



***Becoming Fully Devoted Followers
by Studying the Followers Before Us***

WEEK 52

JESUS:

WHO WAS, AND WHO IS, AND WHO IS TO COME

DECEMBER 24-28, 2007

DAY	<i>THROUGH THE BIBLE</i>	ABBREVIATED STUDY
Monday	Revelation 1-5, Psalm 106	Revelation 1:1-8, Psalm 106
Tuesday	Revelation 6-9, Psalm 107	Revelation 3:1-6, Psalm 107
Wednesday	Revelation 10-14, Psalm 108	Revelation 5:1-14, Psalm 108
Thursday	Revelation 15-18, Psalm 109	Revelation 12:1-11, Psalm 109
Friday	Revelation 19-22, Psalm 110	Rev 22:1-5, 16-21, Psalm 110



Connecting people to abundant life.

READ

Revelation 1:1-8

Psalm 106

REFLECT

This week the Devo takes on a very particular task. This is the final week of our *Walk through the Bible* year, and with it we give special attention to the one Person that has in fact been mentioned every week, though He has not yet received His own particular week. We also consider Him, however, in light of the way He is presented to us in the final book of the Bible. And thirdly, here in the season of Advent, we also wish to do justice to the wonderful Gift of Christmas. So here goes.

The Book of Revelation is presented to us as “the revelation of Jesus Christ.” It is a prophetic message that comes to the Church from the Lord of the Church, delivered by two messengers: an angel, and John (Rev 1:1). Remarkably little is told us about either of these two messengers; they are important to the book only to the extent that they simply bear testimony to “all” they have seen and heard (1:2). Their value is that they pass on the full value of the Word of the Lord.

Protestants are often less comfortable than other types of Christians with angels, except maybe at Christmas. The Bible teaches that they are servants of God, whose home is heaven even as our human home is earth, and that they assist the earthly work of God at times. They know and rejoice in God’s holy will in a way that is a wonderment to us, since we still struggle with the selfishness that prevents our unhindered listening to God’s voice of love and command. Thus they seem particularly charged with helping to get across to us the clarity of God’s Word at times when it is hard for earthlings to hear it. And so in the events of Jesus’ birth, Gabriel secured Mary’s attention for a message that was literally unbelievable; and later an angel choir found a rapt audience of shepherds with whom to share the joy of God’s grace. Maybe instead of picturing angels with harps, we should see them

carrying hearing aids for the deafened ears of the children of Adam and Eve! Their message is usually disruptive and inconvenient: not the arrival of happy times, but of the saving act of God. And so it is in today’s passage: an angel warns us to “listen up!” – because God is going to save.

In a real sense this “revelation of Jesus Christ” is also *about* Jesus. And as Pastor Jim shared last week, the name Jesus means “God saves” – not, for instance, “happy days are here again.” As the Gospels begin with the story of Jesus’ coming, so in Revelation the Church looks forward to Jesus bringing this particular age to a conclusion. And it is indeed all about Him. As we learned over and over again in our study of the Old Testament, Israel was never able fully to grasp the salvation that God offered, even with the repeated injunctions of the prophets. In many ways this failure clarified the need for the disclosure, the revelation, of something completely unheard of among humanity: that God Himself would arrive to save His people, and indeed the whole world. Verses 4-6 of our passage remind us eloquently of Jesus’ ministry, death, and resurrection, and verses 7-8 remind us that what remains is still very much about Him. Salvation seems never to be obvious to us humans; it always seems to come to us out of left field, with tremendous energies of God, and of angels, directed at getting us to “listen up” (v. 3). But for those who do listen up, life is never again the same.

RESPOND

Because God means really to save and not just to assuage, our service to Him and to His Gospel can mean interruptions and disruptions as He directs our energies away from our own “great ideas” and toward His own plan for the ages. Are you ready to be interrupted this Christmas, in order to share God’s love in an unexpected way?

PRAY

“To Him who loves us, and released us from our sins by His blood, and who has made us to be a kingdom, priests to God His Father – to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.”

READ

Revelation 3:1-6

Psalm 107

REFLECT

The first chapters of the Book of Revelation declare Jesus to be the great Shepherd of the Church. The vision of Jesus in 1:9-20 leads into His letters to the seven churches of Asia Minor in chapters 2-3. He is the One “who loves us, and released us from our sins by His blood.” He bore the judgment of our selfishness, and now as our Head He is the perfect one to continue to guide us in the life He purchased for us. Today’s passage, the fourth of the seven letters, allows us to look closely at a sample of Jesus’ shepherding style.

The letter to the church of Sardis brings a wake-up call to the Christian community there. Sardis was built in antiquity as the fortress city of Croesus, by reputation the wealthiest man in history. Secure in his wealth and in the armies that it purchased, he grew lax at just the wrong moment, and the neighboring king, Cyrus, was able to conquer the unconquerable city. Croesus finished out his days as the pet advisor of Cyrus, spouting canned wisdom about fortune’s vicissitudes. This letter to the church implies that the Christians there have picked up the bad habits of the town itself. They have a reputation for vitality, but the Lord knows them to be spiritually dead. If they do not become alert to their situation, “I will come like a thief.” But the weakness that overshadows the community can be simply (but perhaps not easily) overcome: it is a matter of turning from the routine, and walking instead with Jesus.

A wake-up call is by definition both uncomfortable and timely. To extend our theme of yesterday, Jesus again comes preaching God’s

uncomfortable salvation. He does not here preach a return to thoughtless comfort, but rather delivers an abrupt challenge to the church’s entire way of life. The good news is not about “good times,” but about the demands of God’s salvation.

RESPOND

Often Christmas has worked for me like a wake-up call, but never in any way that I expect. Usually I approach Christmas with the assumption that I will be contributing a lot more to Christmas than I am likely to get out of it. There is so much to contribute, after all, in terms of planning, and execution, and spirit, and readiness. But the best Christmases for me have been the ones that brought me more than I could have predicted – not of gifts, but of the Lord’s own goodness (not presents, but Presence). Once it was a dinner delivered to our door on a Christmas Day that our family was sick and couldn’t join others. Often it is the glimpse of some blessing in the lives of others. One year brought both a new child and the death of a parent; and the music of Christmas was permanently enriched with both joy and sorrow. The Lord may speak through a child, through a carol, or through a Christmas message. He may come in the gentleness of a Lamb, in the laughter of a Bridegroom, or in the snarl of a Lion. But He always comes to us for the same reason, and it’s not to coddle, to bemoan, to placate, and certainly not to lull. Jesus comes to save. It is not always comfortable. But it is always timely.

PRAY

“Oh give thanks to the Lord, for He is good; for His lovingkindness is everlasting. Let the redeemed of the Lord say so, whom He has redeemed from the hand of the adversary.” Psalm 106:1-2

- D.D.

READ

Revelation 5:1-14

Psalm 108

REFLECT

As we have seen, in Revelation 1-3 Jesus is presented as the Shepherd of the Church, guiding it in the challenges of life and witness. Revelation 4-5 then places all in perspective, as John is brought up into a vision of heaven itself, and he gazes on the astonishing activity at the throne of God, the center of all things visible and invisible. He finds no timeless placidity here, but an ebb and flow of constant and strenuous activity that has its central purpose in giving constant, energetic, vital praise to the Most High God.

In the midst of this activity, an angel steps forward (5:2). Let's be reminded that the appearance of an angel (as we noted earlier) means, "Listen up! God is saving!" The one "seated on the throne" has a scroll in His hand, and the angel asks, "Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?" At first no one in heaven or on earth is found who is worthy to perform this task. Poignantly, it causes the author of Revelation to break his background role, as he is overwhelmed with an almost uncontrollable grief. Why does he weep? The imagery of the closed book speaks to us that there is some powerful and beautiful message or action that God is ready to perform, but that remains unfulfilled and undelivered because there is no one in creation who is able to handle the message. No one is worthy to hear and accept the Word of God in its power and beauty. John weeps because he understands that it signifies the isolation of humanity from God; we are cut off from His grace and blessings because we cannot even hear His voice. His grief is the grief for the full tragedy of fallen humanity.

But the moment is not over. True, no one was found who is worthy; but now someone "has overcome so as to open the book and its seals." The tense of the verb ("has overcome") implies that a drama has played out in some sense that has changed the situation forever. The

prophesied Messiah of the line of David has done it. As He steps forward to take the scroll and open it, we find that the Lion of Judah is in fact the Lamb of God slain for our sins (5:5-6). In His work of salvation, Jesus has rectified the relationship between God and humanity, and the full blessings and joy of God can once again flow in our created world. The angel was right to get us to "listen up!" Jesus has arrived, not just for good times, but for salvation itself. And the rest of the chapter records the energy of the heavenly praise, hardly pausing but rather broadening to acknowledge not only the creating work of God (4:11) but now also the salvation of God and of the Lamb (5:9).

Do you hear the Christmas message? Humanity needs to have relationship with God to be truly blessed and alive, and yet sin has placed all humanity under a cloud. And so God sent His Son to be born as a tiny infant, to live and grow not as a freakish alien but as a real human, as a real member of creation itself. In this way Jesus was positioned to receive the word of judgment and the word of blessing that must come to humanity, but He was able to accept it and deal with it because He was worthy as only God is worthy.

Mild, He lays His glory by; born that man no more may die;
Born to raise the sons of earth, born to give them second birth!
Hark, the herald angels sing: "Listen up! God is saving!"

RESPOND

While Christmas is often the time for wonderful productions and glorious services, it is simultaneously the time for us to bring our deepest, most personal worship to Jesus Christ. It can happen as we listen to music in our homes, or gather for worship at church, or even as we check the franticness of a shopping expedition with a moment of praise and thanks. Jesus saves!

PRAY

Dear Lord, Thank you for the gift of salvation. Please help us be ready to share the real meaning of Christmas with all those we encounter, in thought and word and deed.

- D.D.

READ

Revelation 12:1-11
Psalm 109

REFLECT

The Book of Revelation is best read as a series of visions, in which the Gospel of Jesus Christ is depicted and explored from a variety of perspectives. This is especially true of chapters 6-22. Each of these visions has something to do with “the things that must shortly take place” (Rev 1:1), that is, with the future that is fast bearing down on the Church as it struggles to remain faithful to its Lord. But in sketching the future, the visions also dig deeply into the Biblical past. Here is the power of the language of the book, which draws on Old Testament imagery in a rich way, going beyond mere citation, and rather imitating its very qualities and cadences.

Today’s passage presents us with a vision of a woman giving birth to a child, an attack on them both by a dragon, God’s act of protection, and a voice commenting on the scene. The question that springs to mind is, “who are these figures?” The text gives us some help with that, but also suggests a complexity that leaves matters somewhat mysterious. The dragon, it is clear, is Satan (12:9), who at the start of the vision has tremendous power, and part way through it is “thrown down to the earth” (12:9) where however he still represents a huge threat (5:13-17). The identity of the child is not stated as clearly, but the fact that He is “to rule all the nations with a rod of iron” (5:5) tells us that this is Jesus Christ (compare 19:15-16). That should make the mother Mary, and yet there seem to be layers of signification that push this identification in other directions. She is “clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars” (5:1). This has led some commentators to see here a reference to the earth itself, emphasizing the beauty of the Lord’s original creation (over against the viciousness of the dragon) so that Jesus is a true “son of the earth.” As events unfold, she is also hidden and nourished by God in the wilderness (5:14), which reminds us of aspects of the history of Israel; and so some see here a

specific reference to Israel as the “mother” of Jesus. These three references are perhaps not inconsistent with each other: the perfection and beauty of the original creation was taken up in Israel’s worship and experience as the people of God, and Mary certainly represents the obedience and beauty of Israel’s faith. The swirling themes allow the vision to carry several legitimate levels of implications.

On the other hand, the reference to Bethlehem is clear, though astonishingly gruesome. Samuel Beckett shocked the world in his play *Waiting for Godot*, by depicting the quality of human life as a woman giving birth while straddling a grave: a quick and dirty womb-to-tomb experience. His image was not less shocking than the John’s image of the dragon awaiting the birth of the Savior with an open maw. (I’ve never seen a crèche like this.) Only one thing prevents disaster: God intervenes, and allows the natural development of the child to take its course. Only the action of God stands between the unslaked ferocity of Satan and the vulnerable baby who must grow before He can conquer. Only God stands against the mind-blowing pointlessness of evil – or for that matter of Beckett’s empty philosophy. God insists on retaining human life as beautiful, meaningful, and full of wonder. And He does it by protecting the natural, normal, quiet, vulnerable processes of nature and family. Again, a powerful reiteration of the real meaning of Christmas: God saves!

RESPOND

Verses 10-11 pattern our response as “the brethren” who have known the salvation of God. As beneficiaries of His blood, they became His witnesses, and turned from a life of their own to a life lived (and lost) for Him. So much about Christmas seems to bring out our human selfishness. But there is much too that can turn us away from a life lived for self.

PRAY

Lord, thank You for the faithfulness of so many of Your servants – the prophets of Israel, Mary and Joseph, and the many faithful witnesses in our lives who have shown us the light of life in Christ. Help us shine Your light today.

- D.D.

READ

Revelation 22:1-5, 16-21

Psalm 110

REFLECT

The final two chapters of Revelation, and of the Bible, depict the New Jerusalem, the city where the blessings of God flow without hindrance. The great characteristic of the new city, that is expressed in all its parts and wonders, is the presence of God. It glows with the very glory of God (21:11), and needs no temple, for “the Lord God, the Almighty, and the Lamb are its temple” (21:22). Nor is any sun needed, for the Lamb is the light of the City of God (21:23). Further, the very throne of God, which we saw in Revelation 4-5 in the heart of heaven, is now to be found in the New Jerusalem – or, as some commentators construe it, Jerusalem will now be the very throne of God and of the Lamb.

The first part of chapter 22 goes on to describe the life of the city. It takes its source from God, from the river that flows from the throne and gives life to all within the city. The river is a wonderful evocation of the river seen in a vision by Ezekiel (see Ezekiel 47:1-2), where a vast stream descends from Jerusalem into the desert, watering huge trees along the way. We might see a significant change when the imagery reappears in Revelation; whereas the life-giving waters in the Old Testament produced leaves for the healing of Israel, these trees bear leaves for the healing of all of the nations. In another way this vision surpasses anything possible in the days of Israel's and the Church's long struggle: here there shall be found no curse (literally, “no accursed thing”), but rather all activity will promote the service of God's love and will. In the presence of God and in the nurture of His blessings, human life will find its true stride.

The vision is all-inclusive. Even the city walls (21:12-21) have nothing to do with protection or security, and everything to do with the luminous display of beauty and glory. Everything is open, everything is

seen, everyone is welcome. This is made especially clear in the final verses of the book (22:16-21). Here we find Jesus Himself now lifting His voice to everyone, inviting each and all to participate of the good things of God: “Let the one who wishes take the water of life without cost.” The leaves representing the healing of the nations in the New Jerusalem are already on offer, in the presentation of the Gospel to those of every tribe and nation. God is saving.

Christmas is a season of lights. There is no doubt that the light of Jesus stands behind our traditions of lights at Christmas. But there is also no doubt that our cultural traditions have gotten away from the Gospel, especially by appropriation for materialistic and other purposes. In our forays into the malls and shopping centers and movie theaters, we may easily feel distanced and even offended by the splendor of what is promoted as related to the season. Let me argue, however, that it would be a shame if the offense we take would prevent us from seeing the specific ways that this hurting world is in need of “the healing of nations.” We who know the real Light of God can be comfortable knowing that Jesus too roamed streets and marketplaces, bringing true light where there were those who had become disenchanted with the darkness.

RESPOND

If the materialism of our culture inevitably puts on its particular displays each Christmas, it's also true that our Christian commitments and predilections can pull us from engagement with others at this time of year. We need to hear the urgency of the Book of Revelation that the time is short, and that every moment is the day of salvation of our God. Let the Church lift its voice and cry, “Come!”

PRAY

Jesus, thank You that at the heart of salvation we find You. In all the obligations of life and faith, all our hopes and desires for how life might be, You are our constant companion and unfailing guide. Shape this day with Your love, we pray.

- Dave Dorman

Walk Through The Bible Readings
WEEK AT A GLANCE

December 24-28 Week 52

Monday	Revelation 1-5	Psalm 106
Tuesday	Revelation 6-9	Psalm 107
Wednesday	Revelation 10-14	Psalm 108
Thursday	Revelation 15-18	Psalm 109
Friday	Revelation 19-22	Psalm 110

PRAYER JOURNAL

This week I am praying for . . .

. . . good health, safety, and wisdom for Charly and Jodie Pine, along with children CJ, Joshua, and Jordan, serving with the Navigator's. Jodie is the daughter of members Dave and Betsy McIntire. Charly teaches in a developing country and Jodie is home schooling their three children along with taking a class on social issues.

. . . the several families in our community that the staff, college group and a small group are helping with food and gifts this Christmas. May they experience the Lord's blessings.

And . . .
