



Part 11 – The Church’s Future

Revelation 19

The Book of Revelation was not given so that 21st century Christians (or any other generation of Christians) could predict the moment of Christ’s return. The Book of Revelation is not a secret code to be deciphered by “prophecy experts.” True, Revelation belongs to the category of apocalyptic literature. Therefore, it is an “unveiling.” But what the Book of Revelation unveils is quite clear: Jesus wins in the end.

The Book of Revelation is the Apostle John’s account of the great visions given to him by God concerning the second advent of Jesus, the future of the church, the judgment of the wicked, the final defeat of Satan, and the inauguration of the age to come. It was originally addressed to the seven churches of Asia Minor. The primary purpose of the Book of Revelation is two-fold. First, it is a call to the church to remain faithful to the end of the age. Second, Revelation is a word of comfort to the persecuted church that God will indeed judge the wicked and cast down the ancient serpent (**Genesis 3; Revelation 20**). For those generations of Christians who have been impoverished, pursued, imprisoned, and slaughtered for their faith in Jesus, this message has served as a great comfort. While the kingdoms of this world prosper now; while they seem to succeed in their wicked designs they will be brought to ruin by the righteous hand of King Jesus. As part of his triumph, the Lord Jesus who is “King of kings and Lord of lords” (**vs. 16**) will welcome his church, his bride into the great eternal wedding feast of the Lamb (**vv. 6-9**).

This vision of the church’s future is not merely truth for which to be thankful (though it certainly is that!). Knowledge of the church’s future ought to inform how Christians live today. We live in light of eternal realities therefore we do not cling to this world as though it is for our good. We know that every injustice, every sin, every act of wickedness against God and his people will be avenged by God (**Isaiah 61:2; Jeremiah 51:36; Ezekiel 24:8; Matthew 3:7; 2 Thessalonians 1:8**). Therefore, we have the freedom to never seek vengeance upon those who harm us. Vengeance is God’s business (**Romans 12:19**). Because of that, Christians are free to love their enemies and to pray for those who curse them. What is more, because of the terrifying prospects of God’s coming judgment, the church is to labor with great urgency to call sinners to repent.

1. The church will worship.

- Revelation 19 is the response to the previous chapter’s call to rejoice over the destruction of Babylon (**18:20**). In Revelation, as elsewhere in Scripture, Babylon is used metaphorically to refer to the godless and immoral world system arrayed against God and his people. Notice that the saints in Heaven are not uncomfortable with God’s wrath exercised against the wicked. Indeed, they offer praise in response. How different this is from many Christians who display differing levels of discomfort with the fact that God will judge his enemies. In Heaven it is cause for worship for it represents the vindication of God’s justice and righteousness.
- Our difficulty in expressing thankfulness for the victory of God over his enemies is most likely a sign of the distance between the way we tend to think about God, mankind, sin, and salvation and the testimony of Scripture concerning those things.
- There is a fourfold repetition of the word “Hallelujah” in this chapter. The word John uses is a Greek transliteration of the Hebrew word which means “Praise the Lord” (“Praise-Jah” *Yahweh* or *Yahova*). And while this may be difficult for postmodern minds, the praise of Revelation 19 is connected to God’s judgment of the wicked.
 - a) The first hallelujah celebrates the fact of God’s righteous judgment (**vv. 1-2**).
 - b) The second hallelujah is expressed at the completeness of God’s judgment (**vs. 3**).
 - c) The third hallelujah is in response to the settled rule of God who is “seated on the throne” (**vv. 4-5**).
 - d) The fourth hallelujah celebrates the completion of the Lord’s redemption of his people (**vv. 6-8**).

2. The church will be redeemed.

- The marriage supper of the Lamb (**vv. 6-10**) is a depiction of the church's final redemption and eternal union with Christ. In **Romans 8** Paul writes of how even the people of God "groan" in this present evil age as "we wait eagerly for adoption as sons; the redemption of our bodies" (**vv. 22-25**). So, while it is true that we *are* redeemed, we are also *being* redeemed and *waiting* for that final and complete redemption which we will know in the age to come. The church's future is full and complete redemption, body and spirit. No more will there be any sin or sorrow. Wickedness and calamity and disease will be no more. Just as we sing: "Sickness, sorrow, pain, and death are felt and feared no more."

3. The church will be at rest.

- The great promise held within the creation days of **Genesis 1:1-2:3** is that God has prepared for his people an eternal rest. Since the fall into sin (**Genesis 3**) mankind has labored under the weight of his sin and sin's consequences. The work of humanity has been toilsome, our bodies decaying, and our relationships fraught with pain. We also battle daily with the world, the flesh and the devil. But by God's grace there remains for us an eternal rest in the presence of our Lord; a rest whereby we will remain productive, enjoy sinless communion with one another, and forever behold the beauty of the Lord.
- The second half of Revelation 19 (**vv. 11-21**) is a graphic depiction of Christ's triumph over the wicked. It is a depiction of Christ's second advent as a Warrior King. His victory signals the vindication of God's righteousness which has been mocked, questioned, and denied for generations. But the victory of King Jesus also signals that his people can finally rest from their warfare; their conflict with the principalities and powers of this present evil age (**Ephesians 6:10-12**). The church's future is one of peaceful rest. The battle will be over. The victory will be once and forever won. "And the great church victorious shall be the church at rest."

Preparing for the Church's Future:

1. Reframe our worship

It is right and appropriate that we worship God according to what he has done for us. Indeed, our worship would be deficient if it did not include praising God for his provision for us of everything from our eternal salvation to our daily bread. And yet, there must be more. Even as we will shout our hallelujah to God in the age to come simply for his own excellencies and the vindication of his own name, so too should we praise him today for those very things.

2. Rethink our suffering

In light of her future the church is able to think differently about suffering than does the world. This does not mean that Christians are able to rise above pain or the experience of feeling "hard pressed" and "dismayed" (**2 Corinthians 4:8**). To the contrary, we feel it all. What is more, we experience those things knowing that it is not the way it is supposed to be. And yet we say with the Apostle Paul, "For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing to the glory that is to be revealed to us" (**Romans 8:18**).

3. Rebuke our sin

Revelation 19 offers vivid portrayals of God's coming judgment against the wicked. Babylon is used as a metaphor for the world in all of its idolatry, immorality, and violence. All the sinful deeds so characteristic of the world must not characterize the lives of God's people. We have no business being conformed to the world (**Romans 12:1ff**).

4. Recalibrate our perspective

To calibrate means to establish a particular standard of measurement. A typical clock is calibrated to measure the passage of time by minutes and hours. A car's odometer is calibrated to measure distance in miles. So, to *recalibrate* means to change the standard of measurement. It is not unusual for us to tend toward calibrating our lives in terms of the here and now. We forget that our lives aren't even a flicker in terms of eternity. That does not mean that our lives are insignificant. Quite the opposite. It does mean however that we must live our lives in view of eternity. Live with the end in view. Live with Revelation chapters 19-21 before you. When you experience injustice and you want vengeance, recalibrate your perspective and remember eternity. When you feel as though you will collapse under the weight of this world's sin, recalibrate your perspective to remember the victory of Jesus and that eternal, fully satisfying, and tearless rest that awaits all whose lives are hidden in Christ.