. Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, [7] that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men and be crucified and on the third day rise." [8] And they remembered his words, [9] and returning from the tomb they told all these things to the eleven and to all the rest. [10] Now it was Mary Magdalene and Joanna and Mary the mother of James and the other women with them who told these things to the apostles, [11] but these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them. [12] But Peter rose and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves; and he went home marveling at what had happened.

Notes

- The tomb was empty. The resurrection of Jesus is central to our Christian faith. His death was necessary, but so was His resurrection; if He had not been resurrected, then His death had no meaning. One compelling piece of evidence for the resurrection was how the disciples went from being cowards to being courageous witnesses of the faith. What could be the reason why? The most plausible reason was that they did indeed see the risen Christ!
- The resurrection of Jesus guarantees the resurrection of all who are Christians, since Jesus is the first-fruits of those who had been risen from the dead (first fruits implies more fruit to come). Since the resurrection is an event that happened in our world, the effects of the resurrection is not just for the future (when we will be raised), but has very present implications for us too. Four points for today:
 - Resurrection and sin.
 - Resurrection and sanctification.
 - Resurrection and service.
 - Resurrection and suffering.
- From 1 Corinthians 15:17,20, we see that if Christ had not been raised, our faith is in vain. In contrast, because Christ is risen, we can have full assurance that our sins are fully paid for. The resurrection of Christ implies that the penalty for sin has been fully paid for. As Paul says, the wages of sin is death, and since Jesus took on the penalty of our sin, He must die on the cross. But how do we know that our sins are fully paid for? We know because Jesus resurrection from the dead tells us that our sins have really been paid for. But does this mean that we can sin freely? This leads to the second point.
- As Paul says, in Romans 6:4, the resurrection of Jesus gives us the power to live new lives despite our fallen human nature. The power that raised Jesus from the dead is the same power that sanctifies us. Hence, since it is certain that Jesus was raised, we can have certainty that we as Christians will be sanctified. But some of us will say, "but I still struggle with sin! What does this mean then?" The answer is the "already but not yet" existence of the Kingdom of

God! Jesus' incarnation began the process of inaugurating the kingdom of God, and at Jesus' resurrection, He finished the inauguration of the kingdom of God. So right now, similarly to what Jesus told the disciples, the Kingdom of God is in our midst. Hence similarly for us, as John Stott says, "the already means more confidence that anyone can be changed, that any enslaving habit can be overcome. But on the other hand, our fallen nature remains in us and will never be eliminated until the fullness of the kingdom arrives. The not yet means we need more patience and understanding with growing persons, it means not to be condescending nor impatient with lapses and failures. ". Or more simply, the resurrection of Christ breaks the power of sin, so that we have the ability, despite our fallen nature, to offer up our lives to God as our acceptable spiritual worship, though it might be still imperfect. And we can have the confidence that as we continue to live by the Spirit, we will **asymptotically** approach perfection in this life.

- Next, as Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15:24, because Christ is risen, our work for the Lord is not in vain. This "work of the Lord" refers not just to Christian ministry, but it also refers to the work we do in the marketplace. One question; is the earth going to be replaced or renewed at the second coming of Christ and at the great and final resurrection? If the answer is that the earth will be "replaced", then no real work we do on earth matters except the saving of souls. But if the answer is that the earth will be "renewed", then our marketplace work is also significant. Everything that is true, and good, and beautiful in the work that we do in the marketplace will be used by God in the renewing of the new creation. In whatever we do, as long as we do it for the glory of God, it can be considered the work of the Lord.
- Lastly, as Paul says, the resurrection of Christ gives us hope in our suffering. From 2 Corinthians 4:16-17, even though our outer body is wasting away, the resurrection of Christ which implies our resurrection means that we can look forward to an eternal weight of glory. One interesting quote: "In light of the weight of the glory of heaven, even the most miserable life on earth will look like one night in an inconvenient hotel". It is axiomatic in Christianity that the way up is down, that the road to glory is the cross. If that is the pattern that our Savior took, going to the cross to be glorified, then that is the pattern we must take in our lives. And as Jesus said, "take heart; I have overcome the world". The resurrection of Jesus, which guarantees our future inheritance in heaven, gives us hope in our suffering.
- In conclusion: resurrection of Jesus leads to:
 - Forgiveness of sin.
 - Power to be sanctified and to live sanctified lives.
 - Purpose and meaning for our service to God, not just in Christian ministry, but also in our marketplace work.
 - Hope in our suffering.

Reflection Questions

How does Christ's death and resurrection help us to...

1. Withstand temptation and overcome sin?
2. Derive meaning and purpose in our day to day work?
3. Find hope in the midst of our sufferings and trials?

Figure 1: Reflection questions for this sermon

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16th April 2023: Are You Ready?

Text: Revelation 19:1-10

[1] After this I heard what seemed to be the loud voice of a great multitude in heaven, crying out,

“Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God, [2] for his judgments are true and just; for he has judged the great prostitute who corrupted the earth with her immorality, and has avenged on her the blood of his servants.”

[3] Once more they cried out,

“Hallelujah! The smoke from her goes up forever and ever.”

[4] And the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshiped God who was seated on the throne, saying, “Amen. Hallelujah!” [5] And from the throne came a voice saying,

“Praise our God, all you his servants, you who fear him, small and great.”

[6] Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the roar of many waters and like the sound of mighty peals of thunder, crying out,

“Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns. [7] Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready; [8] it was granted her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure”—

for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints.

[9] And the angel said to me, “Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.” And he said to me, “These are the true words of God.”

[10] Then I fell down at his feet to worship him, but he said to me, “You must not do that! I am a fellow servant with you and your brothers who hold to the testimony of Jesus. Worship God.” For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.

Notes

- Recap: the bird's eye view of the book of Revelation is that there is a prologue and another chunk. The prologue is the christophany, which includes the letters to the seven churches. The other chunk can be divided into three sections (based on Pastor Ronnie's analysis):
 - Church age (this is where all the judgement is, the seven seals and trumpets and bowls)
 - The second coming of Christ (the millennium age)
 - New heavens and new Earth

Pastor Ronnie said he is pre-mil lol. The heavenly worship in chapter 4 and the marriage supper of the lamb helps to interpret the text that is sandwiched in the middle.

- Three points for today:
 - Worship
 - Worthy
 - Watchful

- Recall the heavenly worship in chapter 4. We have all the creatures glorifying God. Why is there still chaos in the world now? Chapter 4 is a reminder that the chaos in the world right now is not God's plan for the creation. Sin is the thing that leads to the chaos, and sin must be dealt with. And sin is dealt with in chapter 5 and beyond, through the Lamb.
- Babylon in the past symbolised the Roman empire, but not just the Roman empire specifically, but Babylon in general symbolises all of the world powers (secular or religious) that opposes God.
- First point on worship: in our text today, we have the great multitude in heaven praising God for judging Babylon. Question: are the multitude praising God because Babylon is fallen, or are the multitude praising God because His judgements are faithful and true? It is easy to praise and worship God when God executes judgment on the oppressors, even the pagans can do this (e.g the folk chinese obsession with Justice Bao). But it is difficult to praise and worship God when God seems to be silent in the midst of oppression. Yet we must still remember that God is faithful and true, and in fact God is eternally faithful and true. And God being faithful and true is our reason for worshipping him. God will eventually judge evil, even if he seems silent at the moment. God is unlike human judges, God being omnipotent and omniscient, knows the best time to do justice to everyone. If we believe this, then we can worship God even in trials.
- The bride here refers to two possibilities:
 - The universal church of all believers.
 - The saints who have been martyred for Jesus' sake.

Pastor Ronnie argues that the bride here refers to the latter, but I don't agree with him lol. His argument was that the idea of all believers being clothed with fine linen (which is the righteous deeds of the saints) goes against the protestant doctrine of justification by the imputation of Christ's righteousness onto the believers. But my POV is that since those who are justified will eventually be sanctified and glorified, and if we remember that the righteous deeds of the saints are done through the Holy Spirit, then there is no real issue with God clothing ALL the saints with the fine linen since their righteous deeds are empowered by Him anyway! There is no risk of pelagianism. Anyway the scene here is not a courtroom, it is a marriage, hence there is no reason to insist so strictly on the language of justification by the imputation of Christ's righteousness. Let me check the commentaries I have...

- Ok moving on, as the angel who judged Babylon mentioned, there will be no more marriages in Babylon (marriages were one of the most joyous occasions in ancient days). In contrast, there is a marriage in heaven. This is a contrast between those who commit immorality and God's people!
- OK I lazy to type liao. Oof. Sorry Ps Ronnie. I got stuck at the part about the bride.



Figure 1: Reflection questions for this sermon

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23rd April 2023: The judgment of the Word of God

Text: Revelation 19:11-21

[11] Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. [12] His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems, and he has a name written that no one knows but himself. [13] He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which he is called is The Word of God. [14] And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses. [15] From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron. He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. [16] On his robe and on his thigh he has a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords.

[17] Then I saw an angel standing in the sun, and with a loud voice he called to all the birds that fly directly overhead, "Come, gather for the great supper of God, [18] to eat the flesh of kings, the flesh of captains, the flesh of mighty men, the flesh of horses and their riders, and the flesh of all men, both free and slave, both small and great." [19] And I saw the beast and the kings of the earth with their armies gathered to make war against him who was sitting on the horse and against his army. [20] And the beast was captured, and with it the false prophet who in its presence had done the signs by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped its image. These two were thrown alive into the lake of fire that burns with sulfur. [21] And the rest were slain by the sword that came from the mouth of him who was sitting on the horse, and all the birds were gorged with their flesh.

Notes

- Satan uses false words to lead mankind down the path of destruction. Our passage today describes a metaphorical war that takes place after the fall of Babylon. The two belligerents are the forces of evil (led by Satan, personified by the beast and the false prophet) and the forces of good, led by Jesus.
- In our world today, the beast represents all the human systems and powers and institutions that is arrogant and haughty in men that set themselves against God. The false prophets are the spokesmen for these human systems and powers and institutions by spreading false messages and lies. One example of such a lie is that we must enjoy our life on earth, because "you only have one life". This hedonistic, individualistic lie promoted by our culture helps to serve the system of capitalism. On the other hand, in 1 John we see that "all that is in the world, the desires of the flesh and the desire of the eyes and the pride of life, is not from the Father". We also see in Paul that "Godliness with contentment is great gain". The lies spoken by the false prophets in the world lead us away from God and sometimes set us in opposition to God, which is what Satan wants to do!
- So as Paul explains, we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but we wrestle against these false ideologies that Satan's false prophets spread and we need to wrestle against Satan. This is our war to fight, as Christians. We do not take up any actual weapons of war. And as Christians in this war, we are led by our Lord Jesus.
- Our Lord Jesus here in this chapter is described by a rider on a white horse, and is called Faithful and True. Our Lord Jesus here has many diadems on his head, and on his robe and his thigh, he has the inscription "King of kings and Lord of lords". All of this tell us that Jesus here is sovereign over all. The beast tries to mimic the sovereignty of Jesus here (with 10 crowns),

but Jesus is the real sovereign. Our Lord Jesus here is also described with the inscription “Word of God”, which could be a throwback to John 1, but some scholars think a better reference would be the apocryphal book Wisdom 4:12-13. In Wisdom 4:12-13, the context is that the Word of God came down from heaven in the last plague on Egypt. Our Lord Jesus here defeats the forces of evil with a sharp sword, which are his words (c.f also Hebrews 4). He defeats the forces of evil himself, his army does nothing.

- After Jesus defeats the forces of evil, the forces of evil are pictured to lie dead on the field. So all who follow the beast and the false prophet are to become the supper of God for the birds. This is a very macabre contrast to the marriage supper of the Lamb for the redeemed. So for those who are faithful, they will enjoy the marriage supper of the Lamb; for those who follow the beast and the false prophet, their fate is utter defeat; their bodies will not even be buried but will become bird food. The beast and the false prophet are also then thrown into the lake of fire. For us, one aspect of this is that there will be no more false ideologies and false words anymore, all the false ideologies and false words will be eradicated.
- We can have faith that this final battle will end in this way, that satan and death will be defeated. We can have such faith in God’s word because the Word of God has come down to us in the person of Jesus Christ, light from light, true God from true God. Jesus Christ, the Word of God, took on human nature for us, died on the cross for us, and was raised for us. Jesus is the fulfilment of the Law and the Prophets, and He is the guarantor that God’s words are faithful and true because He himself is Faithful and True. Jesus, the Word of God, who is Faithful and True, also reveals to us how faithless and false we are. Jesus was crucified because of the sins of sinful humanity. Jesus’ crucifixion reveal to us how traitorous we are (through Judas), how faithless we are (through Peter), and just how evil we are (the roman soldiers, chief priests and pharisees, etc).
- (I didn’t really catch this part so I’m making things up here) Jesus has revealed to us that we are supposed to be bird food. Yet in His grace, he has granted us to have eternal life by faith in Him. That is also His victory, that by His blood, he has ransomed a people for God (c.f Revelation 5).

For reflection

1. What are some of the ideas pervading popular culture which are false according to God's word but are accepted by many today? What is wrong with them? Why do you think people accept them?
2. Have you been tempted to accept any of these falsehoods as truth and live your life according to them? Why? What prevented you from doing so?
3. How can you be assured that God's word is true?

Figure 1: Reflection questions for this sermon

30th April 2023: Triumph Of Righteousness

Text: Revelation 20:1-15

[1] Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding in his hand the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain. [2] And he seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years, [3] and threw him into the pit, and shut it and sealed it over him, so that he might not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years were ended. After that he must be released for a little while.

[4] Then I saw thrones, and seated on them were those to whom the authority to judge was committed. Also I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus and for the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. [5] The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended. This is the first resurrection. [6] Blessed and holy is the one who shares in the first resurrection! Over such the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and they will reign with him for a thousand years.

[7] And when the thousand years are ended, Satan will be released from his prison [8] and will come out to deceive the nations that are at the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them for battle; their number is like the sand of the sea. [9] And they marched up over the broad plain of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city, but fire came down from heaven and consumed them, [10] and the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.

[11] Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. From his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them. [12] And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done. [13] And the sea gave up the dead who were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them, and they were judged, each one of them, according to what they had done. [14] Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. [15] And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

Notes

- Satan's modus operandi has always been to spread lies to cause people to turn away from God and even to turn against God. We see that starting with Adam and Eve. Last week, we see Jesus (the rider on the white horse) triumphing over the beast and the beast's false prophet, symbolising the end of His opposition. Over the last few weeks, we have seen God's wrath on His enemies, starting from the fall of Babylon etc. We should not see the multiple accounts of judgment as happening chronologically one after another, but we should take all of these accounts as all describing God's same judgment, but from different points of view.
- In our text, the chain that binds Satan and Satan being thrown into the pit shows us God's power and sovereignty even over Satan. Here, the reference to 1000 years is not to be taken literally, but it is to be taken metaphorically to mean "a perfect long time". The binding of

Satan and the 1000 year duration symbolises the period where Satan is no longer able to prevent belief in Jesus. The 1000 year period could be the period between Christ's first and second coming, so that in this interim period, the gospel will effectively be able to convert people to faith in Jesus. And during this period, Satan will not be able to hinder the conversion of people to faith in Jesus. Though Satan can still hinder our work, he can't render it totally fruitless.

- In our text, there is also a contrast between those who shares in the first resurrection and those who were raised at the end to be thrown into the lake of fire. Hence we see two types of resurrection; everyone will be resurrected in the end (the faithful and the unfaithful), but the faithful will be raised to life first to reign together with Christ, and then subsequently the unfaithful will be raised to be judged and thrown into the lake of fire. We identify the first group with the faithful because the first group is "those who had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus, ..., and those who had not worshipped the beast of its image and ... (v4)".
- In our text again, we also see Satan being released again for a little while. One possible reason for God releasing Satan is for God to show that Satan will not repent even after a long time, and also to show that the hearts of the unbelievers remain equally hard even after a long time. Here, we see the obstinate rebellion of Man and of Satan. Here we see that without faith in Jesus, Man cannot reform himself to do good even in Satan's absence. We also see that Satan will not reform himself, he will continue setting himself in opposition against God.
- After Satan's release, he picks up where he left off to continue to deceive the nations to gather them for war. The battle scene here is not new, it is similar to the one in chapter 19. Hence the outcome is also not new, the outcome is the same as was described in chapter 19. Satan's work in stirring up the hardened hearts of Man and to start the war against God is described in verses 7 – 9, and the result of the war is seen in verses 10 – 15. Here we see Satan and the unbelievers being justly judged.
- The unbelievers here are thrown into the "lake of fire" (also known as Hell), which is also described as "darkness", "place that the worm will not die", "place where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth", etc. There is a lot of very fierce imagery here describing the torment of those who died in their unbelief. We should not take these imagery literally, because these images do not describe the full depths of torment that the unbelievers feel.
- For example, Hell is not just a place of physical torment. Hell is a place where the unbelievers are fully and totally cut off from God. Yet as Paul quotes, "in Him (God) we live and breathe and have our being". God is our creator and sustainer, and every single person is made for fellowship with Him. Hence for the unbelievers, when this possibility of fellowship with God is taken away when they are cast into Hell, the purpose that they are made for will never be fulfilled, and the longing in their hearts for God that they suppressed in their unbelief will never be fulfilled. As Augustine said, "our hearts are restless until they rest in God", and for these unbelievers, their hearts will forever remain restless. That itself is the eternal torment that exists in Hell, the torment is not physical or emotional but it is on a deeper more metaphysical level (it is at the level of the soul). The physical and emotional torment described is just a way for us to scratch the surface of the depth of this torment.
- Yet for us who have faith in Jesus, we can be encouraged that when Christ returns, we will share in eternal fellowship with Him and the Father through the Holy Spirit. Our deepest longing to have fellowship with God (which we were made for) will be totally and fully fulfilled finally, and that is the hope that helps us to be faithful, even unto death.

For reflection

1. Have we been praying for and sharing the good news of God's grace and love to those whom we love and care about?
2. How does knowing that the Lord knows all our days and that each of them are recorded in his book, encourage us in our walk with him?
3. What must we do to remain faithful in our current world?

Figure 1: Reflection questions for this sermon

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7th May 2023: The New Jerusalem

Text: Revelation 21:1-22:5

[1] Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. [2] And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. [3] And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. [4] He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away."

[5] And he who was seated on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new." Also he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true." [6] And he said to me, "It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give from the spring of the water of life without payment. [7] The one who conquers will have this heritage, and I will be his God and he will be my son. [8] But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, as for murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death."

[9] Then came one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues and spoke to me, saying, "Come, I will show you the Bride, the wife of the Lamb." [10] And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great, high mountain, and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God, [11] having the glory of God, its radiance like a most rare jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal. [12] It had a great, high wall, with twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and on the gates the names of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel were inscribed—[13] on the east three gates, on the north three gates, on the south three gates, and on the west three gates. [14] And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.

[15] And the one who spoke with me had a measuring rod of gold to measure the city and its gates and walls. [16] The city lies foursquare, its length the same as its width. And he measured the city with his rod, 12,000 stadia. Its length and width and height are equal. [17] He also measured its wall, 144 cubits by human measurement, which is also an angel's measurement. [18] The wall was built of jasper, while the city was pure gold, like clear glass. [19] The foundations of the wall of the city were adorned with every kind of jewel. The first was jasper, the second sapphire, the third agate, the fourth emerald, [20] the fifth onyx, the sixth carnelian, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth chrysoprase, the eleventh jacinth, the twelfth amethyst. [21] And the twelve gates were twelve pearls, each of the gates made of a single pearl, and the street of the city was pure gold, like transparent glass.

[22] And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. [23] And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb. [24] By its light will the nations walk, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it, [25] and its gates will never be shut by day—and there will be no night there. [26] They will bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations. [27] But nothing unclean will ever enter it, nor anyone who does what is detestable or false, but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life.

[1] Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb [2] through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. [3] No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him. [4] They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. [5] And night will be no more. They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever.

Notes

- God has promised to make everything new. This renewal promise is in the context of a covenant relationship, which is established with the covenant formula: “I will be your God, you will be My people”. Today’s text is the fulfilment of this renewal promise which God has made a long time ago (e.g in Ezekiel 37, in Jeremiah 29, etc).
- In today’s text, we have mentions of a new heaven and a new earth. Yet from a secular perspective, people like Karl Marx have said that “religion is the opium of the people”, because when people believe in a new heaven and new earth, it helps them escape the pain of the current earth. People like Karl Marx have been prophesied about in 2 Peter, as part of the group of scoffers who doubt Jesus’ second coming. The new heaven and the new earth that will come down from heaven is God’s doing, it is not our doing. Unlike the atheistic humanism of Marx, from the Christian perspective, only God can renew the creation. In a sense, we have a greater awareness of the problem of sin that plagues humanity (as compared to the secular humanist dictum that says that humans are basically good). Also, we have a more lasting solution to this problem of sin, which is Christ (as compared to the secular humanist dictum of better education, better governments, more science, etc).
- In our text today, see that in the new creation, there will be no more sea. The sea, in hebraic thought, is the manifestation of all that is chaotic and evil. And hence the removal of the sea is God removing all the evil.
- We note here that a covenant differs from a contract. A covenant is relational, whereas a contract is agreement based. A covenant is transformational (because it is relational, and relationships with others change us), whereas a contract is transactional and benefits driven. A covenant is the coming together of two, whereas a contract is the maintenance of the two as the goal. This has two implications: this means that if our r/s with God is more like a contract than a covenant, we won’t be transformed. Furthermore, this means that what God wants is a relationship with us, not a contract, since God is the one who initiates and establishes a covenant. Hence, the metaphor for the relationship between God and the bride is, in this text, described as a marriage. The r/s between a bride (the Church) and the bridegroom (God) is that of a covenant!
- And as part of God’s covenant with His people, He will renew His people. This renewal is God sending His Spirit to work in the hearts of His people, to turn their hearts of stone to hearts of flesh. In our relationship with God, the more we know God, the more we understand our union with Christ, then the more we will be transformed (since a covenant is transformative). And hence we can have the assurance and faith that as we continue to walk with God, He will transform us and renew us. In our text, we see the bride (the church) adorned with fine jewels and etc. The fine jewellery that adorns the bride and makes the bride beautiful is exactly God’s righteousness that the church possesses by faith. This righteousness is both what God imputes and also what God works in the church through His renewing work. This renewal

Babylon the Harlot	New Jerusalem
City (adulterous)	City (holy)
City of the sea-beast	City of God
Earthly city (the epitome, 17.5)	City descending from heaven (21.2)
Woman (feminine image): harlot	Woman (feminine image): bride
Intoxicating revelries of kings and peoples (17.2; 18.3)	Marriage supper of the Lamb (19.9; cf. Isa 62 as background)
Richly adorned (17.4)	Shining like a jasper
Nations will be enticed and ruled by it but they will finally destroy it (17.2, 15-18)	Glory of the nations to be brought into it, and they walk by its light (21.26)
City without foundations? (Cf. the dirges of chap. 18)	City with foundations (the 12 apostles)
Blood of slaughter of saints (17.6; 18.24)	Life and healing for the nations (22.1-2)
Exhortation to leave (18.4)	Exhortation to enter (22.14)

Figure 1: Comparison between Babylon and the new Jerusalem as mentioned in Revelation.

finds its ultimate fulfilment when God will come again to dwell with us.

- As mentioned, the day when God will come with us is described as a wedding. On that day, all tears will be wiped away. In our life, we shed tears when we feel sad, and we feel sad because of sin. For example, sin leads to death, and death separates us from our loved ones, which is why we cry. But on that day when God comes back, because sin and all its consequences will be removed, there will be no more tears. For example, we will be re-united with the saints who have died before us. And because sin is totally removed, as mentioned in the text, the gates of the new city will no longer be shut. There is no need to shut the gates, because there is no worry or fear of anything evil attacking the new Jerusalem.
- A corollary of the above (there being no more evil) is that all the evil and accursed will not be enter the new Jerusalem. As mentioned in the text, nothing unclean nor anyone who does what is detestable or false will enter in. As per verse 8, the cowardly, the faithless, the etc etc... will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death.
- Hence, for us today, we must desire to be God's people so that we will enter into the new Jerusalem. And that means that we should come out of Babylon. Btw, we should note the difference between the new Jerusalem and Babylon as in Figure 1. And as we come out of Babylon and be God's people, in a sense, like what is said in 1 Peter, we like living stones will build up God's house and hence even right now, by God's power, we will build up the New Jerusalem.

For reflection

1. God's covenant with His people is relational and transforms people. How can we be transformed?
2. How would you describe your relationship with God? Is it covenantal or contractual?
3. God's salvation plan includes people from every tribe and nations. How does that shape your kingdom work? How can you join the building project of the New Jerusalem?

Figure 2: Reflection questions for this sermon

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14th May 2023: He is coming soon!

Text: Revelation 22:6-16

[6] And he said to me, “These words are trustworthy and true. And the Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, has sent his angel to show his servants what must soon take place.”

[7] “And behold, I am coming soon. Blessed is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book.”

[8] I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things. And when I heard and saw them, I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who showed them to me, [9] but he said to me, “You must not do that! I am a fellow servant with you and your brothers the prophets, and with those who keep the words of this book. Worship God.”

[10] And he said to me, “Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is near. [11] Let the evildoer still do evil, and the filthy still be filthy, and the righteous still do right, and the holy still be holy.”

[12] “Behold, I am coming soon, bringing my recompense with me, to repay each one for what he has done. [13] I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end.”

[14] Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life and that they may enter the city by the gates. [15] Outside are the dogs and sorcerers and the sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices falsehood.

[16] “I, Jesus, have sent my angel to testify to you about these things for the churches. I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star.”

Notes

- Since this is the last sermon on Revelation, here we have a recap of the entire letter:
 - Background of John’s audience: living in Rome during the Roman empire, facing much persecution as well as bad influences from the surrounding culture. An example of persecution is martyrdom, and an example of bad influences would be how craftsmen were required to join a guild to sell their craftware, and in those guild meetings there would be food sacrificed to idols and orgies.
 - Hence, Revelation is a letter written to the Christians back then to encourage them to be faithful even in the midst of persecution and their morally decadent society.
 - How does Revelation encourage the saints? First, there is a vision of Christ in chapter 1, then there is the worship in heaven in chapters 4-5, and then the bulk of the book is about the destruction of evil. The destruction of evil is a big part of the book because ultimately Satan, the evil one, is the one behind the persecutions of the Christians and also the moral decadence of the book. And lastly, after the encouragement, there is an exhortation to remain steadfast, even to choose martyrdom.
 - The destruction of evil is the part that is subject to different interpretations. For example, some people read chapters 17 – 20 chronologically in a more literal, premillennial version. Other people read it in an idealist, amillennial fashion. True Way takes the latter view, where the 1000 years is emblematic of the entire age between Christ’s ascension and

Christ's second coming. And as the "day of the Lord" comes, the evil will intensify. But at the end, all the battles written are just different panels of the same event, the great "day of the Lord", which is the culmination of the seventh scroll, the seventh trumpet and the seventh bowl, which signals the final defeat of evil.

- Our text today is the epilogue which concludes the letter. There are two main themes in the epilogue here. These two themes also appear in the prologue, and hence we have an inclusio structure here. The first theme is: "I am coming soon", and the second theme is: "the words of the prophecy". We can also find these two themes in the prologue (chapter 1).
- The first theme, "I am coming soon". 2000 years have passed, and Christ has yet to come. Why? First, we must first remember God's perspective on time, as said in 2 Peter 3:8-9. Christ is delaying His coming because of His mercy. Second, the root word for soon here actually means quickly and suddenly, rather than *X* years from now. Hence, Christ's words that "He is coming soon" is to summon us to preparedness. If we compare Revelation 22 with Daniel 12, we see that Daniel is supposed to seal up the words of the prophecy, but John was not supposed to. Hence, this tells us that the time is really near.
- The second theme, "the words of the prophecy" are trustworthy and true. Here, these words are given in the following order: God → Jesus → Angel → John → saints. In fact, if we generalise this theme to the entire book of the Bible rather than just Revelation, then all of God's revelation in the Bible are trustworthy and true. We note that Genesis and Revelation actually form a big inclusio, with the common themes being the tree of life, human beings in God's presence. We also see Jesus the root, the descendent of David which is the fulfilment of Genesis 3:16-17. Since the entire testimony of God is trustworthy, hence, we are to keep God's word.
- To keep God's word, we receive it in faith, hold fast to it in hope, and live it out in love. The first and single most important in keeping God's Word is to worship Him. Not just on Sunday, but in our lives through how we live. Compare this with the pattern of the world which is to worship self or to worship created things.
- John also says not to "add or remove to the words of the prophecy". Generalising this to beyond Revelation, we see that we must not cherry pick what we want to believe/obey (such as ignoring certain commandments like the commandment against homosexual activity (psleek's example) or divorce (my example)). We must also not pervert the Gospel (prosperity gospel). (My thoughts:) There needs to be some elaboration on the first point though because if not critics will also bring up how we also don't have head coverings for women. Clearly, some commandments are contextual; we do not interpret the commands for masters and slave as endorsing the institution of slavery. There needs to be a criteria given to say what is contextual or not, because critics can also argue that the commandments against homosexuality are just contextual.
- The letter ends with an exhortation that God's grace is with us. Our whole Christian life, our obedience, is only possible through grace.

For reflection

1. When you hear Jesus says, "I am coming soon," what is your response and why? Indifferent? Afraid? Excited?
2. Is there something in the Word of God which you cannot accept or submit to? In light that we are not supposed to add or subtract from the words of prophecy, how are you going to resolve that tension?
3. What are some takeaways from the book of Revelation now that we have completed it?

Figure 1: Reflection questions for this sermon

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21st May 2023: Samaria and to the ends of the earth

Text: Acts 8:25-40

[25] Now when they had testified and spoken the word of the Lord, they returned to Jerusalem, preaching the gospel to many villages of the Samaritans.

[26] Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, "Rise and go toward the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." This is a desert place. [27] And he rose and went. And there was an Ethiopian, a eunuch, a court official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who was in charge of all her treasure. He had come to Jerusalem to worship [28] and was returning, seated in his chariot, and he was reading the prophet Isaiah. [29] And the Spirit said to Philip, "Go over and join this chariot." [30] So Philip ran to him and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet and asked, "Do you understand what you are reading?" [31] And he said, "How can I, unless someone guides me?" And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him. [32] Now the passage of the Scripture that he was reading was this:

"Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter and like a lamb before its shearer is silent, so he opens not his mouth. [33] In his humiliation justice was denied him. Who can describe his generation? For his life is taken away from the earth."

[34] And the eunuch said to Philip, "About whom, I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?" [35] Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning with this Scripture he told him the good news about Jesus. [36] And as they were going along the road they came to some water, and the eunuch said, "See, here is water! What prevents me from being baptized?" [38] And he commanded the chariot to stop, and they both went down into the water, Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him. [39] And when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord carried Philip away, and the eunuch saw him no more, and went on his way rejoicing. [40] But Philip found himself at Azotus, and as he passed through he preached the gospel to all the towns until he came to Caesarea.

Notes

- In our lives, there would be people who we think that don't deserve to go to heaven. Such as people like Hitler, rapists, pedophiles, etc. Sometimes we think that these people don't deserve to hear the gospel, because what if they believe and repent and are forgiven? Or what if it is someone who has hurt us deeply?
- For us, have we erected imaginary walls in our head that prevent us from reaching out to particular people groups? A mental exercise: when we hear of place names like "golden mile complex", "tekka market", "geylang" are there immediately certain people groups that we think of? Do we treat those people groups as the "other"? Sometimes we might "other" people groups based on race, language, socioeconomic class, etc. This is even more clearly seen in the covid pandemic. In the pandemic, we see a systemic difference between Singaporeans and the migrant workers; the treatment for these two people groups were very different.
- Sometimes, these walls even exist in our church groups, that's why we form cliques. We form cliques based on people who think, speak or act like us.
- Yet when we read the gospel accounts, in Jesus' ministry, we see that He was more interested in breaking down walls and building bridges. For example, Jews usually do not talk to Samaritans, but we see Jesus intentionally speaking to the Samaritan woman at the well. We also should

consider Jesus' ministry to the poor, the tax collectors, and the prostitutes. And at Jesus' ascension, we remember Jesus' words to take the gospel to Samaria and to the end of the world.

- In our text, we see the Spirit directing Philip to Samaria, to minister to the Ethiopian eunuch. In OT times, Ethiopia was known as Cush. And in OT times, Cush was considered "the ends of the world", since Israel didn't have a globe or Wikipedia lol. Here we see how Philip transcending the barriers that might have divided them; the Ethiopian was dark skinned, Philip was probably not as dark. The Ethiopian was rich, Philip wasn't. We can see how wealthy the Ethiopian was by the fact that he had his own chariot and he had his own scroll of Isaiah.
- Lastly, this Ethiopian was a eunuch (c.f Isaiah 56), but not Philip. This eunuch was probably a proselyte (convert to Judaism), since he was returning to Ethiopia from Jerusalem (v27). Note that in OT times, at least based on the Deuteronomic prohibition on who can enter into the assembly of the LORD, the eunuch was probably stuck in the court of the Gentiles (the outer courtyard) in the Temple. This makes the passage in Isaiah that he was reading from even more significant. Since Isaiah is a large book, in olden days, it was split across multiple scrolls. The part that the eunuch was reading from is categorised as what is known as the "fourth servant song", which starts from Isaiah 53. Since he was reading from the "fourth servant song", he would also have read Isaiah 56.
- This background makes the eunuch's question even more piercing. The eunuch asked: "is there any reason why I cannot be baptised?". At least from the OT perspective, he couldn't have entered into the assembly of the LORD. But here we see the difference between the NT perspective and the OT perspective in Deuteronomy. We see how Philip tore down the walls of division that separated people groups, such as the wall between the Jews and Gentiles. This is exactly what was mentioned in Ephesians 2:14-18. In the baptism of this Eunuch, Philip was fulfilling in Isaiah 56 that even all the Gentiles and the eunuchs can be counted as God's covenant people.
- Now, we note that all of this was before Peter met Cornelius, and before Paul was commissioned as an apostle to the Gentiles.
- What then, is the lesson for us? One lesson is that God feels passionately for the people on the other side of the wall that WE have erected in keeping them out. Again, from Ephesians 2:14-18, we see how God is creating a new people, a people undivided by ethnicity, by socioeconomic class, etc etc. Or again, in Galatians, "there is no male or female, Jew or Greek, slave and free". What binds all these diverse people groups is God's love for every single people group and our love for Jesus. Only Jesus is the one that can bring about healing and transformation and forgiveness, and that is true for all peoples.
- And one symbol of this Christian unity is the Lord's supper (c.f 1 Corinthians 10:17, "Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread.").
- In our ministry, even when we are reaching out to those who are considered as the "other", we should not stay in our comfort zone and wait for the "other" to come to us, we should GO into where the "other" are! An example is Healthserve; when Dr Goh started his clinic, there weren't many people who came, until he went to where the migrant workers were!
- Our Christian faith, our evangelism (especially in SG), cannot be ethnocentric. We cannot just reach out to the people who are the same as us! Are we erecting walls that divide, or are we building bridges?

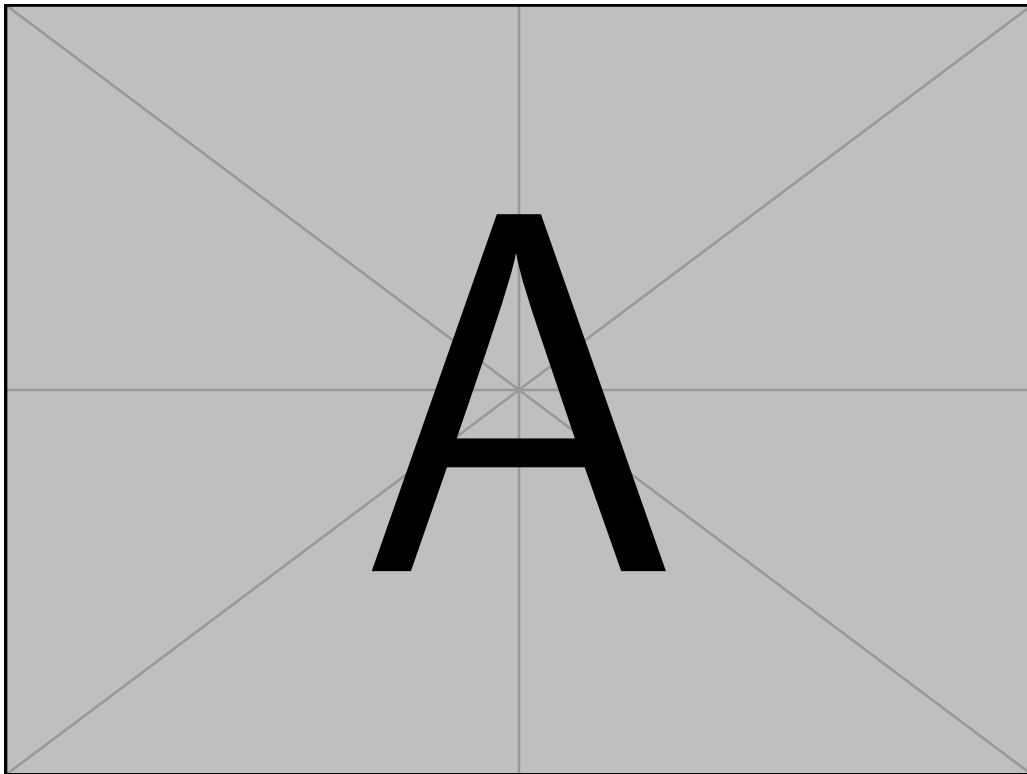


Figure 1: Reflection questions for this sermon

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11th June 2023: A time to embrace and a time to refrain from embracing

Text: Matthew 21:28-32

[28] “What do you think? A man had two sons. And he went to the first and said, ‘Son, go and work in the vineyard today.’ [29] And he answered, ‘I will not,’ but afterward he changed his mind and went. [30] And he went to the other son and said the same. And he answered, ‘I go, sir,’ but did not go. [31] Which of the two did the will of his father?” They said, “The first.” Jesus said to them, “Truly, I say to you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes go into the kingdom of God before you. [32] For John came to you in the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes believed him. And even when you saw it, you did not afterward change your minds and believe him.

Notes

- Last week was about “embracing one another”, this week is about “embracing the other”, next week is “limits on embracing”
- In our text, the first son refers to the sinners (tax collectors and prostitutes) who repent. The second son refers to the religious leaders who say they obey God but actually they don’t. For example, the sinners believed John the Baptist, but the Pharisees didn’t. In rejecting John the Baptist, it was tantamount to rejecting Jesus and rejecting God who sent Jesus.
- In the parable, the outcasts here are the tax collectors and the prostitutes. Why were these groups of people hated by both the Pharisees and the general public? Firstly, the tax collectors were Jews who collected taxes for the Romans, and hence they were viewed as traitors. Secondly, they usually collected more than required to cheat their fellow brothers. As for the prostitutes, I guess this is self explanatory.
- But we must remember that there is no sin too big for Jesus to forgive. Nobody is beyond the grace of God, and if God doesn’t judge people who want to repent as too guilty, why should we judge people who want to repent as “too guilty”?
- When we put our faith in Christ, we are all sons of God, regardless of our prior background and regardless of our past lives.
- On this note, in church do we erect barriers like nationality, race, education level, income level, age, when we interact with others? How is it that Singaporean society at large is more welcoming than church? In church we just naturally gravitate towards our familiar cliques, but why? Why don’t we reach out to the others and genuinely befriend them?
- We also cannot be just pretenders like the second son, to say that we want to do X but don’t do X. As Christians, sometimes we pretend to show love to one another but don’t actually show love. Sometimes we just treat people as boxes to be ticked in our checklist rather than people to be loved. Or even worse, sometimes we promise God that we will love our neighbour as ourselves but we don’t do anything!

18th June 2023: That his spirit may be saved

Text: 1 Corinthians 5:1-12

[1] It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that is not tolerated even among pagans, for a man has his father's wife. [2] And you are arrogant! Ought you not rather to mourn? Let him who has done this be removed from among you.

[3] For though absent in body, I am present in spirit; and as if present, I have already pronounced judgment on the one who did such a thing. [4] When you are assembled in the name of the Lord Jesus and my spirit is present, with the power of our Lord Jesus, [5] you are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord.

[6] Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? [7] Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. [8] Let us therefore celebrate the festival, not with the old leaven, the leaven of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

[9] I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people—[10] not at all meaning the sexually immoral of this world, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. [11] But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler—not even to eat with such a one. [12] For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge?

Notes

- Part of a three part series on being an embracing community. This sermon is the last part about “the limits of embrace”.
- 1 Corinthians 5 is church discipline. It is about the most extreme form of church discipline, which is excommunication. Excommunication is a topic that is rarely talked about.
- Church discipline has always been a vexed issue. Some question whether church discipline is the best way to deal with a church member living in sin or a church leader promoting heresy. Perhaps a gentler approach is better (?). Even those who are for church discipline question when to excommunicate a person. Furthermore, church discipline is hard to implement in modern day protestant churches too, since Protestant churches do not have enough institutional ties between denominations.
- In our text, we see that Paul was appalled by how the Corinthian church dealt with immorality in the Corinthian church. Paul suggests excommunication here in this text. Apart from Matthew 18:1-15, this text is the most important text in church discipline.
- A few questions for today:
 1. What is church discipline in general and excommunication in particular?
 2. Who must the church discipline?
 3. What is the logic of church discipline

- What is church discipline? There are two types: formative church discipline (when members spur each other to love and good works) and corrective church discipline.
- Corrective church discipline occurs any time sin is corrected within the body... It occurs most fully when the church body announces that the covenant between church and member is already broken because the member has proven to be unsubmitive in his or her discipleship to Christ.
- In the teaching of the reformers, corrective church discipline is one of the two keys of the church (the other key being the preaching of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments). See Matthew 19; whatever the Church binds on earth will be bound in heaven, and etc etc. see also Heidelberg Catechism qn 83. And WCF qn 30. So we see that in the teaching of the reformers, corrective church discipline is as central as the preaching of the gospel. And in the OT, deuteronomy provides a basis for excommunication.
- And when excommunication occurs (the highest form of corrective church discipline), the person is forbidden from participating in the life of the church, such as worship and holy communion.
- Now, the qn is, who shall be excommunicated? In church tradition, there are two classes of sin: serious moral delinquency, and the second class of sin is heresy. (My thoughts: what is heresy though? haha. Is Arminianism a heresy?).
- In our text, we have this first case here. And in the later part of our text, the list expands from just sexual immorality to greed, swindlers and idolators.
- The second case, which is heresy, is also explained in the NT. E.g in Jude, and in 1 Peter, and in Matthew. There is always an injunction against false teachers in the NT. For example, Paul instructs Timothy to rebuke false teachers in the presence of all. If those people repent, then it's ok, but if they don't, they should be excommunicated.
- What is the logic/purpose of corrective church discipline, especially excommunication? What do we hope to achieve in our excommunication? (This will be answered later).
- Furthermore, didn't Jesus command us to even love our enemy? How much more than should we love those who profess to be Christian? (Despite their heresy and their moral failings). Is excommunication compatible with this? Isn't excommunication very intolerant and brutal?
- Firstly, as an extreme form of church discipline, excommunication should only be used sparingly and as the last resort for very severe moral failings (My thoughts: what exactly is a "severe moral failing?" If "greed" is a criteria as Paul mentions here, then should we excommunicate everyone who desires luxuries in life such as flying business class/owning large mansions/etc?)
- Secondly, sometimes this corrective church discipline is necessary for the spiritual life of the community. "A little leaven leavens the whole lump". What this means is that when we keep outwardly unrepentant people in our congregation and in our church life, they will influence others to sin like them too.
- Thirdly, this excommunication is also good for the offender. Here Paul says: "that his spirit or soul may be saved in the day of the Lord". Church discipline is meant to be redemptive. But what does Paul mean here by "deliver to Satan for the destruction of the flesh"? Maybe this means to put the person back from the kingdom of light (the church) to the kingdom of darkness, i.e by excluding him from fellowship. The logic is that when the person is excluded from church fellowship, he will feel FOMO and then understand the severity of his own sin and

repent. The “destruction of his flesh” here then is to destroy the person’s sinful nature. The purpose of excommunication is not to condemn, but to correct.

25th June 2023: Will you go or flee?

Text: Jonah 1

[1] Now the word of the LORD came to Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, [2] “Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it, for their evil has come up before me.”

[3] But Jonah rose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the LORD. He went down to Joppa and found a ship going to Tarshish. So he paid the fare and went down into it, to go with them to Tarshish, away from the presence of the LORD.

[4] But the LORD hurled a great wind upon the sea, and there was a mighty tempest on the sea, so that the ship threatened to break up. [5] Then the mariners were afraid, and each cried out to his god. And they hurled the cargo that was in the ship into the sea to lighten it for them. But Jonah had gone down into the inner part of the ship and had lain down and was fast asleep. [6] So the captain came and said to him, “What do you mean, you sleeper? Arise, call out to your god! Perhaps the god will give a thought to us, that we may not perish.”

[7] And they said to one another, “Come, let us cast lots, that we may know on whose account this evil has come upon us.” So they cast lots, and the lot fell on Jonah. [8] Then they said to him, “Tell us on whose account this evil has come upon us. What is your occupation? And where do you come from? What is your country? And of what people are you?” [9] And he said to them, “I am a Hebrew, and I fear the LORD, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land.” [10] Then the men were exceedingly afraid and said to him, “What is this that you have done!” For the men knew that he was fleeing from the presence of the LORD, because he had told them.

[11] Then they said to him, “What shall we do to you, that the sea may quiet down for us?” For the sea grew more and more tempestuous. [12] He said to them, “Pick me up and hurl me into the sea; then the sea will quiet down for you, for I know it is because of me that this great tempest has come upon you.” [13] Nevertheless, the men rowed hard to get back to dry land, but they could not, for the sea grew more and more tempestuous against them. [14] Therefore they called out to the LORD, “O LORD, let us not perish for this man’s life, and lay not on us innocent blood, for you, O LORD, have done as it pleased you.” [15] So they picked up Jonah and hurled him into the sea, and the sea ceased from its raging. [16] Then the men feared the LORD exceedingly, and they offered a sacrifice to the LORD and made vows.

[17] And the LORD appointed a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.

Notes

- Sermon series on the book of Jonah! This is the first sermon in that series!
- Church tradition tells us that Jonah is historical. Jonah is also mentioned in 2 Kings under the reign of Jeroboam, which places Jonah under the time 780+BC.
- “Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city...”. Nineveh was the city of the Assyrians, and the Assyrians would conquer the Northern kingdom in the next 30 years. But Jonah, instead of going to Nineveh, went to Tarschich, which was in the opposite direction. Jonah was disobeying God on purpose. But why? The reason will be explained in Jonah 4.
- On the ship, there was a mighty storm caused by God. Everyone was panicking and crying

out to their God and etc. Even throwing things down into the sea. But not Jonah. Jonah was just sleeping in the ship. But why? My guess: cause Jonah really didnt want to go to nineveh and he would rather die lol. So when there was a tempest, Jonah went to the deck to sleep, he was content with dying. Then the captain went to find him.

- Then there was a casting of lots to find out why there was a tempest (in ancient thinking, disasters come about because of sin). Then the lot fell on Jonah. The lot fell on Jonah to show that Jonah was the cause of the evil. But very interestingly, even after the lot fell on Jonah, the captain still asked him: “tell us on whose account this evil has come upon us”. Why would the captain still ask Jonah that after the lot had fell on him? Perhaps the captain wanted a further explanation, like what was Jonah’s occupation, where was he from, etc. Then Jonah explained that he worships a sovereign God who made heaven and earth but he was running away from God lol.
- Then Jonah suggested that the sailors just throw him off the boat. I think again, since Jonah wanted to die. But the sailors didnt listen to Jonah, they didnt want to kill Jonah. Instead, they sought a solution that doesnt involve killing Jonah, so they tried to row back to dry land.
- But they can’t row to dry land because the storm got worse. They got even more fearful and then they called out to God, which was the only deity they haven’t called out to yet. And then they finally took Jonah’s suggestion, threw Jonah overboard, and while doing so, they cried for mercy from God to not be guilty of doing so.
- After doing that, the sea calmed down, and the men realised that God is really sovereign and powerful, and they feared the LORD, offered a sacrifice to the LORD and made vows.
- Application: Jonah is like an example of a Christian who sins wilfully and who doesn’t repent when given the opportunity to do so. The end result is that Jonah was directly chastised by God. When a Christian sins wilfully, they cause a lot of damage. This is Jonah and the tempest. Then when given an opportunity to repent, we should. If we don’t, the damage we cause will continue to increase. This is Jonah’s refusal to repent when the lot fell on him (he could have called out to God and apologised for not going to Nineveh). Lastly, when there is a unrepentant sinning christian, the only way to stop the damage is to excommunicate him. This is throwing Jonah over the boat.

2nd July 2023: Memento Mori

Text: Jonah 1:17-2:1-10

[17] And the LORD appointed a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights

[1] Then Jonah prayed to the LORD his God from the belly of the fish, [2] saying,

“I called out to the LORD, out of my distress, and he answered me; out of the belly of Sheol I cried, and you heard my voice. [3] For you cast me into the deep, into the heart of the seas, and the flood surrounded me; all your waves and your billows passed over me. [4] Then I said, ‘I am driven away from your sight; yet I shall again look upon your holy temple.’ [5] The waters closed in over me to take my life; the deep surrounded me; weeds were wrapped about my head [6] at the roots of the mountains. I went down to the land whose bars closed upon me forever; yet you brought up my life from the pit, O LORD my God. [7] When my life was fainting away, I remembered the LORD, and my prayer came to you, into your holy temple. [8] Those who pay regard to vain idols forsake their hope of steadfast love. [9] But I with the voice of thanksgiving will sacrifice to you; what I have vowed I will pay. Salvation belongs to the LORD!”

[10] And the LORD spoke to the fish, and it vomited Jonah out upon the dry land.

Notes

- All humans will eventually die. Memento Mori is latin for “remember that you must die”. The remembrance of our mortality is a good remedy and therapy for our wayward hearts. Only when we remember that we must die, will we look to Jesus for life.
- Chapter 2 of Jonah is a little strange; why is the stubborn and rebellious prophet now saying a prayer of thanksgiving? He would have had rather the sailor throw him overboard than to call upon his God. But now Jonah is calling upon his God with a prayer of thanksgiving. Why? Did anything happen between Jonah being thrown overboard and in the fish swallowing him? We can look for clues in his thanksgiving prayer.
- In Jonah’s thanksgiving prayer, it is clear that Jonah is very familiar with the psalms. In fact, a lot of Jonah’s psalms quotations allude to Jonah descending into Sheol (Hades in greek). In the mind of the Jews, Sheol is a location in the deep of the earth, that everyone must go to when they die, and when people can only go to when they die. So here, Jonah either had a near death experience or he really died. And when Jonah was about to fall from the sea into Sheol, he prayed to escape Sheol, and God heard his prayer. God then sent a fish to swallow Jonah up and then over the span of three days, Jonah went up from Sheol to the sea, i.e he was resuscitated, and then in the belly of the fish he prayed this thanksgiving prayer for God’s delivering him from sheol.
- Death strikes fear in the hearts of sinful persons. In Jonah 1, the tempest brought the sailors to worship God, and in Jonah 3, Jonah’s proclamation of judgment led the people in Nineveh to repent. For Jonah, at first he was very arrogant, even telling the sailors to throw him into the sea. But when he came face to face with death, his arrogance melted, and he could do nothing except cry to God for help.
- So when we remember that we will eventually die, it is a scary thought. It should be a scary thought, because we are created for eternity and for life. Death is not in God’s plan for us when He created us. But yet now after Christ conquered death, God uses death to enter the faithful

into glory. So these thoughts about death should awaken us from our spiritual lethargy and into faithfulness. Teach us to number our days, as the Psalmist says. This remembrance of death helps points us to what truly matters.

- Jonah desired to have his own way, and he wanted to flee from God. But his death experience (or near death experience) showed him that the end of going his own way is death, and that only in God is there life.
- But having said all these about memento mori, while death is used by God to remind us of our frailty and to enter us into glory, it is a bad thing. As the apostle Paul mentioned, death is our enemy. As mentioned before, we were created for eternal life, not death. Death only came into the world because of our rebellion from God and our separation from God. But in God's wisdom, He uses death for our salvation. God sent His Son to die on the cross for our sins, to destroy death by tasting death and overcoming it by His divinity, and rising from the dead. This is why Jesus says that one sign of his ministry for the Jews would be the sign of Jonah. And now as mentioned above, death is now an entrance into glory for those who are united with Christ; those who die with Christ will be raised with Christ.
- God's mercy welcomes all who turn to him. Because of God's mercy, the rebellious Jonah can find mercy and forgiveness from God. God always hears our prayer and is merciful to us, even when we feel like we are in Sheol. No matter how forsaken we feel, we can just cry out to God, and God will hear us. On the cross, Jesus cried out "my God, my God, why have you forsaken me". When Jesus says that, it is an expression of His feeling of separation from God (as experienced in his humanity) as He tastes death (in his humanity). That quotation is actually from the start of Psalm 22. And the end of Psalm 22 actually shows God deliverance, which is shown in Jesus' resurrection. God does not forsake those who call out to Him, and Jonah showed that through his deliverance, as well as our Lord through His resurrection.

9th July 2023: God's love for us and our holiness

Text: 1 John 2:28-3:3

[28] And now, little children, abide in him, so that when he appears we may have confidence and not shrink from him in shame at his coming. [29] If you know that he is righteous, you may be sure that everyone who practices righteousness has been born of him.

[1] See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him. [2] Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. [3] And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.

Notes

- Our privileged status as God's people is based on two things: God's unconditional love and God's promises.
- For the first point on God's unconditional love, it is even true in the OT, i.e Deuteronomy 7:7. This point directly addresses the spirit of entitlement in our culture. And this spirit of entitlement has crept into the church! Sometimes, we might think: "Lord, pls help me with X, then I will do Y". We feel entitled to God to do certain things for us. But rather than asking God to conform to our will, we should conform our wills to God's will, in response to God's unconditional love for us. We don't need to do things for God to love us. God loves us even while we were still sinners. Its just that God's love is more mysterious than we can ever understand, so we must just trust. Rather than have a spirit of entitlement.
- For the second point on God's promises, we know that God will not go back on His word. God has promised us many things, such as His presence, His salvation, etc. In our text, God has promised that we will not shrink from Jesus in shame when He comes again, but this promise is a conditional promise; the condition is that we must abide in Jesus. And abiding in Jesus necessarily means forsaking sin and forsaking the acceptance/sinful pleasures of the world, and then walking in the way of the Lord.
- When we forsake the world, the world will hate us, as Jesus mentioned in the sermon on the mount. But when we are being attacked, we can identify with Christ in His suffering, and it also shapes us to be more Christlike.
- In 1 John 3, we see that our hope is to be like Jesus as He is, and see Jesus as who He really is. Since that is our hope, we are to strive to resemble Jesus in holiness now, so we can have some measure of that! And when we resemble Jesus in holiness now, we testify to the world that we belong to God, c.f 1 Peter 2:9 and Deuteronomy 7:6.
- God's saving grace is always accompanied by His transforming grace! We don't strive to be holy to be saved, but instead we strive to be holy because we are saved. Holiness is not just the outward forms of piety like going to church. Holiness is a state of mind stemming from our real relationship with God.
- Application: we need self examination to see if we are truly born again and saved. Since a holy life and a pure life that strives to fight sin daily and to hate sin is a necessary (but not sufficient condition) for salvation, we need to check if we have compromised with sin in any way. The sufficient condition for salvation is for us to trust Jesus, and for that we need to

check if we have a relationship of trust in Jesus and Jesus alone. Do we trust Jesus for our justification? Do we trust Jesus for His power to sanctify us? Do we trust Jesus to provide for our needs, both physical and spiritual? How is our trust manifested in practical actions?

- Tl;dr: do we hate sin? (Necessary but not sufficient condition for salvation). Do we trust Jesus and in Jesus alone, for our physical and more importantly our spiritual needs? (sufficient condition for salvation)

16th July 2023: The God of second chances

Text: Jonah 3

[1] Then the word of the LORD came to Jonah the second time, saying, [2] “Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it the message that I tell you.” [3] So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the LORD. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly great city, three days’ journey in breadth. [4] Jonah began to go into the city, going a day’s journey. And he called out, “Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!” [5] And the people of Nineveh believed God. They called for a fast and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them to the least of them.

[6] The word reached the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne, removed his robe, covered himself with sackcloth, and sat in ashes. [7] And he issued a proclamation and published through Nineveh, “By the decree of the king and his nobles: Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste anything. Let them not feed or drink water, [8] but let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and let them call out mightily to God. Let everyone turn from his evil way and from the violence that is in his hands. [9] Who knows? God may turn and relent and turn from his fierce anger, so that we may not perish.”

[10] When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil way, God relented of the disaster that he had said he would do to them, and he did not do it.

Notes

- Recap:
 1. It is silly to run away from God.
 2. It is silly to limit God’s love only to Israel.
 3. We saw that when Jonah was sinking, he cried out to God for help and deliverance, and God delivered Jonah out of His mercy.
- Two points:
 1. God gave Jonah a second chance
 2. God gave the ninevites a second chance
- Firstly, we see how God gave Jonah a second chance. We see this by how God sent Jonah to Nineveh a second time after rescuing him. God also did not rake up the first failure, He did not keep harping on Jonah’s disobedience. God forgives, and forgets, unlike us humans... we must learn to forgive AND forget, so that when the same mistake comes up again, we treat it like the first time the mistake is being made.
- We also see how God forgives in such a deep way such that He still trusts us to do His work despite our mistakes. Two examples other than Jonah: David and Peter. Though these people all had made mistakes, after their repentance, God still trusts them to do His work. This is so unlike us humans, even when we forgive a person, we will always feel biased towards the person. We need to stop doing that!
- Also, from how God forgives Jonah, we can be assured that despite our failures and shortcomings, God still forgives us and uses us. We don’t need to feel too bad to do God’s work, when we sin and when we fall short.

- Next, we see how God gave the Ninevites a second chance. Despite Jonah's short message and half-hearted attempt at preaching to the Ninevites (he only walked one day when the city was three days in breadth), the Ninevites all believed Jonah, and even the king. This showed that God in his grace convicted the hearts of all the Ninevites to recognise their sin and their need for deliverance. Thus, we see that in the end, repentance only comes from God's Spirit convicting the sinner. Now, two things: as polytheists, how did the Ninevites know which god Jonah was referring to? Most likely, Jonah did tell them about his God too, just that it is not reflected in the text. Next thing, we see from v9 that the king did not know that God would forgive. It is uncertain whether Jonah omitted the message of God's forgiveness or whether it is just not reflected in the text.
- Next, we see that the repentance of the Ninevites had very concrete actions. Not only were their hearts broken for their sins, they also turned from their evil ways and their violence. Repentance is not just about feeling bad, it is about turning away from sin and towards God.
- For the king, in his act of repentance, he came down from his throne, took off his robes, and sat in ashes. This act of self-dethronement is a sign of humility, which is necessary for repentance. This self-dethronement is a picture of the self-denial that is commanded of us, for us to take up our cross and follow Jesus. When we repent, we can no longer be the king of our own lives, but Jesus must be the king of our lives. Jesus is not just our savior, He is our Lord.
- The book of Jonah served to reprimand Israel. Compare Nineveh's repentance to Israel's hard hearts; and this is despite Israel having more prophets being sent to them, and Israel having the Law which daily points out their sins. In today's context, as Jesus says, "But he answered them, 'An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. The men of Nineveh will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and behold, something greater than Jonah is here.'" In synagogues, on Yom Kippur, the story of Jonah is being read to remind the Israelites of what repentance looks like. But yet ironically, the Jews reject Jesus, who is greater than Jonah.
- Conclusion: God has given us a second chance through Jesus who died in our place so we can be freed. Are we willing to take God's second chance to others by bringing his message of salvation to them?

23rd July 2023: God in the midst of an angry man

Text: Jonah 4

[1] But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was angry. [2] And he prayed to the LORD and said, "O LORD, is not this what I said when I was yet in my country? That is why I made haste to flee to Tarshish; for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from disaster. [3] Therefore now, O LORD, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live." [4] And the LORD said, "Do you do well to be angry?"

[5] Jonah went out of the city and sat to the east of the city and made a booth for himself there. He sat under it in the shade, till he should see what would become of the city. [6] Now the LORD God appointed a plant and made it come up over Jonah, that it might be a shade over his head, to save him from his discomfort. So Jonah was exceedingly glad because of the plant. [7] But when dawn came up the next day, God appointed a worm that attacked the plant, so that it withered. [8] When the sun rose, God appointed a scorching east wind, and the sun beat down on the head of Jonah so that he was faint. And he asked that he might die and said, "It is better for me to die than to live." [9] But God said to Jonah, "Do you do well to be angry for the plant?" And he said, "Yes, I do well to be angry, angry enough to die." [10] And the LORD said, "You pity the plant, for which you did not labor, nor did you make it grow, which came into being in a night and perished in a night. [11] And should not I pity Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know their right hand from their left, and also much cattle?"

Notes

- Last Sunday (Jonah 3), we learnt about God being a God of second chances.
- But here, we see Jonah being angry with God for being gracious. Jonah was upset with God's character for being gracious, for being Himself.
- Unlike Jonah, the Ninevites did not know that God was gracious. Jonah knew that God would forgive the Ninevites if they repent. This is why he didn't want to go to Nineveh in general. He didn't want the Ninevites to enjoy God's grace and mercy. As someone who has experienced God's mercy himself (c.f chapter 2), it is quite selfish for Jonah to want to prevent others from experiencing God's grace. Furthermore, who is Jonah to tell God who He can or cannot forgive?
- Knowing the truth about God should change our **posture** towards God. Jonah knew the truth about God's character, but Jonah's heart wasn't changed. Especially in this context, we should be rejoice with other people and share their blessings with them. In the ideal situation, we should be able to rejoice even with our enemies when they do well.
- God's response to Jonah was quite patient. Instead of chiding Jonah, He asked Jonah: "do you do well to be angry?" But Jonah didn't reply God. Jonah just went into the desert to sulk. He was throwing an tantrum, he was showing God his displeasure at Him forgiving Nineveh.
- We also see how, despite Jonah's disobedience, God appointed a plant to come up over Jonah, to shelter Jonah from the sun. Then Jonah was exceedingly glad because of the plant. But then, when God appointed a worm to eat the plant, and then when the plant died, Jonah became angry at God, angry enough to die.

- Through the plant, God is teaching Jonah a lesson. Jonah thinks that he is better than God, in the area of justice and in the area of compassion.
 - Jonah thinks he is more just than God because he thinks that it is unjust for God to forgive the Ninevites. How can God just let the Ninevites go scot free after they repent?
 - Jonah thinks he is more compassionate than God because he cares about the plant more than God cares about the plant. How can God kill the plant prematurely?

Here, we see the irony; Jonah cares more about the death of a plant than the death of 120000 people, as well as the cattle.

- The fundamental thing that Jonah forgot is this: there is none righteous, no, not one. Israel is not less sinful than Nineveh, and Jonah is not less sinful than Nineveh. It is only of God's grace that in the OT, Israel is chosen by God to be His people. Everything is all of grace, and every person, Jew or Greek, professing Christian or non Christian, are equally sinful and are in need of God's grace.
- In the parable of the prodigal son, the older brother is so resentful because he feels that he worked very hard but the father did not bless him. But from his tone, we know that the older brother's service to his father is not joyful service, but is a burden. So the older son feels like he deserves better because of his hard work, as compared to the younger son who just repents. Two problems here:
 - The older brother's POV is legalism. He thinks his works can earn his father's favour.
 - But more fundamentally, he doesn't need to earn his father's favour, because as the father said, "all that I have is yours".
- We don't need to work to earn our Father's favour, we already have every spiritual blessing in the highest places. Hence,
 - Direct application: We should not feel resentful when we see other people who we think are "unworthy of God's grace" come to God, because we are all unworthy. The older brother did not do anything to be born into his father's family, so similarly, we did not do anything to be accepted by God as His children.
 - Indirect application: We should not feel resentful or envious of other people when they seem to experience more physical blessings. We should not think: "God I serve in church every week, why am I still struggling financially but person X (which could be Christian) never do anything but still doing so well". We must already know that we already have every spiritual blessing in the highest places.

30th July 2023: Identity in our current times

Text: No specific text for this week

Notes

- What we take to be our core identity affects what we do in our life. For example, if we take “i am a good husband and a good father” as our core identity, then we would strive to be good husbands and fathers. But if we take “i am a live for the moment, maximise pleasure” as our core identity, then whenever our family doesn't give us joy, we might ditch them.
- In our life, we have many identities. Who we are at work, our ethnic identity, our political identity, etc. But most of these identities are accidental (i.e, they do not define who we are). Some would say that there is no core identity, but then our identity is just the sum of all these accidental identities. Then when these accidental identities change, our identity changes too. But this sounds quite pessimistic... Furthermore, if these secondary identities conflict, then if there is no core identity, then how? But if there is a core identity, then that would help us determine which conflicting identity to keep or to drop.
- But as Christians, our view is that there is a core identity, and it is that we are fearfully and wonderfully made by God in God's image. I.e, our core identity is that we are creatures that are created by a loving God. C.f Genesis 2. You and I are human beings (a unique ensouled body; embodied soul) created in the image of God; known, created, loved and redeemed in the Lord Jesus Christ, even as we take on the many multiple identities that present themselves in our lives.
- From the christian POV issue, the primary problem is that we **reject** our God-given core identity, and that we define our own discovered primary personal identity. This is sin! C.f Romans 1. Or, it is that we subordinate our God-given core identity under the secondary identities that might actually come from a good place. For example, there is nothing wrong with liking basketball, but if we take our core identity as “i am a basketball player” more than “i am a creature created lovingly by God to be in fellowship with Him”, then that is sin. And sin here is both dishonouring to God and also destructive to us. When our core identity is gotten rather than given, then we feel the need to maintain our gotten core identity.
- But the good thing is that God has provided us with a means to **restore** and **redeem** the identity that we have all rejected. And that is by giving us His Son.
- As per Romans 5:12-21, Jesus Christ re-lived Adam's *life*, Jesus Christ died Adam's *death*, and Jesus Christ fulfilled Adam's *destiny*.
 1. God in Christ Jesus names and calls us as his own (John 10:14-16)
 2. He gives us back our primary identity (created in God's image; known by God; being in Christ)
 3. He does this by laying down his life (John 10:17).
 4. Such is the worth bestowed on us that comes from the identity God gives to us and Jesus redeems back for us

6th August 2023: Bad words

Text: Proverbs 18:21

[21] Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruits.

Notes

- We use words to communicate with each other. Our words can build someone up or tear someone down. We know this from common sense, but also from Scripture.
- When God created us with the ability to talk and communicate, He set us apart from other creatures and also determined our purpose as humans. God created us with the ability to talk because talking is essential for forming relationships, and we are built for relationships. But because of sin, now our ability to talk have the potential to destroy relationships instead of to build up relationships.
- When we say negative things to people, the hurt we cause can cause lasting scars. The thing about words is that we can't take them back after they leave our mouth. Our negative and hurtful words can cause irreparable damage to someone.
- Now, "the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick" (Jer 17:9). And, "out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks" (Matthew 12:34). Ultimately, the reason why our words can hurt others is because our heart is sick. The words that come out of our mouth can only be as good as our heart, and the problem is that because of sin, our heart is sick. For example, angry words only come out from an angry heart.
- As James said, nobody can tame the tongue. But since the tongue is only a manifestation of the sin in our heart, when the heart is changed, then the tongue is can be subdued. And this change of heart is effected by God and His Holy Spirit.
- Most of the times, we hurt others with our words when others hurt us. We get angry when we perceive (correctly or incorrectly) other people sinning against us, then the angry words will come out. But this is where the gospel comes in. When we realise God's forgiveness for us, then we can forgive others when they hurt us, and this would prevent us from saying hurtful words back to them. But all of this can only be done after God gives us a new heart.

27th August 2023: The wedding night

Text: Song of Solomon 3:6-5:1

[6] What is that coming up from the wilderness like columns of smoke, perfumed with myrrh and frankincense, with all the fragrant powders of a merchant? [7] Behold, it is the litter of Solomon! Around it are sixty mighty men, some of the mighty men of Israel, [8] all of them wearing swords and expert in war, each with his sword at his thigh, against terror by night. [9] King Solomon made himself a carriage from the wood of Lebanon. [10] He made its posts of silver, its back of gold, its seat of purple; its interior was inlaid with love by the daughters of Jerusalem. [11] Go out, O daughters of Zion, and look upon King Solomon, with the crown with which his mother crowned him on the day of his wedding, on the day of the gladness of his heart.

He

[1] Behold, you are beautiful, my love, behold, you are beautiful! Your eyes are doves behind your veil. Your hair is like a flock of goats leaping down the slopes of Gilead. [2] Your teeth are like a flock of shorn ewes that have come up from the washing, all of which bear twins, and not one among them has lost its young. [3] Your lips are like a scarlet thread, and your mouth is lovely. Your cheeks are like halves of a pomegranate behind your veil. [4] Your neck is like the tower of David, built in rows of stone; on it hang a thousand shields, all of them shields of warriors. [5] Your two breasts are like two fawns, twins of a gazelle, that graze among the lilies. [6] Until the day breathes and the shadows flee, I will go away to the mountain of myrrh and the hill of frankincense. [7] You are altogether beautiful, my love; there is no flaw in you. [8] Come with me from Lebanon, my bride; come with me from Lebanon. Depart from the peak of Amana, from the peak of Senir and Hermon, from the dens of lions, from the mountains of leopards.

[9] You have captivated my heart, my sister, my bride; you have captivated my heart with one glance of your eyes, with one jewel of your necklace. [10] How beautiful is your love, my sister, my bride! How much better is your love than wine, and the fragrance of your oils than any spice! [11] Your lips drip nectar, my bride; honey and milk are under your tongue; the fragrance of your garments is like the fragrance of Lebanon. [12] A garden locked is my sister, my bride, a spring locked, a fountain sealed. [13] Your shoots are an orchard of pomegranates with all choicest fruits, henna with nard, [14] nard and saffron, calamus and cinnamon, with all trees of frankincense, myrrh and aloes, with all choice spices— [15] a garden fountain, a well of living water, and flowing streams from Lebanon.

[16] Awake, O north wind, and come, O south wind! Blow upon my garden, let its spices flow.

She

Let my beloved come to his garden, and eat its choicest fruits.

He

[1] I came to my garden, my sister, my bride, I gathered my myrrh with my spice, I ate my honeycomb with my honey, I drank my wine with my milk.

Others

Eat, friends, drink, and be drunk with love!

Notes

- In the song “fly me to the moon”, there is a lot of imagery but the main point is just the person saying that he/she wants to be loved. All the “fly me to the moon and let me sit among the stars” stuff. Similarly, there is a lot of imagery here but here we need to find the message behind the imagery.
- The text starts with Solomon’s wedding carriage. Probably Solomon here is just used to depict an ideal “prince charming”, and all of the description here about Solomon is saying like the groom is regal, fierce (lol), and a protector, just like Solomon.
- The text then talks about the bride. The text first starts with a description of the bride’s eyes, and then moves down to describe her hair, her teeth, her neck, and then down to her breasts. After describing her breasts, he then talks about going to the mountain and etc with her lol. Probably this is the groom expressing a desire for privacy and physical intimacy with his bride.
- Then v12-16 is the actual physical intimacy lol. The garden here in ancient near eastern culture refers to a woman’s genitals. Note: at first the woman’s garden is referred to as locked (so the woman is a virgin), then thereafter the woman asks the man to enter her garden (wow), i.e sexual union, and the man gladly does so. Ancient near eastern culture focuses on the woman’s virginity (patriarchal culture), and we can see this in God’s Law too in the OT. But we no longer live in these days (i.e, prizing the woman’s virginity more importantly than the man’s!).
- Song of Solomon is about the love between man and woman, and this love is epitomised in the sexual union between man and woman.
- Sex is something God created to be enjoyed by a man and a woman in marriage, we see that in Eden. But because of sin, the intimacy that a man and a woman is lost (they were ashamed), and now sex is corrupted by sin. That sex is corrupted can be seen by how in ancient near eastern culture, there were things like temple prostitutes etc. People still knew that sex is of divine origin, but they think that sex with the idols (as mediated by the prostitutes) is a thing. Then today, there are two extremes; one extreme says sex is dirty and bad and only to be used as a vehicle for baby-making. The other extreme says sex is to be openly and freely enjoyed with all people and that babies are a hindrance.
- In our text, we see a man and woman in a garden (v12-16), and they had joy in their marital union, which is in a sense, a redeeming of what was lost in Eden.
- Marriage as an institution has inherent honour and dignity, which is why in many cultures, they have something similar to Solomon’s entourage as described here. E.g, in Chinese culture, we have the many cars during the gatecrash lol. Or more generally, weddings are quite extravagant. That is not wrong even for us Christians, but that must be done in the right spirit. An extravagant wedding cannot be done as a flaunt of wealth or what, that is wrong. The right spirit is that the wedding must be done as a show of love between the couple and also as gratitude to the parents (e.g SoS 3:11). If we have the means to and if our heart is right (as per mentioned above), then a more expensive wedding is ok.

3rd September 2023: Good words

Text: No specific text for today

Notes

- Recap:
 1. Proverbs 18:21. Our words can lead to either good consequences, or bad consequences. We can either uplift someone or hurt someone.
 2. Bad words, like lies and hurtful statements, come from a rotten, deceitful heart.
 3. We need God's help to renew our heart so that we can speak gracious words.
- Three points for today:
 1. Why good words matter
 2. God's word
 3. Relying on the Holy Spirit for God's help
- Why do good words matter?
 - Proverbs 12:25 — our words can help uplift someone and encourage someone. When someone else is in trouble, we don't need to lie to the person and tell him that his problem will go away tomorrow, but we can speak truths like how God is with them :).
 - Kind words are like honey, Proverbs 16:24.
 - Our words can often bring healing to people whom we have hurt. An example of that would be an apology. Apologizing is really difficult. Really need God's help for this. And one thing that is helpful to remember is that God has forgiven us. See Ephesians 4:32
- Why God's word matters
 - Colossians 3:12-17. Love is the key to speaking gracious words. But this Christian love that constantly puts others first doesn't come from us, it comes from God. God gives us this love through His Word, through Psalms, hymns and spiritual songs (v16).
 - The Spirit of God uses the word of God to put new life in our hearts and new words in our mouths.
- Rely on the Spirit for our words
 - 1 Corinthians 2:10-13
 - We have received God's Spirit!
 - And we use words given to us by the Spirit, using the Spirit's word to explain spiritual truths.
 - We should pray and ask the Spirit for opportunities to share the gospel in our conversations and also for the power to share the gospel in our conversations.
 - We should also ask for and rely on the Spirit's prompting to find someone that we can encourage with a gracious word.
 - The Spirit works in us to give us a new heart, and the Spirit also works through us and uses us to encourage people, especially other Christians.

10th September 2023: A spousal tiff

Text: Song of Solomon 5:2-6:3

She

[2] I slept, but my heart was awake. A sound! My beloved is knocking. "Open to me, my sister, my love, my dove, my perfect one, for my head is wet with dew, my locks with the drops of the night." [3] I had put off my garment; how could I put it on? I had bathed my feet; how could I soil them? [4] My beloved put his hand to the latch, and my heart was thrilled within me. [5] I arose to open to my beloved, and my hands dripped with myrrh, my fingers with liquid myrrh, on the handles of the bolt. [6] I opened to my beloved, but my beloved had turned and gone. My soul failed me when he spoke. I sought him, but found him not; I called him, but he gave no answer. [7] The watchmen found me as they went about in the city; they beat me, they bruised me, they took away my veil, those watchmen of the walls. [8] I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem, if you find my beloved, that you tell him I am sick with love.

Others

[9] What is your beloved more than another beloved, O most beautiful among women? What is your beloved more than another beloved, that you thus adjure us?

She

[10] My beloved is radiant and ruddy, distinguished among ten thousand. [11] His head is the finest gold; his locks are wavy, black as a raven. [12] His eyes are like doves beside streams of water, bathed in milk, sitting beside a full pool. [13] His cheeks are like beds of spices, mounds of sweet-smelling herbs. His lips are lilies, dripping liquid myrrh. [14] His arms are rods of gold, set with jewels. His body is polished ivory, bedecked with sapphires. [15] His legs are alabaster columns, set on bases of gold. His appearance is like Lebanon, choice as the cedars. [16] His mouth is most sweet, and he is altogether desirable. This is my beloved and this is my friend, O daughters of Jerusalem.

Others

[1] Where has your beloved gone, O most beautiful among women? Where has your beloved turned, that we may seek him with you?

She

[2] My beloved has gone down to his garden to the beds of spices, to graze in the gardens and to gather lilies. [3] I am my beloved's and my beloved is mine; he grazes among the lilies.

Notes

- Up till now in the book, we had courtship and marriage and the consummation of marriage.
- Now in the book, we have married life together. Married life together is not always as rosy as the fairytales portray.
- In chapter 5:2-9, we have a tense mood. The point is captured in Shakespeare's quote: "the course of true love never did run smooth". Here, the intimacy that the couple once shared is threatened. But though there are threats to intimacy, we must safeguard it and make it run straight.

- Here, most likely we have a spousal fight due to unmet expectations. The woman was waiting for the man to reach home (she was half asleep), but the man reached home quite late. The man expects the woman to be available for sex but the woman is now a little lazy, since the husband came home so late. But after a while, the wife relents and opens the door but then by then the husband is already quite annoyed and he left. Here, we have many instances of unmet expectations. Perhaps the wife should have communicated that she wanted the husband to come home earlier, and perhaps the husband could have communicated an apology, and etc.
- Unmet expectations can cause tensions in the marriage, so there is a need to communicate so expectations can be aligned, and the communication has to be done amicably.
- The greatest obstacle to intimacy is selfishness and self centredness. Both the woman and man are selfish here.
 - He is selfish — he comes home so late and still expects to have sex
 - She is selfish — she is unwilling to let him in because it is inconvenient
- The opposite of selfishness is selflessness.
- Here, from v4 onwards, we see the woman shifting from thinking just about herself to thinking about her husband. She goes in search for her man in the city. Probably she was not literally beaten, but the watchmen beating her is probably a metaphor for how defenseless she felt without her husband.
- After a while, the woman asks the daughters of jerusalem for help to find her husband, but the daughters of jerusalem ask if this man is worth it. Then, the woman replies with many praises of the man.
- By the way, v8b-v16d form a chiasm (left as an exercise to the reader. Hint: “daughters of Jerusalem”, “my beloved” , “gold”).
- After that, the husband appears with the wife, and then the intimacy is restored.
- Self-centredness and selfishness is killing many marriages. The antidote is self denial, to put the interests of our spouse above our own interests.
- An application of the above concept is in sexual intimacy. Quite often, there is a mismatch in sexual desire between husband and wife. Suppose (for the sake of argument) that the husband has more desire than the wife for sex.
 - The wife should be ok to have sex even if she doesn’t want to, because she wants to seek her husband’s pleasure more than her own.
 - The husband should be ok to not have sex though he wants to, because he wants to seek his wife’s well being more then his own.
 - If both parties are so understanding towards each other (see the two points above), they will both feel loved and intimacy will naturally come.
 - The opposite of the above story is that the husband is annoyed that the wife is reluctant to have sex cause she is tired and he insists on his own way. The wife hates that and she withholds it even more not just because she is tired but now also to punish the husband for not caring about her tiredness.
 - Sex is a gift of God to be enjoyed by married couples, not a weapon to be used in retaliation.

- Now, human love (the r/s between husband and wife) should point us toward divine love, to the love between Christ and the Church.
- Just like in marriage, when we commit to being Christian, we should commit to a life-long pursuit of Christ. But we can do this only because Jesus denied himself first (“yet not my will, but your will be done”) and pursued us, by voluntarily self-sacrificed and died on the cross for our sins.
- Christ is the epitome of self-denial, and He has set for us a model of what it means to deny self.
- Here, we see that as the r/s matures, the starting point changes. Comparing chapter 2:16 and chapter 6:3, in chapter 2, the starting point is our desire for the beloved, but in chapter 6, as the r/s with the beloved grows, the starting point is the beloved’s desire for us.
- Today’s text also has a spiritual reading:
Here, Jesus is the true husband who knocks on the doors of our hearts. By our neglect, sometimes we forget Jesus and we are lazy to open the door for him. Then we feel like we can’t feel Jesus’ presence in our life. Nothing goes in when we read the Bible, and we feel weak and helpless, like when we kenna whack by the watchmen of Jerusalem. In those times, we might think: is Jesus worth it? Then, we must remember how perfect Jesus is and how he loved us first. After which, when we open the door, unlike the husband in Song of songs who leaves, we will still find Jesus there.

17th September 2023: Words of affirmation

Text: Song of Solomon 6:4-7:10

He

[4] You are beautiful as Tirzah, my love, lovely as Jerusalem, awesome as an army with banners. [5] Turn away your eyes from me, for they overwhelm me— Your hair is like a flock of goats leaping down the slopes of Gilead. [6] Your teeth are like a flock of ewes that have come up from the washing; all of them bear twins; not one among them has lost its young. [7] Your cheeks are like halves of a pomegranate behind your veil. [8] There are sixty queens and eighty concubines, and virgins without number. [9] My dove, my perfect one, is the only one, the only one of her mother, pure to her who bore her. The young women saw her and called her blessed; the queens and concubines also, and they praised her.

[10] “Who is this who looks down like the dawn, beautiful as the moon, bright as the sun, awesome as an army with banners?”

She

[11] I went down to the nut orchard to look at the blossoms of the valley, to see whether the vines had budded, whether the pomegranates were in bloom. [12] Before I was aware, my desire set me among the chariots of my kinsman, a prince.

Others

[13] Return, return, O Shulammite, return, return, that we may look upon you.

He

Why should you look upon the Shulammite, as upon a dance before two armies?

[1] How beautiful are your feet in sandals, O noble daughter! Your rounded thighs are like jewels, the work of a master hand. [2] Your navel is a rounded bowl that never lacks mixed wine. Your belly is a heap of wheat, encircled with lilies. [3] Your two breasts are like two fawns, twins of a gazelle. [4] Your neck is like an ivory tower. Your eyes are pools in Heshbon, by the gate of Bath-rabbim. Your nose is like a tower of Lebanon, which looks toward Damascus. [5] Your head crowns you like Carmel, and your flowing locks are like purple; a king is held captive in the tresses.

[6] How beautiful and pleasant you are, O loved one, with all your delights! [7] Your stature is like a palm tree, and your breasts are like its clusters. [8] I say I will climb the palm tree and lay hold of its fruit. Oh may your breasts be like clusters of the vine, and the scent of your breath like apples, [9] and your mouth like the best wine.

She

It goes down smoothly for my beloved, gliding over lips and teeth.

[10] I am my beloved's, and his desire is for me.

Notes

- To think: why do couples treat each other differently before and after marriage?
- Marriage is not the end of a r/s, it is the start of a lifelong pursuit.

- In today's text, the man is always telling the woman how beautiful she is. He has been doing this since their courtship days, and he did this during the wedding, and he is doing it now after marriage again. He is also doing it after a fight (c.f 6:4, 7:1,6).
- Btw, today's text is q similar to chapter 4:1-3, very similar metaphors are used.
- Seems like today's text show that the man and woman have reconciled after their fight (see ch6:12, ch7:10). No doubt these words of love were helpful; they show the other person that regardless of how bad the fight is, the affection that y'all have for each other is unchanged, and hence they provide the security for the other person to be vulnerable.
- And ofc, the same principle holds for other interpersonal r/s too (maybe without the erotic component). In our friendships/dealing with our families, we must still love the other person and demonstrate our love even in the midst of a conflict. This demonstration would look like a desire for reconciliation, a seeking for the other person's forgiveness, a seeking to make restitution for the wrong inflicted, etc. And when we do so, the other person will feel safe to be vulnerable with us and let us know how exactly we hurt them, and then when we address the hurt, this would lead to a growth in closeness and finally reconciliation.
- In our text, in v4, tirzah and jerusalem are the two capital cities of israel and judah back then. And then there's also the phrase "awesome as an army with banners". The same phrase appears in v10, that's how we know its an inclusio. The whole chunk here then is a description of the wife's beauty. In this section, the focus is on the wife's face.
- The next chunk here in the description of the woman's beauty is in ch6:13-7:5. The description here starts from bottom up. Some metaphors to take note: damascus is the capital city of the syrians, which are israel's enemies. Hence the woman's nose pointing towards damascus signifies an unfearing and brave spirit (much like what is praised in 1 peter 3:1-7).
- The tl;dr is then this: the woman is beautiful.
- Here, we also see that the man here is a one-woman man (chapter 6:v9). Unlike solomon!!!!
- A note on the theology of the body:
 - Bodily beauty points to the beauty of the creator. In fact, all beauty points toward the beauty of God. All creation praises God, and they do so by radiating their beauty, through which we see the wisdom and the beauty of God. Humans best reflect God's beauty, since humans are made in the image of God. The image of God should point us back to God.
 - Jesus' incarnation, death and resurrection took place while He was in the body. God cares about the body! In the future, there will be a **bodily resurrection!**
- Application: husband and wife should continue appreciating each other, physical beauty included! And when we do this, we will see God :).
- Application 2: we also shouldn't need to chase after an ideal body image, because that differs from culture to culture! In the past, people loved women with pudgy bodies (e.g belly like a heap of wheat). Defo not today. Each of us has been fearfully and wonderfully made by God, so we should be thankful for the physical qualities God has given us :). In fact, appreciation of physical appearance is in the eye of the beholder! Shulammite thinks she is dark, but the man loves her for it.
- Application 3: in fact when we look at the man's description of his wife, not all his description are of the wife's physical appearance, some of them are of the wife's qualities. E.g, nose like

the tower of lebanon that looks towards damascus-> confidence. Awesome as an army with banners -> exudes strength.

24th September 2023: Romantic love

Text: Song of Solomon 7:11-8:14

[11] Come, my beloved, let us go out into the fields and lodge in the villages; [12] let us go out early to the vineyards and see whether the vines have budded, whether the grape blossoms have opened and the pomegranates are in bloom. There I will give you my love. [13] The mandrakes give forth fragrance, and beside our doors are all choice fruits, new as well as old, which I have laid up for you, O my beloved.

[1] Oh that you were like a brother to me who nursed at my mother's breasts! If I found you outside, I would kiss you, and none would despise me. [2] I would lead you and bring you into the house of my mother— she who used to teach me. I would give you spiced wine to drink, the juice of my pomegranate. [3] His left hand is under my head, and his right hand embraces me! [4] I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem, that you not stir up or awaken love until it pleases.

[5] Who is that coming up from the wilderness, leaning on her beloved?

Under the apple tree I awakened you. There your mother was in labor with you; there she who bore you was in labor.

[6] Set me as a seal upon your heart, as a seal upon your arm, for love is strong as death, jealousy is fierce as the grave. Its flashes are flashes of fire, the very flame of the LORD.

[7] Many waters cannot quench love, neither can floods drown it. If a man offered for love all the wealth of his house, he would be utterly despised.

Others

[8] We have a little sister, and she has no breasts. What shall we do for our sister on the day when she is spoken for? [9] If she is a wall, we will build on her a battlement of silver, but if she is a door, we will enclose her with boards of cedar.

She

[10] I was a wall, and my breasts were like towers; then I was in his eyes as one who finds peace.

[11] Solomon had a vineyard at Baal-hamon; he let out the vineyard to keepers; each one was to bring for its fruit a thousand pieces of silver. [12] My vineyard, my very own, is before me; you, O Solomon, may have the thousand, and the keepers of the fruit two hundred.

He

[13] O you who dwell in the gardens, with companions listening for your voice; let me hear it.

She

[14] Make haste, my beloved, and be like a gazelle or a young stag on the mountains of spices.

Notes

- Romantic love is something that is hard to explain. Romantic love is more than just a biological phenomenon caused by the release of hormones. When one's spouse asks: "why do you love

me?”, it is usually a difficult question to answer.

- That’s why God included the song of songs in the bible, to teach us romantic love through poetry that connects with our heart and teaches us love through our heart.
- Romantic love, like all forms of love (like the love between friends), moves us out of ourselves to commune with another. This is what we are made for, community. So there is a desire to love another, and there is a desire to be loved by another.
- In ch8 v1, the explanation is this: in the ancient world, PDA (public display of affection) is frowned upon. In v1 it is the woman saying that she loves her husband so much that she wishes it would not be taboo for them to PDA outside, such as would be the case if they were thought to be siblings. So in ch7:11-13 and in ch8:1-7, we see the woman showing her desire to show love to her husband and also to receive love from her husband.
- Now, love is “other-centred”, which is something that is difficult for us sinful humans to do, since sinful humans like us are “self-centred”. Hence, for us sinful humans, we can say that love is a virtue that needs to be cultivated (through the Holy Spirit).
- In the context of marital love, sex is supposed to be “other-centred”. And that is love. Sex is supposed to be self-giving, it is supposed to be a person giving of themselves to another person, it should be a person seeking the other person’s pleasure. On the other hand, lust is when the sexual desire is “self-centred”. In lustful sex, a person desires only his/her own pleasure, not the pleasure of his/her wife/husband. This is a perversion of sexual desire that God created. And pornography is an example of this.
- In the latter half of chapter 8 (v11-12), we see the man comparing his love with solomon’s love; the man’s love is “other centred”, it is centred on his wife’s welfare, whereas solomon’s love is “self centred”, it is centred on his own pleasure. This is why solomon had 1000 lovers, all to satisfy his lust, whereas the man only has one lover, his wife, because he seeks his wife’s welfare.
- Also in the later half of ch8 (v8-9), it is a description of the woman’s youth. When she was young, her family helped to adorn her (e.g, the metaphor of the wall/door and the adorning of the wall/door). This is so the woman can attract a potential suitor. But in v10, the woman already doesn’t need her family’s help. This is because in v10, she already knows how to love, and she already knows she is loved by her husband. This is an example of maturity on the woman’s part; because she is loved by her husband, she knows how to love on her own without the help of her family. Similarly, when we know we are loved by God, that helps us to mature and know how to love.
- In v6-7, we see that the romantic love between husband and wife is exclusive and strong. This is the analogy which is used for God’s love for His people in the OT, such as in Hosea.
- Now, we note that ch8.14 ends very abruptly. But that might be the point: “The effect of 8:14 is to assure us that the Song will never end, that the lovers will evermore be engaged in love’s game of seeking and finding. The final words of the poem send us back to the beginning, to the voice that speaks in 1:2.”
- There is a longing/expectation for eternal love in song of songs itself. And this expectation for eternal love is found across all cultures.
- However, eternal love is not possible because of death. UNLESS, the love we are talking about is God’s love for us. While we might die, our death doesn’t separate us from God’s love for us. God’s love for us is STRONGER than the grave, FIERCER than death. Through life and death, God loves us. And, the christian fellowship and friendship that we share with each other will

never end too; in the resurrection we'll be like the angels, perfectly loving God and each other :).

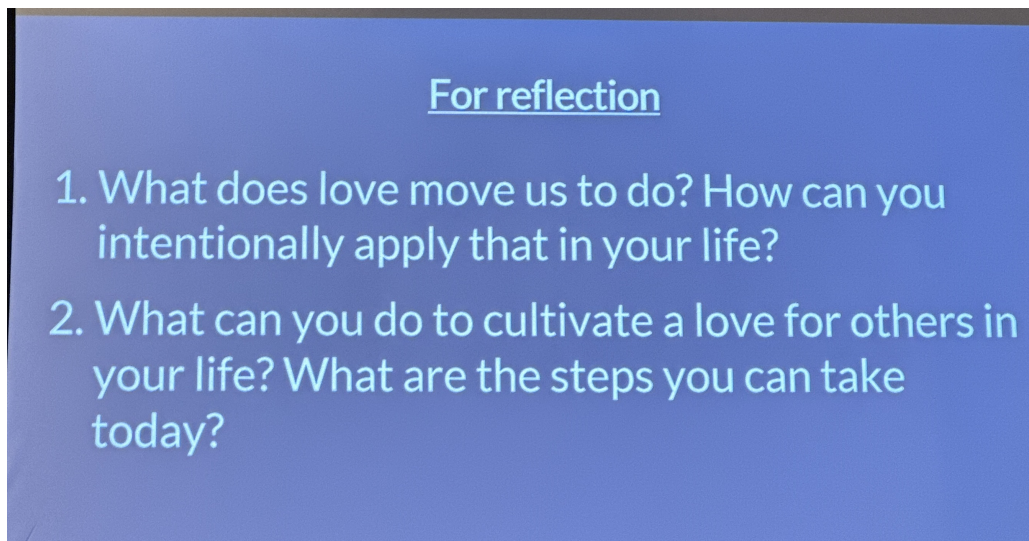


Figure 1: Reflection questions for this sermon

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