

REVELATION



Day 343

“Center Stage”

December 9 - Revelation 1

Dear Friends,
I have always enjoyed radio. I can remember laying on the beach, cooking in the sun and listening to my little AM/FM transistor. It's funny how voices you regularly hear on the radio become like familiar personalities to you. They can feel like an old friend even though you have never actually met them. I recall one disc jockey who would read my mind and play all of my favorite tunes as I wedged my toes in the sand and sipped Vernors from a bottle. For some reason that combination of things sticks firmly in my memory bank.

The odd thing was what happened in your mind when you'd meet up with one of those personalities or see their picture somewhere. For example, there was a Christian apologist named Walter Martin who did a program called The Bible Answer Man. He used to close his program by saying, “May God bless you as you open up your heart to His Son.” That always struck me as comforting. Anyway, when I finally met Martin I was so surprised to find that he was nothing like I had imagined. He was a hulk of a man who wore a toupee and he had a grin so big he looked sort of cartoon like. I can't remember what I had expected, but how he looked took me off guard.

Think about all that you have learned about Jesus to this point. You have a picture of Him in your mind. I don't necessarily mean how He would look physically, but how you view Him in the light of all of the knowledge you have of Him. Revelation is the picture of the voice that you have been hearing all along. To

hear His voice through His Word and in your spirit is revealing, and is only made more complete because of the clear picture of Jesus here.

The Revelation or unveiling of Jesus Christ is the big picture of the last book of the Bible. It is an unveiling of the final work of God before a new heavens and new earth are set up. The book is both simple and complex. It's simple in the sense that you can see that God is finishing His righteous judgment of the earth. It is complex because the timeline of those events are, I believe, very unclear. Man wants to think he can figure God's timetable out by exploring the mysteries of Revelation. I believe God is warning us through Revelation to prepare for His coming. Jesus is very clear about that. He says the book is from Himself. “I am the Alpha and the Omega,” says the Lord God, “who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty” (1:8). Interestingly enough, at the end of the book it is clear that these titles are describing the Lord Jesus who is the “Almighty.”

Up to the very end of time and on into eternity, the cross will always be the banner over those who have put their trust in Jesus. Look what John writes in chapter one: “To Him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father - to Him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen” (1:5). He loosed us from the entanglement of our sins through the cross. Remember Hebrews 12 when you think about this. We look to Jesus. Why? It was the blood of Jesus that freed us from every weight and sin

**“Problems In The Church”**

December 10 - Revelation 2: 1-17

which tries and, often succeeds, to trap our lives. It is only the cross and Christ's work there that can set a prisoner of sin free. Only Jesus can make the crooked path straight. Only Jesus can take a mess and make something good out of it. Only Jesus' blood. When He comes in the clouds all men will see Him including those who pierced Him. I think the Spirit is urging us to forgive someone today for Jesus' sake. Who just popped into your mind? You know who they are, don't you? You have had it in for her or him for some time. I urge you to forgive them today. Would you take a moment right now and acknowledge the thing they did that injured you and then forgive it. I am not asking you to like them or reconcile with them or even call them. Just forgive them. Would you? Remember when Jesus was hanging on the cross that He forgave "them" because they really didn't know what they were doing. He didn't condemn them or complain about them or demand his rights or throw a fit. He forgave. At that time He chose to offer them, the very ones who nailed Him to the cross, a pardon from that sin. That doesn't mean that God wouldn't bring them to justice one day. That is certainly a theme in Revelation. But for now we are asked to forgive for Jesus' sake and leave the judgment up to God. Remember that Paul talked about this in Romans 12 and Jesus Himself emphasized it, especially in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5.

Jesus forgives, but Jesus also judges. He does not put up with game playing when it comes to spiritual things. He is "seen" by John as terribly bright and awesome person. He has eyes like a flame of fire and His attire is resplendent as if with polished bronze. At His first coming He came to save, but at His second coming He will exercise His authority to judge. Jesus' appearance to John emphasizes His holiness. See here His glory, His righteousness, His brightness. His hair is white, His eyes are aflame and His countenance is stronger and brighter than the sun. Who can stand in His presence? And so John falls. The righteousness of

the Savior is terrifying. For those who live in sin Jesus is ominous. He comes with a rod of iron (Psalm 2) to judge the nations in righteousness. Those who are playing with spirituality and have not taken Him seriously will be in for a rude awakening. He was once the suffering servant, in Revelation He is the conquering King. Revelation is written to wake us up and remind us of the seriousness of the things the Lord has said to us. Remember in the great commission at the end of Matthew that the Lord told the disciples to instruct others about all things He had said. So Revelation is meant to stir us from our spiritual lethargy. We must put off sin and cling like crazy to our Lord. We, who hate sin, love the Lord who will judge the earth. His coming, for us, will be a vindication of His righteousness and the establishment of His rule. And so John is instructed to write what he has seen which is most likely the events leading to the current climate in the Roman world.

He is to tell it like it is about the current condition of the churches, which he does in chapters two and three. Then he will unveil the horrible but deserved wrath of the peoples of earth and, on the other hand, He will set up His glory with His people who will forever reign with Christ. Jesus is concerned about those who say they are His, but they don't live like it. He holds the elders of the churches in His hands (or, these "messengers" may be angels who are assigned to the churches; the Greek word angelos can be translated "messenger" or "angel") and He walks among the churches, but He will call them to repentance before He brings judgment that will consume them for their hypocrisy. Jesus is center stage in the book of Revelation. He will not share that honor with anyone else. Let's behold His glory and be humbled by it as we journey through a look at the end of the world. Enjoy the Revelation. There is a blessing to those who read it (1:3). Let's read it with hearts wide open.

God's blessings to those who await His coming,
Pastor Steve

God Be With You,
There is a phrase in Zechariah that boldly stands out: "for whoever touches you touches the Apple of His eye" (2:8). God values His people. If you have faith in Jesus, His Only Begotten Son, then he treats you like a son or daughter. And like a good daddy He watches over His own.

The church ("the called-out ones") is the bride of Christ (Ephesians 5). God is very jealous for the purity and well-being of His church. We are the "apple of His eye." I have to admit that from time to time I get tunnel vision when it comes to the church. I only focus on "my" church and see the church through its eyes. Then I'll meet someone from another fellowship and am reminded that the church is much bigger than I am thinking. God's church spans the globe.

It should not surprise anyone that the church has its own unique set of problems. Over the years we have heard many people talk about bringing the modern church back to the quality of the churches of the New Testament era. But you do not have to read very far through the Book before you realize that Jesus had to address many problems. Remember his scolding of James and John, two pillars of the first century church, who were rebuked for their militaristic attitude toward the Samaritans? Then all you have to do is begin to read either of the Corinthian letters or Galatians or Philippians and you will see a church in need of correction.

The New Testament emphasis on Grace is the explanation why God can love an imperfect people so perfectly. He went to great lengths to redeem, buy back, a people who would become His possession. These people would form His inheritance and they would be the grateful possessors of God Himself. You'll remember this from Romans 8 - joint heirs with Christ of God. The church has been given so much and the Lord expects us to guard it until that day re-

ferred to in Zechariah when "the Lord will be king over the whole earth. On that day there will be one Lord, and His name the only name" (14:9). In the meantime, we will need to deal with problems.

In Revelation 2 Jesus addresses the seven churches of Asia Minor so that they would know His will for them. Each church had its unique message. God gave these messages so that we could learn from each one. Like Cracker Jacks, there is a surprise in every package. We cannot stand back and point the finger at this or that church. Doesn't God, rather, want us to learn from the failings of others? We are the church universal. You may meet in some local, but you are just as connected to the church abroad. Remember when Paul talked to the Corinthians about their problems, how he said it was as if he was right there "in spirit" beholding what they were doing? The church is connected no matter where she gathers.

The very first message is the need to love the Lord. Love is the greatest motivator. When you act and devote yourself out of love you will see great results. Jesus said that the Church in Ephesus had left their first love, namely Him. Why is it that we will usually come to Christ and revel in His love for us and our love for Him and then we can so easily move into a kind of formalism that chokes our spiritual life? Maybe it is because love is sort of messy sometimes. When you are in love, sometimes others do not understand how you are acting. They look at you like you are nuts. "You're going to church again? Why? Don't get too fanatical!" "Why are you always talking about Jesus? That's fine for religious days and Christmas and Easter but not in ordinary life?"

It is also easy to get wrapped up in our responsibilities and forget why we are worshipping Jesus. This happens in marriage much of the time. Couples marry because of love but quickly lose the spark because of the stresses in their lives. Then they forget to date and

talk romantically and give each other the necessary time to relate lovingly.

There's a neat little outline to remind yourself of the importance of making your love for the Lord a top priority. I. Remember - think about the way it was when you first fell in love with Him. Connect with Him on a love level. II. Return - don't wait, today come to Him and let Him know how much you love Him. III. Repent - turn all the way back to Him and do the first

works that were connected with the time when you were head over heels in love and could only talk about the impact Christ was making on your life.

"I love you Lord, and I lift my hands to worship you. O, my soul rejoice. Take joy, my king, in what you hear, may it be a sweet, sweet, sound in your ears."

Love Him like before and more,
God's blessings give us "first love" love,
Pastor Steve



"Tolerance"

December 11 - Revelation 2:18-3:6

Look Up, Jesus is described like no one else. I love His descriptions in Revelation. They are rich with meaning and significance. They always say something about His character. Since He is God it shouldn't surprise us that He is different than all others. Let's take a glance at a few of these descriptions and then finish with a discussion about Jezebel.

"These are the words of Him who holds the seven stars in His right hand and walks among the seven golden lamp stands" (2:1). In chapter one it says that the stars are messengers to the churches and the lamp stands are the churches (1:20). If the messengers are pastors then this description of Jesus would be a great encouragement to them. If it is a reference to angels, that too is an encouragement because of the angelic presence in the church, not to mention the Lord's own presence. He walks among us. Remember, Jesus had said that if two or three are gathered in His name He is right there.

"These are the words of Him who is the First and the Last, who died and came to life again" (2:8). His superiority to all things is emphasized since He is the beginning of all things and will wrap up all things. His death and resurrection always remind us of His love

for us on the cross and His presence with us through the Spirit each day.

"These are the words of Him who has the sharp, double-edged sword" (2:12). This can refer to the penetrating power of His word and also the sword that will come out of His mouth to bring judgment on those who did not know God or give glory to His Name. "These are the words of the Son of God, whose eyes are like blazing fire and whose feet are like burnished bronze" (2:18). I can't help but think of Ezekiel's vision of the Lord and all of the blazing metaphors that describe the majesty of God. The fire and burnished bronze may also refer to Jesus' holiness. Such utter purity and unadulterated essence is unknown on earth. Only Jesus has eyes and feet like this. Praise His Name!

"These are the words of Him who holds the seven spirits of God and the seven stars" (3:1). Jesus is sovereign. He loves us and will take care of us. We are in His hand. "And I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of my Father's hand. I and the Father are one" (John 10:28-30).

Against the backdrop of Christ's brilliance and superiority is the woman Jezebel, who leads God's people away by her fleshly and worldly cunning and tact. By means of immorality and idolatry she dissuades the faithless to follow her ways. If this was true in the first century it is even as bad or worse today. Our immoral and money-conscious society pulls us every day into a lifestyle of worshipping things and using people. Because the "flesh is weak" so many carelessly fall into the traps she sets.

Interestingly enough the Lord gave her room to repent. God is so gracious. She didn't turn though and so she will go into great tribulation with all of those who have followed her ways. Jesus is furious that the church would even tolerate her for one minute. Like the immorality in Corinth, the church at Thyatira was not quick to judge immorality in their midst. The result is more immorality. If it is not curtailed then it will spread. Paul said to the Corinthians that a little leaven would leaven the whole. The only solution would be to

remove it.

Whether Jezebel was a real person then or a figure of speech for those who would act in her spirit is not the important thing. You'll recall that it was Jezebel, wife of the evil king Ahab, who pursued the good prophet Elijah and threatened his life because he took a stand against the idolatry of the day. Maybe John is talking here about those who follow her spirit. Either way, tolerance of evil is not acceptable with the holy Lord. Tolerance is tantamount to complicity.

Do you usually call a spade a spade or do you "beat around the bush," most of the time? Jezebel needs to be resisted and thrown out. To ante up in her game will be a losing proposition. Let's remember, immorality dehumanizes and idolatry minimizes God. Let's look into the flaming eyes and follow the will of the First and the Last.

Blessings from the One whose eyes are like a flaming fire, Pastor Steve



"Keep The Word"

December 12 - Revelation 3: 7-22

In Awe Of God's Works,

When someone commends us, something happens to our souls that is hard to describe. If you could see on the inside of a person who is being commended I think you'd see a Popeye-like person whose chest is puffed way out and whose arms are flexed with a strength that seems super human. We all need commendation. Our souls need encouragement. We need to think that we matter and have accomplished something that will matter in some way.

When I began my teaching career I had the opportunity to work with a man who had a PhD and who, more importantly to me, believed in me. He loved me and was willing to pour his knowledge into

me. I will never forget the evaluation times I had with him. I was hanging on his every word. When he would speak words of commendation I was elated. I couldn't believe that he thought I was doing a good job. I was on top of the world. It mattered to me that I was able to please this man I admired so much. Yes, he did correct some errors I had made and I was willing to take that medicine, but it didn't matter because I knew that He cared about me. We all need that, don't we?

Jesus had some pretty severe warnings for the churches in these beginning chapters, but He also had a few commendations. Remember, the churches during these times were under a cloud of persecution, the pressure was on, and the true nature of the

saints was being manifested. Some needed to repent of their carnal and unspiritual ways. Some needed to stop playing games and serve the Lord. Others needed motivation because they had become apathetic with spiritual things. Jesus makes it clear that in some fellowships there were such severe spiritual fallacies that He would not be able to keep His presence there unless they repented.

Jesus honors the church of Philadelphia by saying that they have kept His word and have not denied His name. Jesus said in the gospels that if we confess Him before men then He will confess us before the Father, but if we denied Him before men He would deny us before the Father. He expects us to let others know where we stand. He wants us to make a clear testimony about Him. He doesn't want us to play church and put on a show for others, no, He wants sincere faith that demonstrates itself in genuine heart-felt works. This church of "brotherly love" was serious about their faith in Jesus and they were enduring patiently the kinds of attacks that were stumbling others.

Wouldn't you love for Jesus to say this about you? Let's think for a moment about what it means to keep His word. To keep means to guard or treasure. It means that His words become the most important possession in your life. If you look back at Psalm 19 or 119 you will have a wealth of verses that encourage us along these lines. We all need daily reminders of Jesus' Word. The day we put our Bibles on the shelf and lean on our own understanding is the day we will begin to slip away from what God's desire is for us. Think

about what Jesus said in John fifteen: "If you abide in me and my words abide in you, ask whatever you will and it shall be given to you" (15:7). The abiding word in our lives puts us in a daily position to pray on target and receive what God has for us. Jesus Himself, when confronted by the devil had the ammo of the Scripture to put him to flight.

Paul makes it clear to Timothy that the Word is inspired by God and should be used for sound teaching so that the believer will be aware of where he has erred and will turn back to the good path God wants him on. He says that the Scriptures were communicated by God so that the man of God could be equipped to do the works of God. Therefore, keeping the Word means acting on the Word. No matter what the cost, no matter what others may think, no matter the circumstances, we ought to act on the Word of God and keep its truths so that we too, like this church in Revelation, may receive the commendation that we are Word keepers.

Those who have taken a stand down through the centuries for God's Word against the traditions of sinful systems or sinful men have found that God blesses their faithfulness. They will have to endure troubles for it, but in the end Jesus is the one who will be giving the final exam. Is it time for you to take a stand in your life? Have you been tolerating sin and anti-God behaviors of those you have an influence over? "Lord, I want to keep your Word!"

God's blessings will lead us to make tough decisions, Pastor Steve



"Brilliance"

December 13 - Revelation 4: 1-11

Wow! What if there was nothing? If there were nothing, then what would be? Is it even possible to fathom a state of nothingness? If you try then that "state" itself would be something, wouldn't it? If you open a box and there is nothing inside, can you truthfully say that there is nothing in there? Isn't there air in there? Air is something, isn't it? So for us mortals to conceive of nothing puts us into a mental tilt position where our minds may search its recesses for answers but none are forthcoming.

If there were no earth and no people and no atmosphere and no solar systems and no anything then we would still have to admit that something would have to be there. Our existence warrants that because otherwise how would we justify being here then? In nature, things do not typically appear out of nothing. There is always a reasonable explanation for what we observe. Now, there are some magicians who make it appear that you can bring something out of nothing and they dazzle us with their ability to fool us. But we know that they know what's up, don't we. We have even asked ourselves how they did that and we thought it would be cool if we knew their secret so that we too could impress our friends.

If there were nothing physical, God would still be. When the Lord revealed Himself to Moses at the burning bush (Exodus 3), He told him that He was the "I Am." He is the self-existent one; in Revelation terms, He is the one who is, who was and who is to come. God is there. If all were lost, God would still exist. He has always been and always will be; God is self-existent.

He is not dependent on anyone for His well being or being, He is. How God got there in the beginning is a mystery. If we could answer that question then we would be Him, wouldn't we? God has mysteries and secrets that none of us are privy to at this point.

In Deuteronomy, Moses said that the secret things belong to the Lord but the things He has revealed we can know. Paul said that on earth we see through a glass darkly, but someday when we are face to face with Jesus we would experience a knowledge that would be far superior to what we have to work with now.

Jesus takes John into heaven and what we see there is spectacular. There the spotlight is on the one enthroned in the center. Around God is an array of beings, angels and people and unusual creatures and spirits to be exact, who are busy serving and worshipping God. The heavens are declaring the glory of God like the atmospheric heavens did on Earth. All honor and praise and power and everything is directed to Him who sits on the throne. He is awesome. He is our all in all.

It is so important for us today to get a head start on heaven and begin to make the Lord the center of all things in our lives. He can be the center of our relationships and our money and our jobs and our worship life and our prayer life and our families, etc. Christ desires to be at the center of our lives and live in our hearts by faith. He becomes the honored guest in us, the King on the throne of our hearts, the head of State of our state. To get there He need only be invited with a humble attitude that repents of anything that would not be conducive to a compatible relationship with the Lord.

Let's think about the crowd in heaven. There are twenty-four elders. These could be twelve apostles and twelve representatives from the twelve tribes of Israel. That is a guess. It makes sense, but is by no means certain. There are four creatures who have eyes all about them. Weird, huh? Well, the eyes are probably to stress that they see all. Maybe they are God's watchdogs. They may represent the four gospels and aspects of Jesus in those books. The first

creature was like a lion. Matthew portrays Jesus as the kingly lion and the lion of the tribe of Judah. Jesus is our King.

The second creature is like an ox. Mark writes about Jesus as the Servant of the Lord. The ox was used to plow the fields. Jesus showed an avid work ethic that involved meeting the needs of people, especially their spiritual needs. The third creature was man-like. Luke portrays Jesus as the perfect man. In Luke Jesus is described as the Son of Man. He was a man in every sense but did not succumb to the evils all other men choose. The fourth creature was like an eagle. John portrays Jesus as the God over all. The eagle majestically glides over all creation and with precision vision can spot even the smallest movement on the ground.

Let me just say that I do not know about the seven spirits who are before the throne. Do you? I cannot

think of one cross-reference in the Bible that would help us to understand them better. The number seven is used sometimes to denote completeness. It could mean that the perfect number of spirits were there. Peter talks about the spirits of just men made perfect. And a little later in Revelation we see the souls of those who are martyred during the tribulation under an altar in heaven.

Let's spend the day today thinking about this scene and how outrageously brilliant it is and how the Lord is glorified with the words "holy, holy, holy." This is another reminder that God is so far beyond us and He is there and He is the answer to the question, "What would be if nothing was?"

God's blessings are stupendous, Pastor Steve



"A Scroll With Seven Seals"

December 14 - Revelation 5: 1-14

There is a popular expression these days when someone is overcome with admiration for another. They raise their hands up and then sweep them down and say, "I'm not worthy, I'm not worthy." It's usually done in fun but also serves as an encouragement to the one "worshipped." It's an admission that the other person has done something that you think is awesome.

Remember when Daniel saw a vision of the Lord. He fell down and was mesmerized for days. Here in Revelation John sees the original vision of the Lord Jesus and he falls down as a dead man. I love the story of the reaction of the guards who witnessed the resurrection of Jesus - the Bible says that they were so shocked they looked like dead men. Their jaws were probably dragging on the floor. When Peter witnessed

a miracle of the Lord, He told Jesus to get away from him because he was unworthy. He felt unworthy in the presence of pure worthiness.

All of us need people that we look up to. We need some in our life who we feel stretch us to be better than we are. When we think of him or her we are challenged to be better at our discipleship. We are challenged to go on with the Lord and do better in our service of the Master. I have already told you of a few people God placed in my life who have challenged me through the years. Let me say a few words about Carl Petersen again. Remember, he was the fellow who first prayed for me and then died about three years later of cancer. One thing that has stayed with me was something Carl's mom Hazel said that he said. Are you with me? Anyway, she told me once how much

Carl loved the Old Testament. For some reason that thought stuck with me all of these years. And guess what, I too have learned to love the Old Testament. People we think are "worthy" will have an impact on our future.

When John sees a scroll, sealed with seven seals, he begins to weep because no one was found worthy to break the seals and reveal the contents of the scroll. The scroll contained the will of God for the future and John wanted to know what it was. Then, a Lion, a relative of David, a Victor - a Lamb steps forward. He was worthy. Only he could take the scroll and unloose it. His supremacy is then extolled. In John's vision and in the admiration of the heavenly host. First of all, John sees Him as having been crucified. Think for a moment about a crucified man coming to life and bearing the marks of His cross. John sees Jesus in heavenly glory as if He had been slain. How remarkable a picture that is!

I imagine that the Lord Jesus will bear the marks of the cross for eternity. That and that alone will be the memorial that constantly reminds us of the cost

of our redemption. No wonder He alone was found worthy to unveil the seals that would bring the first wave of judgment upon the earth and on all ungodly sinners who suppress the truth in unrighteousness.

He is in the center, the center of the throne, and of the living creatures, and of the adoring host of angels who gather to sing of the worthiness of the Lamb.

"Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!" Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, singing: "To Him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power, for ever and ever!" (4: 12-13).

How can I respond to such perfection? I too can worship. I can raise my voice and my hands and praise Him for all that He has done for me, especially the cross. God, I worship you with all of my heart!!! Join me, will you?

God's blessings come from the Worthy One, Pastor Steve



"Hide Us"

December 15 - Revelation 6:1-17

God is Remarkable, A day of judgment is coming. The Bible is clear about this all of the way through. The Revelation of Jesus is the final word on that big day when mankind will receive what they deserve because of their sin. Some say that God loves the sinner and hates the sin. I have never understood that because how can a person be separated from what they do? Man acts out what he is on the inside and God judges that.

Now if someone were to ask if it pained the Lord to judge the sinner or if it grieved Him that the sinner

would be indicted, then I would understand that. God hates death and He desires that all would be saved, but His justice will punish the sinner along with his sin. Really there will be no consolation for the sinner. He won't find it appealing to say to himself that even though he is judged God loves him anyway. God takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but He fits vessels to demonstrate his glory and power by bringing wrath on the sinful.

The worthy Lamb, the Lord Jesus, opens the seals and the judgments of God are poured out. This judgment will affect everything. Mankind will be

conquered, men will kill one another, poverty and destitution will prevail, mayhem will be the name of the game, the saints will be martyred, the heavens will be wrapped up and the earth will be wrenched by earthquakes. It will be a devastating time. It will be like no other time in human history. God's final judgment will be thorough. No one will escape God's all-seeing eye and be able to hide from His wrath.

Men will try to hide anyway. Those proud folks who lifted their fist to heaven and cursed the acts of God will be in hiding to try and escape the wrath of the Lamb. They want Him to leave them alone. They are not interested in coming out into the light. They hide because they are not fit to be in the presence of the Lamb, for they are still in their sins. Those who live in darkness will remain in darkness forever. The great day of God's wrath is a day of darkness for those who have not obeyed the gospel of Jesus. And so they run and hide and squirm away from the One who could save if they had only turned to Him. They don't though and the results are gruesome.

When we go our own way and desire that God leave us alone, we run the risk of getting what we want. Pride pushes a person in that direction, doesn't it? In Romans one, several times it says that "God

gave them over..." God gives man the reigns of his own life and destiny and when man messes it up, God becomes his enemy as if it were God's fault in the first place. Man can blame God and curse God and hide from God, but all of that will be meaningless in the end because when all is said and done, God will have the last say and He will judge man according to truth.

There is an emphasis in Revelation on the omniscience of God. In other words, He knows it all, all of the time. There are eyes on the creatures around the throne and, no doubt, this is a reminder of the vision of God. Here in chapter six it is the creatures who introduce the riders of doom. All things are open before the Lord.

There is no good reason to try and hide anything from Him. Let's be an open book before the Lord and also confess our sins to other brothers and sisters in Christ. The soul that walks in the light delights in letting God in on all aspects of his life. Keep it all out in the open, it will not pay to hide from the Lord.

God's judgments are deserved,
Pastor Steve



"A Great Multitude & the Last of the Seven Seals (the Trumpet Judgments)"

December 16-17 - Revelation 7: 1-17 & 8:1-9:12

Let's Open Our Hearts To The Lord,
Back in Romans and in Galatians we established that the church is the New Israel. Paul refers to the "Israel of God" after making it as plain as he could that salvation was only through faith in Jesus. God began with Israel (the Jews) and then the door opened to the Gentiles (the non-Jews) and then because of grace given to Gentiles through Jesus Christ, the Jews would be included back again through Jesus.

The result would be that one day all of Israel, the true spiritual Israel, would be saved by the deliver who would arise out of Zion. This would include a multitude of people saved through Jesus Christ from every nationality around the globe.

Therefore, it seems reasonable to see those 144,000 sealed in Revelation 7 as that full group of believers who had been rescued from their sins through the blood of the lamb. It is more natural to see the 12

x 12 formula as signifying a complete number rather than a literal 144,000. In other words, the number represents all of Israel, the redeemed, those who are God's servants. What are they sealed for? Are they kept from the harm the angels are bringing on the earth? In 9:4 the swarming locusts are unable to hurt those who have the seal of God. Are they sealed to identify who they are, the believers? Are they part of the group John sees in heaven before the Lamb? In Ephesians 4:30 it says that the Holy Spirit has sealed us until the day of redemption. Could it be that Revelation 7 alludes to the safety those in the true Israel have because heaven is guaranteed. The Spirit sees to that. He is the down payment working in the life of the believer until heaven becomes home.

Those described as before the throne and the Lamb are the ones who have come out of the great tribulation. They were not spared completely from the troubles of that time. Their consolation is that their robes have been whitened by the blood of the Lamb. Or, they were saved by the death of Jesus. They are those who have believed in the cross for salvation. They are from every tribe and nation and people and language. They are, no doubt, Jews and Gentiles alike. They are a great multitude who have embraced the efficacy of the cross of Jesus. They have believed that Jesus saves and that their eternity is dependent on the work of Jesus on the bloody cross. These images which begin in chapter seven are the depiction of the wrath of God coming on the whole earth. All living will be affected by the outpouring of God's judgment on sin and those who have not been sealed. Paul wrote about this in 1 Thessalonians. "But of the times and seasons, brethren, you have no need that I write unto you. For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night. For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape. But you, brethren, are not in darkness that that day should overtake you as a thief. You are all the children of the light and the children of the day; we are not of the night nor of the darkness...for God has not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ" (5:1-5, 9; KJV).

Let's be careful not to draw unreasonable conclusions from these verses. Some would say that the church will not experience any trouble from the time of the great tribulation. They believe that God will take His people out of the tribulation before the wrath comes down. The problem with this is all of the language that identifies believers, the elect, those washed by the blood of Jesus, who are definitely in the great tribulation. I'm chicken enough to think that I will not have to face something like this and God will keep me in my American bubble, but I am also smart enough to realize that believers have suffered troubles from the beginning. How can we teach that God will rescue the church from tribulation during the great tribulation when believers around the world today are facing torture and death at the hands of persecutors? Well, what I think we can say is that the wrath from God that will come is not directed at believers. Just as the judgment on Adam's sin has affected all, including little babies and the mentally disabled, I believe the judgment is on the sins of those who have sinned. Whereas the babies and young children are, according to Jesus, fit for the kingdom of God (Matthew 18). Does that mean they will not be affected by the judgment? No, because they are there and will be impacted by the events of the tribulation. This will become even more evident as we journey in Revelation through these tough times.

The angels blast the trumpet judgments. These sounds herald one after the other of God's righteous judgment on a blasphemous people. The last three angels pronounce woes of severity that only add to the devastation. The earth is now being decimated. Sin is being punished. The end is at hand.

Do end time descriptions like these frighten you? If so, remember that the promises that Jesus has given us apply to our entire lives. In the world we will have troubles, but the Lord invites us to cheer up because He has overcome the world. The devil too. God is our hope and our security and we will be able to count on Him forever.

God's judgment should not be feared by the believer,
Pastor Steve

**“God’s Righteous Judgment Unfolds (the Trumpet judgments continue)”**

December 18 - Revelation 9:13 - 10:1

The devastation continues. The tribulation is a time unparalleled in history. There have been other disasters, but nothing compares to this time. Imagine a third of mankind being wiped out simultaneously. If there were six billion, think about two billion being destroyed by this fierce army. By the way, I don’t know who this army is. Some have suggested China. I don’t know; it is anyone’s guess.

Think again for a moment of this huge angel who plants one foot on the sea and the other on land. No wonder Hebrews says that we humans were made a little lower than the angels. They are, in some ways, so far beyond us in power and might. God is using these angelic hosts to accomplish His will at the end of the world. Doesn’t it make you wonder about how an angel feels about his place in God’s program. What exhilaration they must feel to be part of God’s righteous judgment on the earth and how they must quickly obey their Master’s voice when He says to them, “Go!”

Along these same lines, when we are exercising our spiritual gifts there is a Holy Spirit guided sense that we too are accomplishing the will of God. We can sometimes discern His pleasure when we are about His business. That is why it is so important for us to remain Christ-centered and for us to abide in Jesus as a branch clings to a vine (John 15). Our gifts are only effective when we are using them for the glory of the Lord. They are not meant to bring honor to us; we only receive the satisfaction of knowing that what God has gifted us with is for His pleasure. As we enter into a time of reflection before the New Year it would be a good idea to talk with God about His use of our gifts for His own honor. What would happen if every Bible believing person walked in the Spirit-led manner God intends? Wouldn’t the name of Jesus be glorified more and more?

The tribulation time is a time when the angels will fulfill a purpose that they have been waiting to

do for a long time. This is their hour and they will glorify God by assisting Him in judgment. The mighty angel with a foot on land and sea had in his hand a little scroll which he gave to the Apostle. John ate it and in his mouth it was like honey but soon enough it made his tummy sour. Get the Roloids! The Word of God is sweet, but the effect of it when the reality hits is tough. I’m sure the people would love to hear a pleasant word from God. They would love to hear about some form of relief, but the Word of God for them would be nothing but more darkness. The time was at hand and the sound of the final trumpet would herald the consequence of a full judgment on sinful mankind. I was at a funeral recently and was not expecting it to bowl me over the way it did. The truth of the word was sweet at the time and I was reminded that death is the lot of all men, but later that afternoon the reality of death grieved me, it was sour in my belly. Who doesn’t cry out for relief from the horrible consequences of sin? The scroll John ate was sweet with truth, but the outcome was the awful truth that sin brings death and destruction.

Despite the judgments which are in the face of all sinners, they still do not express sorrow for the sins that separate them from God. They still do not repent and turn to Jesus. We read earlier that they hide from the face of the Lamb. Here they are portrayed as hard hearted and firm in their own ways. Let’s review: “The rest of mankind that were not killed by these plagues still did not repent of the work of their hands; they did not stop worshipping demons, and idols of gold, silver, bronze, stone and wood - idols that cannot see or hear or walk. Nor did they repent of their murders, their magic arts, their sexual immorality or their thefts” (9:20,21).

Both John, in one of his littler letters, and Paul, in several places throughout his writings, point out that the world is under the control of the evil one. They

teach that mankind, apart from God’s grace, is held captive by Satan to do his will. Notice in the verse above that John equates the worship of demons and idolatry in the same breath. All idolatry, or the worship of things, reflects Satan’s honor and not God’s. In Romans one, Paul says that men exchange the glory of God for the worship of objects. This apparently will be the case right down to the end. To worship the creation removes God from His rightful place of worth. It also puts man in the place of God since he is worshipping things like himself. This behavior then reflects back on the man and leaves God out of the equation. So man does what he wants. He does not want God to interfere with his worship or his morals. Man be-

comes a law unto himself. He refuses to repent and worship God since he is so entrenched in self-glorification. Even in the light of God’s judgment he refuses to give up his pleasures and turn to the fountain of life. He’s doomed. Let the trumpet sound; the fullness of God’s judgment is here.

As we read of these terrible days, let’s remember our unbelieving neighbors who need now to hear of the good news of Jesus. Only through Him can they be rescued from a grim future. The world is winding down and the Judge is standing at the door.

Come Lord Jesus!

God’s judgments are ominous,

Pastor Steve

**“Woes on Earth”**

December 19 - Revelation 11: 1-19

Let’s Look At The Signs Of The Times,

In our last reading John is told that he will continue to prophecy about the end of time events. Here he takes elements from the book of Daniel and the book of Zechariah. The two witnesses are described by Zechariah in his prophecy and the tribulation period with events happening in three and one half year increments are laid out in the book of Daniel.

We are now introduced to the heavy hitters of the tribulation period. The beast comes up from below and kills the two witnesses of God. These two comrades speak God’s truth for three and one-half years. They will become a thorn in the side of those who do not want to repent and turn to God. They are prophets who declare the unadulterated truth of God. For those who want God to leave them alone, they represent nothing but trouble. Up until their demise they were able to perform extraordinary powers that demonstrated that they were God’s men. Those who

tried to harm them were met with calamity.

Obviously these characters are very unique. This kind of spiritual warfare will be truly unprecedented. But even in our day, behind the scenes, there is spiritual warfare that, even though we cannot see it, is happening on a grand scale. We may not be able to feel it all of the time but the effects of it are truly experienced as we go through our days. Remember Ephesians six where Paul says that we are all wrestling against the unseen forces of hell. I don’t know about you but wrestling to me seems to be one of the most difficult of all athletic events. The grappler is out there by himself on the mat straining and moving against an opponent that has been training to pen him. It is strength against strength. It is man on man. No wonder Paul exhorts us to be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. How else could we contend with the enemy? We would be mincemeat otherwise. Do you feel a bit battle fatigued lately? Are you trying to fight the fight in the strength of your own might? Let’s

go to the Lord in prayer and put on His armor and clothe ourselves in His strength so that we might find His victory over the evil one.

After the seventh trumpet sounds, loud voices proclaim the sovereignty of God over the whole earth. Don't you just love this proclamation: "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ, and He will reign forever and ever" (11:15). All men will bow before the kingship of the Lord Jesus. He will reign. This time is the fulfillment of Paul's statement in 1 Corinthians 15 where he talks about all of God's enemies becoming subservient to Jesus.

This declaration is the beginning of the end for all of the forces of hell and every hell bent individual on earth. There will be weeping and cursing and great attempts to control the outrageous wrath of the Lord, but to no avail. This is the time of the end and the reality is that God is in control of the whole shooting match. This ought to remind us of Psalm chapter two where man is trying to get a one-up on God and the Lord sits in the heavens and laughs at the arrogance

of man. This arrogance is epitomized in the attitude of the Antichrist.

He is obstinate and charismatic and deceptive and will even demand worship so that man replaces the one true God with the anti-God, Antichrist. Rather, blessed are the poor in spirit and the meek and the peacemakers, etc. We are the humble who submit to Jesus and desire above all else to do His will. There is no room for the pride of man in God's economy because God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble (1 Peter 5). All pride will be vanquished eventually by the Lord God. He alone will be exalted; we are only the sheep of His pasture. Fortunately, we will not listen to any other shepherd who would masquerade in spiritual looking clothing and try to lead us down the wrong path. We hear the Lord's voice and follow Him (John 10).

God's judgments will squish the proud,
Pastor Steve



"Frustrated Dragon"

December 20 - Revelation 12: 1 - 13: 1a

The ambition of most of mankind and the ambition of the devil is very much the same: the drive to be a god. Have you ever been asked, "If you could be God for a day what would you do?" Man and angels thirst for power. That is why lust and greed are two of the most powerful negative motivators there are. When a man feels that he is invincible or when he has achieved a great feat, there is a sense of superiority that vaults him, in his own mind, over other men.

For some money is their standard of superiority. They have collected a certain amount of money and they believe that qualifies them for special status. All it

may mean is that they will have more worries. Money is no guarantee of immortality. Many don't heed the warning on the bills "In God We Trust," and they live trusting in money to guide their way. Solomon says that money will take wings and fly away. Have you ever experienced that?

Recently someone was talking to me about a person whom they believed had sold his soul to the devil. What do you think about that thought? Can a person sell his soul to the evil one? Jesus put it in terms of losing your soul. That is, losing your very self in the end because you lived for self rather than for God, which was the purpose for which you were

created. Jesus said, "What does it profit a man to gain the whole world and lose his soul?" Answer, "It doesn't profit him anything because in the end he winds up spiritually bankrupt." The fate of the devil himself was locked up sometime in the past when he fell because Jesus said that hell was created for the devil and his angels. Peter adds, "...God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to chains of gloomy darkness to be kept until the judgment..." (2 Peter 2:4).

The devil has, throughout his career, been on a quest for godhood. He dared to challenge the Almighty in the heavenly realms and he delights in challenging God's will on earth. He is the red dragon of Revelation. The reference to sweeping a third of the stars and casting them to earth is usually interpreted to be the other angels who went his way. He is said to be the one who attempted to wipe out the Christ child (through King Herod who had all of the kids around Jerusalem killed who were two years old and under) when he was just a little guy. He is also after the church, the spiritual Israel (compare verses 6 and 17). For a period of about three and one-half years God would hide her in a special place.

The dragon is hurled to the earth by the mighty angelic forces of Michael the Archangel. Then John repeats a voice he hears from heaven which gives the complete victory to the Lord. At this point the kingdom of Christ prevails and the condemning devil is thwarted. The dragon is called "the accuser of the brethren." He works hard at making us look bad and accusing us of awful things, things that Jesus died to forgive. The brethren in Jesus also overcome through Jesus. John says, "They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death."

John says that the devil is "full of fury." Why? because he was aware that his time was short. And so he attempted to destroy the people of God but was frustrated by God's plan to shelter them for 3 ½ years. This was probably the time when persecution subsided. The persecution here like the one related

to the woman's child is most likely the one through the Roman legions of Titus in the seventh decade A.D. Jesus had already said in Matthew 24 that when they saw Jerusalem surrounded by armies they should flee to the mountains or there would be no hope. Many believers had to leave their familiar surroundings and move to the deserts where they could be free from Roman rage.

Picture the dragon standing on the shore of the sea with fury and hate in his eyes. He is a defeated foe but relentless in persecuting God's people who hold to the testimony of Jesus. He would do all in his power to try and trip up the plans of God but it was already established that "now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of His Christ" (12:10).

Jesus frustrates the devil. Paul said to the Thessalonians, "But the Lord is faithful. He will establish you and guard you against the evil one" (2 Thessalonians 3:2). To the Romans he said, "The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet" (16:20). To the Ephesians he said that they should be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might so that they could stand against the schemes of the evil one. Jesus has already won a decisive victory over the devil. John said, "Greater is he who is in you than he who is in the world" (1 John 4:4). The devil knows that his days are numbered and he constantly feels the crushing blow of the cross. He experienced it the day Jesus died and he experiences it every time a believer takes up the name of Jesus and comes to the Father in the name of the Crucified One.

It's as if the game has already been determined. You can watch the replay as many times as you'd like and the result will always be the same. God has won. Believers have won. Let's make that our testimony. We will overcome by the blood of the Lamb and the word of our testimony. Christ died for me, He has won the victory!

God's blessings come through the cross,
Pastor Steve

**“A Call”**

December 21 - Revelation 13: 1b - 18

Church history is riddled with persecutions against the saints. Even in our modern era there are reports out of China and South America and other parts of the world where the believers are being tortured and killed because of their faith in Jesus. Some present day saints in North America haggle about whether believers will escape the tribulation and martyrdom when the church throughout its history has not escaped the fury of the dragon.

Some would say that God will spare the church from such persecution because He wouldn't want His people to experience such torture. Huh? This is not consistent with the will of God for many faithful followers of Jesus throughout the millennia. In the Roman era and in the time that John wrote Revelation, the church was in the crosshairs of the evil one. As a matter of fact, John says, “Here is a call for the endurance and faith of the saints.” Right after John introduces the beast, that insolent and warring tool of the dragon, that worshipped false-god who exalts himself above God and His Temple, he issues the call. We are to be ready for whatever comes our way. It will take tenacity and trust. It will be a difficult time like no other in our lives. It will test all that is in us and will try our commitment to the Jesus in whose name we are being attacked.

The entire world will follow and worship the beast except for those who have their names in the Lamb's book of life. These will be the target of the beasts. The second beast will deceive the world and cause those who do not worship the image of the first beast to be killed. He will also have the power to control the economy by not allowing anyone to buy or sell unless they bear the mark of the beast on their foreheads or right hands. Pastor Steve, do you know who the antichrist is? No. Is he on the scene today? I don't know. John said that there were many antichrists so

that we could tell it was the last hour. That was true in the first century and I believe it is true today. I tend to believe those who think there was a last hour before the city of Jerusalem and the temple were destroyed in A.D. 70.

Is our faith strong enough to withstand the persecution that so many believers endure around the world? Don't you think that it will be necessary for us to be tried before we could know if we would stand or not? I believe God gives grace in the midst of trial. The famous book Fox's Book of Martyrs tells of whole families singing to the Lord as the lions were let loose in the Coliseum. They loved not their lives to the death. Hebrews 11 describes this kind of believer as “of whom the world was not worthy.” They looked for a better country, one in which righteousness dwelt. And so they lived differently and were not so much concerned with their own comfort as they were with serving God in the face of hostile persecution. Could it be that much of Revelation was fulfilled in the first century under the tyranny of those antichrist Roman rulers and the Jewish rulers who remained antichrist long after the crucifixion and resurrection? Could it be that God came in judgment in some respect when Jerusalem was felled in A.D. 70? If so, it would make the “I come quickly” statements more understandable in the light of almost 2000 years since the “last days” and the “last hour” was initiated.

Either way, the call still applies. We are like lights in a dark world where the darkness hates the light and would love nothing more than to put out the light. John said, “They loved darkness more than the light because their deeds were evil” (3:19). Let's consider the call to remain faithful even when the heat is on.

God's strength and blessings are there when needed,

Pastor Steve

**“144,000 And Three Angels”**

December 22 - Revelation 14: 1-13

The Hour Has Come, There has been and will be defining moments in every person's life. Usually these times are remembered because of the significant nature of the event. For example, on a Thanksgiving day many years ago, I went to the home of a family whose family time was interrupted by a fire that destroyed the entire upstairs of their house. They were preparing dinner downstairs when they began to smell the awful odor of burning wires coming through the vents. Before they could do anything about it they were forced to evacuate because of the smoke and flames coming from the bedrooms upstairs.

That day will be etched in their minds for years to come. Hopefully, the rebuilding process will dull the ache of the event, but nonetheless they will still be reminded when the turkey is on the table that they had a very upsetting Thanksgiving in the past. It could be that if they work hard at forging ahead they will be able to focus on the future and not worry about the past, but this will take a concerted effort because of the memories. Unlike these possibilities for this family will be the catastrophic nature, the finality, of the events described in Revelation.

The events recorded by John are final. There is no happy future for those who receive the mark of the Beast and worship his name. They will be condemned along with all those who oppose the Lord. Paul said, “They perish because they refuse to love the truth and so be saved. For this reason God sends them a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie and so that all will be condemned who have not believed the truth but have delighted in wickedness” (2 Thessalonians 2: 10b-12). To some degree this makes the book of Revelation difficult to swallow. The reality of a future judgment is looming all of the time. Remember in chapter one that there is a promise of blessing to those who read this book. As I've been turning the

pages and breathing in all of this judgment I have been wondering how that blessing is received. Let's keep reading until we come upon it and, for now, let's remember that the judgments of the Lord are right.

We meet again the 144,000 who are reigning with the Lamb. They are sealed by the name of Jesus and the Father, they alone can understand the song of heaven, they have been redeemed, are pure and follow Jesus wherever He goes. Again, who are these chosen ones? It sounds like a picture of the church to me. On the other hand, if you wanted to get very literal it appears that they are all men (they didn't defile themselves with women) and that they are a group chosen from among the chosen, a select group. But if you read Paul's description of the church, the Bride of Christ, in Ephesians five it sounds to me like this pure group could also be the 144,000. Otherwise, who are these people and why did the Lord chose them?

John then sees three more angels who are busy serving the Lord. The first one has the gospel and is proclaiming it to all men. It appears to be a final appeal to repent and turn to the Lord and serve Him. Remember in Matthew 24 that Jesus said the end would not come until the gospel reached the world. Possibly this is the culmination of that prophecy.

The second angel pronounces the fall of Babylon. A little later this will be the topic of discussion again. The immorality and abominations of Rome are more than likely in view here. Remember that Peter told us he was writing from Babylon when, in fact, he was in Rome. Babylon represents all that is corrupt. This corruption is in power and in worldliness and in immorality.

The third angel warns of the devastation and eternal torment that waits those who do not follow Jesus but worship the Beast. The picture is of unending suffering and damnation. There is no hope at that point. So for those yet unsaved who are alive during

the tribulation it would be good for them to heed the gospel and persevere even unto death rather than fall prey to the same fate as the Beast who deceives the nations. He may be powerful but he is a liar and the henchman of the devil himself. At this point in the

judgment it would be better to be dead than at the mercy of the Beast. So "blessed" are those who die in Jesus from this point onward.

God's blessings to those who die in the Lord,
Pastor Steve



"Visions of Heaven & Seven Bowls of God's Wrath"

December 23-24 - Revelation 14:14 - 15:8; 16: 1-21

A Great Day Is Coming, God has control of the plagues, the judgments (16:9). Men hated God even more for the wrath that He was pouring out on them. They had nowhere to escape, but instead of turning to Him they cursed Him and did not repent of their evil deeds. They had built their own kingdoms and had their own lives and didn't want God or anyone else, for that matter, to bother them. They would go down with the ship cursing the God who had made heaven and earth and them.

On the other hand, those with faith in Jesus endured to the end. They are seen in glory with harps, yes, harps and they sing a song that vindicates God's righteous judgments. When the temple is opened there is a sense of the holiness of God and there is smoke and God's glory and power is manifested. God is awesome! Who can stand in His presence apart from the righteousness of Jesus. Only through Jesus can a person hope to endure to the end.

Revelation only paints two possible endings for mankind. Man is either in glory with the Lord or in torment separated from Him. There is no middle of the road in Revelation. That is what makes it so frightening. Yet today so many people go middle of the road, don't they? They walk with one foot in the world and one foot in church. They are sold out to no one except what is expedient for the moment. Think about the bowl judgments for a moment. What will

you possibly be able to hold on to when those bowls are being poured out? Will riches help? Will status help? Will church membership be comforting? What can possibly help? At that juncture it will not help to trust in anything but Jesus. So if that's the end of all men doesn't it make sense to be totally sold out to Him now? Why wait?

We live in a Babylon culture. We live in an age of materialism and hedonism and humanism. Man loves to be at the center of his existence. He feels comfortable there. He is secure in his own filth. As in the earlier chapters of the Revelation, he thinks he has it all but doesn't realize that he is actually very spiritually poor. From the beginning of time man has tried to create his own way to immortality. Isn't that the idea behind the Tower of Babel in Genesis 11? Man is reaching the point where he feels like nothing will be too hard for him because he will be his own god. Man's ingenuity deceives him into thinking that he is more than he truly is.

God's wrath is poured out on Babylon, on Rodeo Drive, on Sachs Fifth Ave. Remember back in 1 John that the apostle said that we ought not to love the world or the things in the world because all that is in the world will one day hold up like a rock in a wet paper bag. Those who do the will of God though will endure and find peace and life. The last great battle, the battle of Armageddon is about to take place. The man will be blessed who is not caught with his pants

down during this time. Otherwise, he will be caught off guard and get sucked into the winepress of the great wrath of God. God would have us come into the light today. No more hidden sins or secret lives. We need to come clean right now before it is too late. Once the bowls are poured out and the end is at hand there will be no hope for those who live in darkness.

Let's worship God. Let's not be numbered with those who curse. If we turn away from these our robes will be white, bleached in the blood of the Lamb.

God's judgments are gruesome but right,
Pastor Steve



"Revelation in Context"

December 25 - Revelation 17: 1 - 18

Seize The Day, The imagery of Revelation 17 can best be understood in the context of the Roman Empire, the Apostle John's world. In the Roman Empire, also called "Western Babylon" you would find:

magnificent architecture,
dangerous sporting events,
roadways of superior design and breath,
an army that could not be rivaled Emperors who demanded worship,
various cults and the worship of many gods,
worldwide rule through governors, prefects, and military presence,
widespread immorality in a variety of forms,
economic control of the world,
brutal internal strife

In Daniel's vision of the Roman Empire the metal iron is used to describe the strength of this great power. Their might would rival any known ruling power from the past. Babylon was dominate but not to the degree that Rome reached. Of course, by the time the Romans came to power there had been advances in every form of civilization. Rome was anti-Christian. Remember when Paul got there to be tried how the authorities didn't even realize the impact of Christian-

ity on civilization yet. That, of course, would change as the gospel spread and began to reach people all over the world.

Immorality has always been an issue in any society. It works like a cancer and eats away at the structure of that society. It undermines the good sense of decency and order in the community. Moral corruption can consume all that is good and rot away the moral fabric much like decay rots a tooth. Pretty soon the nerves of that civilization will be frayed. Morality should be a concern for people in every generation. Along with it come corruption and crime and deceit and theft and disease.

Think about the life of Caesar Nero: his "violence-studded life, including the murders of his own family members, the castration of a boy Nero 'married,' and the brutal murder of his pregnant wife by kicking her to death. Bizarre behavior was noted by the historian Suetonius, who wrote that Nero even 'devised a kind of game, in which, covered with the skin of some wild animal, a lion or tiger was let loose from a cage and attacked the private parts of men and women, who were bound to stakes'" (Sproul, The Last Days According to Jesus, p. 186).

"Nero began his reign as emperor in A.D. 54. His imperial persecution of the Christian community was launched in A.D. 64, the same year as the famous fire

that many believe was set by Nero himself. It is often assumed that the persecution of Christians, whom Nero blamed for the fire, was a diversionary tactic to shift blame for his own actions to others. Nero committed suicide in A.D. 68, when he was but 31 years of age" (Sproul, p. 186).

The description of Rome in Revelation 17 fits perfectly what history tells us about it. She may have been a party animal - a morally bankrupt prostitute, but she also would fall - "The beast, which you saw, once was, now is not, and will come up out of the Abyss and go to his destruction" (17:8). This beast or king is from the others - "He belongs to the seven and is going to his destruction" (17:11). Look at the royal description of the woman in verse 4 - she is as royal and sparkly as it gets. She rules over the whole earth with power and majesty. "The woman you saw is the great city that rules over the kings of the earth" (17:17).

She is linked with Babylon for her world dominion and culture. She is also drunk with the blood of the martyrs. She would torture the Jesus people and devise every cruel way to make them suffer. This was so true of the persecutions in the first century. Their Lord had been whipped at the stake and crucified and His followers would face some of the same kind of tortures. Most are well aware that all of the apostles were martyred except John, the writer of the Revela-

tion.

If we are right on the chronology then the five fallen kings beginning with Julius Caesar would make Nero the present king. He was a brutal anti-Christ ruler. After him there was a power struggle for the thrown until the reign of Domitian. It's not quite clear whether he would be the seventh or eighth king. We do know that he was drunk with the blood of the saints.

Despite the lack of certainty about the antichrist there is no disputing that the spirit of antichrist was present in Rome and had a terrific impact on the church of Jesus. Those believers who lost their lives for the gospel were faithful to the end. Much of the Christian community hid in catacombs, caves underground where they could find a refuge from "the beast." These believers are a shining example for us who may not be experiencing it in our land today but cannot be guaranteed what the future will bring.

The lesson for us is to, like them, remain faithful to Jesus come what may. We are also reminded not to complain about our little inconveniences along the way. When we compare our "suffering" with the church in the Roman days, it's as if we live in Disneyland.

God's blessings are not in Babylon,
Pastor Steve

will continue forever running the company or running a marathon or raising a family. Then the end will come and life as they knew it will cease. Peter says, "Knowing this first of all, that scoffers will come in the last days with scoffing, following their own sinful desires. They will say, 'Where is the promise of His coming? for ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation'" (2 Peter 3:3,4). Then Peter says that they should have understood that the flood of Noah's day could occur again in a different form, namely, with fire the next time.

Jesus and Paul warn of judgment coming like a thief in the night. Jesus put it in terms of a manager who had a trust but acted foolishly because his Master was away and he felt like he could get away with riotous living. Paul told the Thessalonians that the day would come when men thought everything was just fine. "For you yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. While people are saying, 'There is peace and security,' then sudden destruction will come upon them like labor pains come upon a pregnant woman, and they will not escape" (1 Thessalonians 5:2,3). This language sounds so much like Revelation 18 even though the emphasis of that chapter appears to be linked to the Roman Empire in chapter 17.

In Revelation 17 and 18 the world power is connected with Babylon and is pictured as ruling in luxury and influence. Their power and rule apparently extended to all parts of the world. When she is destroyed, the merchants of the earth mourn because they had received so much advantage by doing business with her. The world wonders after the beast, the leader of this empire, because of the affluence and immorality that it provides. She appeals to the base nature of man: lust and greed. I'm sure you have

heard the expression "if there's a will there's a way." Well, when man's will is linked to the potential for lust and greed, he will find a way to fulfill his desires. The Roman Empire was a pinnacle of this mantra.

Chapter 18 of Revelation highlights the devastation of this empire. And whether John is pointing to Caesar and his friends or means to say that the world system as we know it comes suddenly to an end, we are still left with the reality that man's government will one day cease. I am sure that the common guy walking the streets of Rome in Paul's day assumed that the Roman dominion would continue on forever. I would have to admit that I will think this way about the U.S.A. from time to time.

We are real close to reading about the end of the world as we know it. It could be that the end of civilization, as we know it is in view here. It will be a time of "woe." There will be no escaping the judgment. All that was held dear will be lost. The economic security will perish and man will be stripped of his ability to earn his way to success.

This ought to make us sensitive to the materialism around us today. We often admire the rich and luxurious and forget that all of their wealth will one day come to an end. Peter said, "Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn! But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells" (2 Peter 3: 11-13).

God's blessings have little to do with material gain,
Pastor Steve



"In One Hour"

December 26 - Revelation 18: 1 - 17a

So much can change in one hour. Life may be going along as planned and in the duration of an hour everything could change. The mistake men make is to think that life will always be what it is for them in their prime. This makes life deceptive. When things are going well we fantasize that it could only

get better. Realistically though, we have no clue what life will be like an hour from now.

When Biblical writers speak of the second coming or the end of the world they highlight the fact that a great multitude will be caught unawares. This crowd will be going about their business thinking that they

**“Indescribable Description”**

December 27 - Revelation 18:17b-19:10

Too Glorious To Capture With Ink Are God's Glories,
 God's works have a tendency to put things in perspective. Sometimes we cannot see the forest for the trees as the saying goes, but when we look more carefully at what God has done there is a feeling of relief from the frustrations of living on a planet that has been infused with sin. Paul said in Romans 8 that the whole creation groans in futility until the restoration that will one day come through Jesus.

When you look at the stars, or stare at a newborn baby as she coos and kicks and waves her arms, or you sit in a warm living room and watch the snow fall through a picture window, or you stop outside your front door in the spring to watch a spider spin his masterpiece, or you witness a star basketball player make an athletic maneuver that makes you shake your head, or you spend some great quality time with your spouse and you both feel that unspoken oneness that is the privilege of a loving married couple: when you experience these glimpses of God's works you can see the glory of God and be at peace with Him and have His peace in you.

When Revelation pictures the saints in heaven worshipping God, there is a sense of the wholeness and tranquility of freedom from the weight of sin. I don't believe we will know the lightness of freedom from our sin until we get to heaven. There we will have been transformed into Christ's likeness to such a degree that the burden of sin will be no more. Perfect spiritual health. We do get glimpses of this here, but they are always stained a bit with ulterior motives and selfish pursuits.

In the meantime, while we wait for heaven, it is best to pursue a life of worship. It is good to check our motives with trusted friends who will monitor our

desires and it is good to put the Lord first and self last. Paul said in Romans 12 that we should offer our bodies as living sacrifices which translates into our reasonable service of worship. In heaven there will be unadulterated and authentic Christ-focus. We will be glad to give Him all of the honor and ascribe to Him all of the power and glory and everything else. Here, there are times like this, but let's face it, we all too often want self to get some of the credit.

I love when I hear others talk about what God has done in their life. This is much more enjoyable than hearing a person talk about what they have done for God. Along these lines though is the meaning of the white garments worn by the saints. John says that these clothes represent the righteous deeds of the saints. So there is a place to talk about works that have flowed from service to Jesus. I can't help but think of the verse in Hebrews that stresses that God does not forget the things that you have done in His name.

The bride of Christ is joined to her Groom. The wedding feast is ready. Luke says in his gospel that once the redeemed are seated, the Lord Jesus will serve them. Picture that, will you. The Lord, scarred hands and all will take the role of a servant and make us welcomed on His big day.

The question is: To what degree do you want your life to glorify God? Is it your pleasure to want God's pleasure? Would you rather see the Lord in the spotlight than yourself? Do you enjoy seeing friends and family focus on Jesus and His works and does it irritate you when someone, including yourself, is too into self to make the Lord the focus of attention?

God's blessings are for those who glorify the Lord,
 Pastor Steve

**“The Rider On A White Horse”**

December 28 - Revelation 19: 1 - 21

Bravo, God!
 The horse is a striking symbol of majesty and power. I have always loved the way Job describes the horse: “Do you give the horse his might? Do you clothe his neck with a mane? Do you make him leap like the locust? His majestic snorting is terrifying. He paws in the valley and exults in his strength; he goes out to meet the weapons. He laughs at fear and is not dismayed; he does not turn back from the sword. Upon him rattle the quiver, the flashing spear and the javelin. With fierceness and rage he swallows the ground; he cannot stand still at the sound of the trumpet. When the trumpet sounds, he says ‘Aha!’ He smells the battle from afar, the thunder of the captains, and the shouting” (Job 39: 19-25).

God is saying that when you look at a horse you can see His power and wisdom and love. The horse is a good example of one of the wonders of God's creation. The horse Jesus appears on is white, no doubt symbolizing the purity of the rider who has come to judge. When Jesus first came, born of a virgin, he said that He did not come into the world to judge the world but that the world might be saved. That was then, now He comes in judgment on a white horse.

Look at the way He is described. Take in the majesty of His authority. There is no earthly comparison. When I was in third grade, my class was on a field trip to the Los Angeles Airport. As we were touring the terminal some official person approached my teacher and told her that Robert “Bobby” Kennedy would be arriving soon and he invited our class to meet the senator who was on his way to being president some day. We all got to shake his hand and I never washed that hand since. We thought we were really special

because we had touched a Kennedy. I have a different view today. The point though is that there is no comparison to that future time when I will be hugged by Jesus.

Let's look at two of the elements of His description. First, He is wearing a robe dipped in blood. This sight sums up Genesis to this point, doesn't it? He is seen in bloody clothes. After a ballplayer finishes the game, tired and sweaty, maybe even a blood stain or two, he goes to the showers and appears in the club afterwards clean and well-dressed. Jesus worked, on the cross, for us and when we see Him on the white horse He has on a bloody coat. If you can't love Jesus for this then I don't think there is hope for you. Secondly, out of His mouth comes a sword that will bring judgment. In the Bible the sword is a figure for God's Word. It would be the clear teaching of God's Word that would stand in judgment over the whole world. Remember the rich man who died and was in hell and wanted Jesus to go and warn his brothers that they should prepare to not end up there too? Jesus said that if they didn't believe Moses and the prophets why would they take His word. The Word of God will stand forever and will be the edge of the sword that will bring all men into judgment.

It has been our privilege to go through the entire New Testament this year verse by verse. I trust that you have experienced the life-changing power of it. It is sharper than a two-edged sword and is able to change us in our heart of hearts.

“God, continue to use your Word to change our lives.”

God's blessings come on a white horse,
 Pastor Steve

**“A Great White Throne”**

December 29 - Revelation 20: 1 - 15

In Awe Of God,
The martyrs are raised and reign with Christ. Their sacrifice is vindicated. The devil is given more rope for a short time to deceive the nations. A great army from the north attacks God’s people, but God intervenes and the devil and his buddies are confined to torment.

When a criminal, let’s say a murderer, is locked away in prison for life there is a sense of relief. When a sexual offender is let out of prison and has a sign in his front window warning the neighbors about his past behavior, how secure are you then, especially if you have little kids? We live in a dangerous world. Some people with very little mental amperage and a history of emotional isolation own guns. Some day there will be final justice. In the meantime, we have judges who do their best to uphold the law even when they personally may want to render another verdict. How often do you hear the family of a murdered loved one pronounce eternal fire on the guilty person. Honestly, I feel a bit uncomfortable with this because judgment is in God’s court. Yet, I do understand why could they feel that way.

Ultimately all people will stand or, should I say, bow before God. Paul said that a day would come when “every knee would bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.” Throughout the Bible when man is confronted by the presence of God, he is weakened and brought to his knees. If Jesus is already your Lord or Master, as some newer translations call that title, then you will not be brought under the same kind of scrutiny.

Have you ever been caught doing something you should not have been doing? I think I was a sophomore in high school, taking Algebra from Mr. Barth, who looked more like a drill sergeant than a math teacher. His arms weren’t unlike that of Popeye. My friend, Steve Thomas, who sat to my right one over,

had agreed that we could expedite the exam if he did questions 1-5 and I took 6-10. Then we’d exchange papers and get it done. I was busy at work when the hand of God rested on my left shoulder. I guess it wasn’t God, but you couldn’t have convinced me of that at the time. Good old Mr. Barth had been watching me look over Steve’s way and he was ready to lay the law down. “Mr. McGuyre, I have seen you cheating on this exam. You can put your paper away and see me after class.” I could see Steve through the corner of my eye; he was cowering away with undetected stealth.

If Mr. Barth was tough just imagine what it will be like to stand before an all-seeing, all-knowing, everywhere-present God in your dirty clothes. Paul has said, “For all have sinned and have fallen short of the glory of God.” It is the “glory” part that will throw us off. We are not God’s buddies, so that we can stand before him with our dirty rags and try to convince ourselves or, even worse, Him that everything is OK. Things have gone horribly wrong. Remember in Romans chapters one through three that the Apostle makes it clear that there is not one righteous man who can stand before God in His perfection and holiness. Only through the

righteousness of Christ can a man see himself standing before the Lord of all creation. Again, no doubt, the white throne highlights the fact of God’s purity and holiness - His otherness.

John sees the dead. All of them were there, even ones who had been buried at sea. God is able to raise everybody even if they have been cremated. God is on His thrown and the Earth and sky disappear from His presence. Maybe this is a reference to the impending doom at the time of judgment. Judgment is a dreadful time. There are books, plural. It appears to be different kinds of books. The dead are judged by their deeds recorded in the books. Interestingly,

no one makes it whose name is in the book of deeds. No one will be justified by works in God’s presence. Only those who are found written in the Book of life survive, but the others are cast in the lake of fire with the devil and his angels. This is the second death.

Judgment for the unbeliever will be unbearable. Judgment for the believer was unbearable too, but was borne by Jesus on the cross. He was forsaken so that we could be forgiven. Paul said, “There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus.” He bore our sins on His body on the cross. Those in Him will be identified with the Man in the blood stained coat. Those who stand in their own deeds will be judged and found wanting - “there is none righteous, no not one.”

We have more to be thankful for then we realize. Jesus paid the price for us so that we can stand before God and receive reward rather than judgment. This should motivate us to serve God while we live. We are all running a race, a long distance race, and the end

is in sight even though it sometimes gets exhausting. A little exhaustion is nothing compared to the fate of those who are not in Jesus.

God’s blessings by the Man in the bloody coat,
Pastor Steve

P.S. Some believe that the 1000 years is a literal reign of Jesus, from Jerusalem, where God’s people will reign with him on earth for exactly 1000 years. Others see the 1000 years as a reference to the Chrstian life which is the result of being raised with Jesus (salvation) and living our lives for Him (the “first resurrection” is a reference to reigning with Christ in heaven before the second coming and the resurrection of the body). I’d recommend a book called The Meaning of the Millennium: Four Views edited by Robert Clouse. Take a look at this old InterVarsity Press book, it may challenge the view you hold.

**“Everything New”**

December 30 - Revelation 21: 1 - 27

Disappointments - life on planet earth is brimming over with them; heartaches - we all have them, no one is immune from the grip of emotional pain; sadness - remember Nehemiah, melancholy runs in epidemic proportions today; broken relationships - divorce is rampant and past breakups affect most people in their adult years; broken down stuff - our favorite this or that sits unused, bent or frayed, only reminding us of what once was; death - my friend has a fish tank and lately the water has been too acidic or something. Today one of his fish was so sick it reeled and circled and rested at the bottom of the tank, dull, lifeless, on the brink of extinction. That was sad, that is life.

No wonder Paul talked about heaven as if he was groaning to be there. He knew that his time on earth would be useful to God as long as it lasted, but in the meantime he saw his earthly body as a tent ready to be folded up and put away. Paul even went so far to say that all of creation groans waiting for the unveiling of what God has in store for His own. If you have sunk your roots down deep on this terra firma you will be in deep weeds sooner or later. This world is passing away. It’s a fixer-upper that will be used as a “burn to learn.” That is a fireman’s expression for a property that wasn’t worth salvaging so they burned it down intentionally so that the firemen could learn how to use their equipment.

“Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea” (21:1). He who was seated on the throne said, “I am making everything new!” (21:5). Think about that. Some might be tempted to think this heavenly place is merely the absence of sorrow, pain and suffering. God by way of John is trying to get us to see that it is so much more. It is glorious. God, paints a picture in human words to help us move in that direction but still we, even the most spiritually perceptive among us, are dull to fully grasp what is being said here. A good analogy would be the “much mores” in Romans 5. What was lost through sin is not just regained in Christ but we have much more in Christ. Heaven will be heaven because of all that we have been saying about Jesus Christ over this past year on our journey through the New Testament. If you have begun to grasp the majesty and beauty of this man who loves you with all of His heart, then you will be able to get a glimpse of the heaven that He dwells in.

Listen to Hebrews again: “But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made

perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel” (12:22-24). Abel’s blood saved no one, Jesus’ blood could cover the sins of the world.

I am overwhelmed by the grace of God. And out of gratitude to Him may we bring with us as many people as we can between now and then. Let’s keep thinking about those around us who don’t yet have the light of the gospel. Let’s pray for them and bring them to Jesus.

Lastly, I find it fascinating that there is no temple there. In chapter 11 we read about a temple in John’s vision. Here we have no temple. The Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple. We will be in God there. We will be in God’s light.

Now I know why the writer of Hebrews concluded that magisterial letter by saying, “Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, equip you with everything good that you may do His will, working in us that which is pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen” (13: 20,21).

God’s blessings make all things new,
Pastor Steve

“The Spirit and the bride say, “Come!” And let him who hears say, “Come!” Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life” Revelation 22: 17.

Do you know how much God loves you? Look at the cross.

Do you realize that God is at work in your life? Think about the resurrection.
God’s Blessings always,
Pastor Steve



“The End is the Beginning”

December 31 - Revelation 22: 1 - 21

Hi and Goodbye,
The end is better than the beginning. In the beginning God made the heavens and the earth; in the end God will create a new heavens and a new earth. In the beginning man lived without community outside a cursed garden with several rivers; in the end there will be a river feeding trees for healing.

In the beginning man rebelled against God; in the end man will walk with God in washed robes made clean through the blood of Jesus. In the beginning there was darkness and chaos; in the end there will only be light. In the beginning man was cursed because of his sin; in the end man would be blessed because of the grace of God.



Now these [Berean] Jews were more noble than those in Thessalonica; they received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so.

Acts 17:11 (ESV)

