

Can you believe it? We have completed thirty-one Sundays, covering thirty-one foundational stories in the Bible from Genesis to Revelation and we are not the same church we were nine months ago.

Our appetite for God's Word has grown.
Our desire to read God's Word and to pray, and to discuss God's Word together has grown.
Thank you for taking this journey with me!

I'm truly grateful.
It does a pastor's heart a lot of good.

Well, here we are today on the last chapter. And yet in many ways this is not the last chapter. The Bible is a book that continues to be written each time the seeds of faith are planted and grow, and the Word of God is shared.

That's why I'm excited this morning.
Not because we've completed thirty-one weeks from beginning to end,
but because this book, God's Word, is living and active.

It's a story that God has been writing on your heart from the moment you first came to know Him.

You see the Bible is foundational. We can't live without it!
It will tell you everything you need to know

- about this world
- about who God is and who you are in the eyes of God
- and about the kind of life we've been called to live

And this year has been quite an adventure in becoming more familiar with the foundational stories in the Bible, what these stories mean,
and how they are meant to form us and shape us into the people God has created us to be.

And just as every story has a beginning
every story also has an ending.
It has a direction, a plot, and a future outcome.

And in the Bible we are given glimpses of the future
in books like Daniel, and in parts of Ezekiel, and Isaiah,
and in the New Testament in the book of Revelation.

Just out of curiosity, how many of you have ever tried to read through the book of Revelation before? Did you find it confusing or hard to understand?

Well, that's not an uncommon experience.

And then you add to that, the fact that in popular culture there are so many books and movies, that frankly just make matters worse.

They are sensationalizing the book, and trying to make it into something it was never intended to be.

Let me explain.

The first key to understanding the book of Revelation is to start is talk about what kind of literature this is. The Bible includes poetry and history, and prophecy, and the Gospels. But the book of Revelation is called apocalyptic literature which means that it points to the future.

In fact, another name for the book of Revelation is "the apocalypse" which literally means, "to uncover" or "to reveal." It doesn't mean a cataclysmic ending.

What this book reveals or uncovers, is a God-given glimpse of the future.

Some of the later prophets in the Old Testament like Daniel were given visions of the future and in the Gospels, we have a few chapters that do that as well.

And now at the end of the Bible we find this vision that an angel delivers to the apostle John, when he was exiled on the island of Patmos. John is told to write this vision on a scroll and deliver it seven churches, including the church in Ephesus.

So that's a bit about the kind of literature this is.

Now, the second key to understanding the book of Revelation is to make sure we listen to the warning at the end, where it says:

"Anyone who hears the words of this prophecy and adds anything to them or takes anything away from them... will not share in the tree of life"

That's a serious warning. As serious as any you'll find in the whole Bible.

But, some people try to make this book into something it's not.

Some people get hung up on words like "mark of the beast" or "anti-Christ."

But did you know that the word "anti-Christ" doesn't even appear in the book of Revelation?

It appears elsewhere in the New Testament and it's always plural.

It literally refers to people who stand against Christ or rebel against God.

That's what being anti-Christ means. It doesn't refer a particular historical person.

So let's not make this book into something it's not.

Instead let's just take it for what it says.

In the beginning of the book, verse four, it says

"I, John am writing this letter to you, the seven churches in the province of Asia."

Notice he didn't say, "I'm writing this letter to 21st century Americans who are trying to figure out when the end of the world is going to be."

No where does it say anything close to that, and yet that's the popular understanding from the outside looking in. You would think that after all the predictions that have come and gone, that people would take a hint.

Or better yet, that people would actually pay attention to what Jesus teaches about the end times. Jesus simply says, "I'm coming back."

We live in this wonderfully blessed time, between Jesus' first arrival and his second arrival. We're waiting for his second coming.

That's what we are doing when we pray in the Lord's Prayer, "Thy Kingdom come."
Let's say those three words, together. "Thy Kingdom Come"

Do know what you're saying?

When we pray for God's Kingdom to come, beginning now, and finally and completely when Jesus comes again. We're praying for Jesus to usher in, once and for all, what He started through his life, death, and resurrection.

Jesus also taught, before he ascended, he said in no uncertain terms,
"I'm coming back, and you won't know the day or the hour."

So, don't be apathetic.

Keep awake, keep alert, don't be caught off guard, don't drift away from me,
because if you do, my coming will be like a thief in the night.
You won't have time to prepare yourself, when I come.

So prepare yourself now and every day.

But also hear this, Jesus says:

"You won't know the day or the hour, so stop wasting your time trying to figure it out."
Stop trying to predict when I'm coming back.

The book of Revelations echoes these themes.

To the church in Laodicea, the message is,

“I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! So, because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of my mouth.”

In other words, “don’t be apathetic. Keep awake, keep alert”

Be ready for the time when Jesus returns.

The book of Revelation also makes clear that trying to predict the timing of Jesus return is not what our focus should be.

Instead of focusing on when Jesus returns, John’s vision turns our attention to the more important matter of who will meet us when this world comes to an end.

To the same church in Laodicea, listen to voice calling out to them:

It’s not voice of Mohammed.

It’s not the voice of Buddha, or any other self-proclaimed prophet.

It’s the voice of our Good Shepherd calling out to us.

Listen to what Jesus says to those in Laodicea, who have become lukewarm:

Jesus says:

“Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline.

So be earnest and repent.

Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me.

... whoever has ears, let them hear.”

That’s the message God wants us to hear,
the message that Jesus is the one who is coming at the end of time
that the God who created us, and redeemed us,
will be meeting us at the end of history,
and will join us in a new community, that we can barely imagine.

This new heaven and new earth that Jesus ushers in, comes to us now, only in glimpses...
but if you’ve read the book of Revelation...
you’ve already heard what an amazing future we have in store.

In Revelation, chapter 21 John writes:

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. ² And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying,

“See, the home of God is among mortals.
 He will dwell with them;
 they will be his peoples,
 and God himself will be with them;
⁴ he will wipe every tear from their eyes.
 Death will be no more;
 mourning and crying and pain will be no more,
 for the first things have passed away. Behold I am making all things new.”

Death will be no more.
 Mourning and crying and pain will be no more.

I don't know about you, but I long for that day.
 I long for the day when Jesus will come again
 and once and for all end the suffering in this world.

Most of the suffering in this world we can't even fathom.
 I can't fathom what it's like for a parent to hear the news that their son has been captured and
 beheaded by ISIS.

I can't fathom the level of suffering experienced by children all around the world
 who grow up in slums, and who ache with hunger day after day.

But even closer to home my heart aches for Cody, a little boy I baptized just a few years ago
 and who has been diagnosed with Ewing's Sarcoma,
 and is undergoing both chemo and radiation treatments for the next several months.

And I think of friends and family right here in our congregation.
 Just this week we added seven new names to the list of people being prayed for by our Prayer
 Team, including the family of 2-year-old Lucy who drowned this week.

Can you imagine the suffering of her parents?
 I long for the day when death will be no more.
 When crying and pain will be no more.

I long for the day when we will see Jesus face to face
 when all who have suffered will be comforted
 when we will be surrounded by a love so divine
 that it will enfold us completely and make us whole once again.

As we sing in the hymn by that name:
 “Love Divine, all loves excelling,
 “Joy in heaven, on earth come down!

Fix in us a humble dwelling,
all thy faithful mercies crown...

Jesus thou art all compassion,
pure unbounded love thou art...

visit us, with thy salvation, enter every trembling heart.

Jesus is coming again.

Thanks be to God!

Amen.