

The End
Revelation 19:1 - 21:8
#13 in a Series on What Jesus Is Saying to the Church
Faith Community Church, November 25, 2007

Introduction

Suppose that after church this morning you went up to the mall and sat down near a table full of people in the food court and said, “Do you know that the world is going to end?” How long do you think it would be until you were sitting by yourself?

While the Bible clearly speaks about future judgment and the end of human history, talking about it seems to be the kind of thing that is associated with the lunatic fringe. There was an article on the Reuters news service just this past Thursday about a Russian sect that has holed themselves up in a cave to await the end of the world. (Read excerpts).¹ Is that what we are if we believe that the world is going to end? Are we “doomsday cultists?”

On the other the whole idea can be nearly irrelevant to us. Peter wrote about people who scoff at the idea of the world coming to an end and the idea of Jesus coming back (2 Peter 3:1ff). We don’t scoff, but it sometimes does seem that life just seems to go on, so maybe all these things will happen in someone else’s lifetime, but not in ours.

When God provided the book of Revelation to the Christians in the late 1st and early 2nd centuries, it was given with the intent that it would make a difference to them. So here we are, 1900 years later, but 1900 years closer. How does this book speak to us?

What God Tells Us About the End

This morning I want us to look at the next big section in the book, beginning in 19:1 and ending at 21:8. It is a long section, but not so long as to prevent us from reading it.

1. What John Heard

In terms of the chronology of Revelation, 19:1-10 is a transitional passage. It looks back to the destruction of the world system that we saw in chapters 17 & 18, and ahead to what is to come.

Let me go back to 1976. I grew up in northern New Jersey and had become a baseball fan – a Yankees fan. From 1949 through 1964 the Yankees had won the American League pennant every year except two. Now, 12 years later, the Yanks had won the American League Eastern Division and were playing the Kansas City Royals to see who would go to the World Series. It was Thursday night, October 14 – six weeks before Laura and I were getting married – and I was listening to the game on the radio as I came

¹ http://news.yahoo.com/s/nm/20071115/ts_nm/russia_cult_dc_1

home. The Royals had tied the game in the 8th inning, and had threatened to take the lead in the top if the 9th, but they had stranded two runners. The Yankees were up in the bottom of the 9th. I remember running inside and putting the TV on in our living room. The first batter, 1st baseman Chris Chambliss hit a long ball over the wall in right-center field for a homerun, and the Yankees had won for the first time since 1964. Their first win since I had become a fan. Yankee Stadium was going nuts, and so was I. Problem was my parents were sleeping in the next room, so I had to go nuts very quietly. So I stood in the living room, throwing my hands in the air, screaming . . . silently. What a feeling!

I've been at some games at Veterans Stadium and at Citizens Bank Park where the celebration was loud. I've been at some concerts where an appreciative audience gave a long standing ovation. Probably the most noise I ever heard was at the Spectrum when Hulk Hogan retained his championship title. Your ears buzz with the noise in those situations. But they pale in comparison to what we will hear at the end.

In 19:1, John hears an ever-expanding expression of praise to God for his judgments, coupled with an announcement that the Bride of Christ has made herself ready.

Beginning in 19:11, through the repeated use of words like, "Then I saw" (19:11, 17, 19; 20:1, 4, 11; 21:1), John takes us through a series of events that lay out God's plan to wrap up human history.

2. What John Saw

One author writes, this section "marks the pivotal point in God's climactic dealing with the earth. From this point forward He will assert his power and will begin to bring to pass his long-cherished purposes which have been so carefully worked out in the total scheme of redemption."²

This is important, because we often approach this section with an interest in the timetable – the when. John's purpose is to show us that God will deal decisively and finally with sin and death. So how does he do it?

- a. Through Christ's powerful and triumphant return. (19:11-16)

John's readers, living in the Roman culture, would have recognized this passage as describing a victory procession. Look again at the text. There is a battle, but one has the sense that it is over before it begins.

- b. Through a horrific judgment of the nations (19:17-21)

How could a loving God do such a thing? We need to remember that throughout the chapters that precede this, God has repeatedly given people a chance to repent, but their response has been to reject God's rule.

² Tenney (1957:87)

- c. Through establishing a kingdom of righteousness (20:1-6)

Following Christ's return and a battle with the Beast and his followers, Satan is placed in chains for 1000 years. Yet as we will see, Satan still has a role to play. This thousand-year period is an intermediate stage during which time believers will reign with Christ on this earth. From numerous Old Testament descriptions of this time, it will be characterized by peace and righteousness. I think we find a description of this time in Isaiah 11:1-9.

- d. Through the final defeat of Satan (20:7-10)

Strangely, God frees Satan at the end of this period, and he immediately leads a rebellion against God that is met with swift and decisive judgment. The question is, why does God allow this to happen in light of how good things have been? I like what one writer said: "God allows Satan and his followers to have one last gasp, yet the purpose there is to prove beyond any doubt that the hold of depravity over the sinner is total."³

You see, we are not sinners because we are forced to be, we are sinners because we want to be.

- e. Through the final judgment (20:11-15)

At this time every person who has ever lived will stand before God, and they will be judged according to their works. Those who are not found in the book of life will be sent to eternal judgment, along with Death and Hades, fulfilling what Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 15:24-26.

- f. Through the New Heaven and New Earth in their perfection

John ends this section with these words (verses 1-5a). "Behold, I am making all things new." And some interesting words, "It is done." (Connect to Genesis 2:1-2; John 19:30).

What is different?

Oppression and injustice are gone.
Cancer, deformity and abortion are gone.
Sorrow is gone, depression is gone.
Failure is gone, grief is gone.
Rape, murder, corruption are gone.
Mistrust, misunderstanding and broken relationships are gone.
Distance from God is gone. Imagine a world without those things!

But another thing is gone. That is opportunity. God's plan of redemption is no longer in force. It is history. The line has been drawn in the sand and

³ Osborne (2002:717)

those who have turned from their sins and have trusted in Christ will enjoy life – eternally. And those who continue in their rebellion will face death – eternally.

Which side of the line are you on?

3. What Jesus wants us to know

Keep your finger here in Revelation 21 and go back for a moment to chapter 1 and re-read 1:1-3. The most important thing to remember about understanding Revelation is that it was God's intent that Christians of all generations would be encouraged and challenged by this book. So it is fitting that this section ends with a challenge.

This is what is involved in God's words in 21:6-8. One of the things that we need to continue to be asking ourselves is whether or not our lives are moving in a direction that gives evidence that we are being faithful. Because "the one who conquers will have this heritage, and I will be his God and he will be my son."

Connecting This Passage to Our Lives

There are two consistent appeals to us from this book and from passages that apply the reality that Jesus will come again someday. I can summarize them in two words: hope and holiness.

Don't dismiss the return of Jesus and the end of the world as some doomsday nonsense. Christ's coming is meant to give us hope and stimulate us toward holiness. Let the truth of God's word do that in you this morning.