

Wow, I don't feel worthy of that. Bumper. Thank you, Carla. And our preschool is such a tremendous blessing to us, and Carla is just wonderful, and thank you. I know we've got grandparents and parents in the room today.

Thank you for coming and watching your beloved children and grandchildren. Appreciate that since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful and so worship God acceptably with reverence and fear. Now we have an enemy. I think most of us know that. And this enemy is literally hell bent on shaking us up.

And he's very, very good at it, I can testify. Because there's stuff all around us, and if we're not careful, it will shake us up, it will unsettle us, it will create confusion, make us question. And then we are forced either to live in fear or to live by faith. A faith that is reverent and submits our concerns and questions to a God who is able to deal with the questions that we cannot answer. Now, most of the time, I think I'm a man of faith.

Well, maybe that's an exaggeration. At times I'm a man of faith, and then at other times, you know, maybe I'm not. And why is that? Why do we battle like we're really good at some point of being faithful, and then at other times it's like, ah, I'm anxious and I'm fearful. Why is that?

Well, let me ask you this first. Have you ever wondered where the expression mad as hell came from? I believe it comes from Revelation 12. Revelation, of course, is full of symbolic language, apocalyptic language that is not to be pressed into literal interpretations and understandings, but it still conveys a powerful, understandable message. And Revelation 12 is a picture of the cosmic struggle between good and evil, between God and Satan, from the time of creation.

And I think it's all compressed into this one little picture. And in Revelation 12, it pictures everything that brings us to Christ's birth. And as Christ is being born, we have Satan trying to destroy Christ while he's on earth. And he's unsuccessful. He thinks he's won on Friday, but on Sunday he realizes he's lost.

And so it seems to me Revelation 12 is saying, yeah, as Jesus ascends back into heaven, Satan chases him there, and there's another battle, and Satan loses again, again. He's a loser twice. And so Revelation 12:9 says he was hurled to the earth and his angels with him. Satan is angry. He is absolutely furious.

He's as mad as hell, because Hell, Satan's home, is driven by Hatred. It's driven by anger. And Satan, twice the loser. In his attempt to destroy Jesus, guess what he does? He takes it out on us.

He takes it out on those who are trying to follow Jesus. And this is

why we struggle. The forces of hell are working against us, trying to win us over to their ways. And so Revelation 12:12 and 17 says, Woe to the earth and the sea, because the devil has gone down to you. He is filled with fury because he knows his time is short.

Then verse 17, then the dragon was enraged at the woman, which is the church, I believe, and went off to wage war against the rest of her offspring, those who keep God's commands and hold fast to their testimony about Jesus. So, you know, Peter describes Satan as a roaring lion. He says, Satan is a roaring lion. He's hungry and he's angry. He's hell bent on destroying you.

He's hell bent on destroying me. But you see, we are a part of an unshakable kingdom. We have hope. We have a confident expectation that everything will turn out well. Tim's sick today, so this is one of his favorite quotes.

But back in the 14th century, there was a woman named Julian of Norwich, and she was struggling with all kinds of things. She was struggling with the suffering in her own life, the suffering around her. She was confused by the temptations and the struggles of sin and just generally evil in the world. And she was really wrestling with this. And then she has a vision that produces this famous quote.

Jesus says to her, in the midst of all that, all shall be well. All shall be well, and all manner of things shall be well. This is the message of the unshakeable kingdom. It's a message of hope. It is the message of revelation.

Revelation was not written to create fear. It's not written to create confusion. It wasn't written as a mysterious puzzle for us to decode 2000 years later. It was a message and is a message of hope for the first century, and it's the message of hope for the 21st century. Good triumphs over evil.

We win in the end. And so over the next several weeks, we're going to dive into Revelation and we're going to look at some of the themes that help us live with an unshakable faith in an ever changing, often chaotic world. Over the last few weeks, we've had a few emails from one of our mission partners. One that we support Sherwood Oaks, and that is Central India Christian Mission. They do a wonderful work.

They have a hospital, among other things, that has served Thousands and thousands of people. But right now, they are facing serious persecution. The hospital staff are often pulled aside and interrogated. People are standing out front of the hospital from time to time and shouting things like this. These are quotes from the email Death to Christian Missionaries.

They should be put to death and hanged. Such people should not live.

Can you imagine going to work and crossing a line where people are shouting these kinds of things? So how do our partners receive this? How are they handling it?

These are people we know, people we love and people we support. And they are responding to the persecution with an unshakeable faith. These are some quotes from things they've said. We cling to God's promises. We are not afraid, but we are heartbroken.

Heartbroken, but not afraid. That really strikes me. Just a few weeks ago, some of us were on the island of Patmos. It was a great. It was a highlight of our trip, in my mind, to Greece and Turkey.

And we were on the island of Patmos. We were there because we wanted to see where the Book of Revelation originated. Revelation is the revelation of Jesus Christ to a specific group of people living in the first century, facing persecution by the emperor, the Roman emperor Domitian. Domitian lives from 81 to 96 AD, and we believe Revelation was written toward the end of his reign in 95 AD. There's lots of reasons for believing that.

Domitian's an interesting character. To me. The emperors of Rome, most of them considered themselves to be a God, just one God among many that were worshipped. But Domitian was an egomaniac. He really took it seriously, and he demanded that you address him as Lord God, Domitian.

So you can imagine what he thinks when he finds out that Christians won't do that, because they're saying, we only have one Lord and it's Jesus. And so, as a result of this conflict between Domitian and Christians, Domitian revitalizes the persecution that happened some 30 years earlier with Nero. You've heard about Nero. And so Domitian's persecution is the background of the Book of Revelation. It's a very specific context.

A very specific thing is going on. And the persecution involved things like exclusion from trade guilds. If you didn't worship Lord God, Domitian, you might not be in a trade guild. You might not be able to participate in the marketplace. And we're going to see that later in Revelation.

It kind of comes out. You might have your property confiscated. You might be like John, who is shipped off, exiled to the island of Patmos, you might be tortured. Some people are being put to death. Jesus, in his letter to the church of Pergamum, one of the seven churches of Revelation, mentions a man named Antipas.

In Revelation 2:13, he says, I know that you live in the city where Satan has his throne, yet you have remained loyal to me. You refused to deny me. Even went Antipas, a faithful witness. My faithful witness was martyred among you there in Satan's city. Tradition is very

strong, and it says that Antipas was put to death inside a bronze bull.

People would be placed in these bulls and then a fire would be built beneath the bull. What a horrible way to die. And yet Antipas refused to worship Lord God Domitian and said, Jesus is Lord. And so they put him in a bull and they killed him. This kind of thing was happening to Christians who refused to worship the emperor Domitian.

Revelation was written to them in the late first century. Now, like all books of the Bible, Revelation has principles and things for us to learn. But it was written originally to a specific group of people living in a certain chaotic context. And the apostle John receives the revelation of Jesus. John was living in the city of Ephesus, and we were there the other day too.

He was living in the city of Ephesus, where Domitian had a 20 foot high statue. I know several of you have probably been to Ephesus. And as you walk down the long road and you have that library in front of you, off to the left, there's a place called Domitian Square. In that Square, in the first century, there was a 20 foot tall statue of Domitian. And people were rounded up and said, are you going to worship Lord God Domitian?

John said, no. And as a result, he was shipped off to the island of Patmos, which is a rocky Greek island in the Aegean Sea. And so John was there because of his faith. And this is what he says in Revelation 1:9, 11. He says, I, John, am your brother and your partner in suffering and in God's kingdom and in the patient endurance to which Jesus calls us.

I was exiled to the island of Patmos for preaching the word of God and for my testimony about Jesus. It was the Lord's day, which is Sunday, and I was worshiping in the Spirit. Suddenly I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet blast. It said, write in a book everything you see and send it to the seven churches in the cities of Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea. Well, as you would.

John turns around to see who is talking and he's struck by it all. It's Jesus. A very scary looking Jesus. It was visual sensory overload. And John, I think, faints.

He passes out. He says this in Revelation 1:17, 19. He says, I fell at his feet as if I were dead. But he laid his right hand on me and said, don't be afraid. I am the first and the last.

I am the living one. I died. But look, I am alive forever and ever. And I hold the keys of death and the grave. Write down what you've seen, both the things that are now happening and the things that will

happen.

So what follows is the revelation of Jesus. The scenes John is given. Why is he given? He's given these scenes to strengthen the church, to encourage the church, and to provide hope. Revelation is not a horror story.

It's not a scary movie. It's a story of hope. And it's also a warning about complacency and compromise. And we're going to talk about that next week when we look at the churches. But it's a book for people under pressure, people that are being shaken by all the stuff that's going on.

People who are dealing with confusion and questions. People like us, people like me, people like people like you. So after addressing and acknowledging the seven churches for their strengths, their weaknesses and their challenges, John looks and he sees a door. A door that's open. And then he hears Jesus say, come over here.

Come up here, John. I want to show you something. Can you imagine? I'm going to show you what's going to happen. Jesus wants John to see something.

He wants John to know something that we all want to know. So John looks through the door and suddenly he sees the throne room of God in all of its splendor and all of its majesty and glory. The colors, the sights, the sounds, thunder and lightning, a circular rainbow. Beings, creatures, all crying out in reverent worship. Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God, the Almighty, the One who always was, who is, and who is still to come.

You are worthy, O Lord our God, to receive glory and honor and power. For you created all things, and they exist because you created what you pleased. So do you. Catching this in the midst of this crazy persecution, in the midst of John's exile, in the midst of people being put to death for their faith, John sees what he needs to see. He sees what we need to see.

God is on the throne. He is in control. It's not the empire, it's not Domitian. They're not in control. It's God.

God. And his throne is not shakeable. It's an unshakeable kingdom with an unshakable king. And so this image, this thought, is where we start when we figure out revelation. It is the foundation for processing the madness of this world.

Heaven is not shaken by it. God is not panicked. God is on the throne, and all of heaven is oriented around him in worship. Now, as John continues to take this in, I think you should imagine revelation as like a play with various scenes. It kind of cycles around three times.

But John has heard what Jesus says to the churches. He's opened the door and seen the throne room of God. And as he is taking all that in, he looks and he sees in God's right hand a scroll written on both sides, which means it's just full of content. And most people believe, and I'm one of them, that this symbolizes the future God holds in his hand, the future. And John desperately wants to know what it says, and so do we.

And so John is looking at it, and he's longing for someone to open that scroll and reveal its contents. Is everything going to be okay? Will all be well when it's said and done?

But John watches, and there's no one worthy to open the scroll.

And he sits in his devastation and he weeps, and he weeps and he weeps. I think maybe for the same reason we sometimes weep, because things just don't make sense. And we want to know, is it going to be okay? Evil seems to win. Life feels out of control.

Is it going to be okay? So John sits there and he weeps and he weeps. And then all of a sudden, one of the heavenly elders says to John, don't weep. Don't weep. Look, the lion of the tribe of Judah has triumphed.

He is worthy to open the scroll. John looks, and he doesn't see a lion. Instead, he sees a lamb. A lamb that looks as if it has been slain.

John realizes he knows this is none other than Jesus. And this is the heart of revelation. This is where we start the victory of Jesus. It's not through political power, but through sacrificial love. And so Jesus is the one who holds the future in his hand.

He is worthy. He is on the throne. He is worshiped. And so worship breaks out toward Jesus. Worthy is the lamb who was slain to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise.

Here's the message. We do not have to fear the chaos. We don't have to be shaken like the early church, like our brothers and sisters in India, like brothers and sisters around the world, we cling to the hope of an unshakable kingdom, a victorious king. All shall be well. All shall be well.

All manner of things shall be well. All right, so here's the full disclosure at this point. Tim, would you come up and we'll talk a little bit about this. Does anybody know where Tim is? He's not here.

So I said, I'll just talk to myself a little bit. That's funny.

So anyway, over the next few weeks, we're going to deal with Revelation. Tim had a lot of questions. He was going to ask questions that you probably have. And so we'll deal with those as we go. I think that the thing I would say in absence of Tim today is when you deal with Revelation, you need to deal with it humbly and very carefully.

And don't make it a matter of fellowship with other people if they think something differently than you do. But I will say over and over again, what value would it be if it was just written for us? What value would it have been for John and those suffering in the first century under Domitian? It has to make sense for them too. I think there are still things to come, obviously in the future, but don't divorce Revelation from its original context and don't.

I think warning would be, don't sensationalize it to mean things that John never would have even known about. A lot of the content of Revelation, the language comes out of Ezekiel, Daniel and Old Testament prophets. Apocalyptic language, Jewish apocalyptic language was very well known in the first century. It's pretty foreign to us, but it's not something that was totally foreign to them. So anyway, next few weeks we're going to talk about Revelation.

I will point to a website. I don't know if we have that up there or not. The QR code. There it is. So if you take your phone and you open the camera app and you zoom in on that, you'll see a little yellow link.

And if you tap on that, it's going to take you to a webpage on the Sherwood Oaks site that's devoted to Revelation. So over the next few weeks, we're going to continue to populate that. Already on, there are. I know I put a 20 page document of notes and quotes. John Ray, who's one of the smartest guys I ever met, I've asked him to submit several things.

I think he submitted probably 30 pages of stuff. So there's all kinds of notes. There's also a link to this book which we're making available. I think if you buy it on Amazon It's 20 something dollars, but we're going to make them available for \$10 out in the lobby. The author spoke at Sherwood Oaks Bloomington this morning.

Revelation simplified. It's just a nice treatment. \$10 suggestion donate \$10 donation suggested out there. If you want to get it in a Kindle format, it's \$2.99. I think we have a link on the website.

All the sermons of this series, both Bloomington and Bedford will be on that website. So we're going to keep pointing to it and it should help you if you're serious and really want to dive in. Lots of material for you to work through. But again, open mind, humility, be careful as we enter into all this. I know I've taught Revelation many

times in different places and always come away not knowing for sure about some things, but never questioning the overall message that we are receiving an unshakeable kingdom and we have hope and we have victory in Jesus Christ.

As we think about communion and turn our attention toward that this morning, Revelation 12, where it pictures that battle in heaven, it's kind of like the ones who are already there. In Revelation 6 it talks about the souls of those who have been beheaded. So Domitian has literally beheaded some people. And Revelation 6 says they are in the presence of God underneath the altar. And so those people in Revelation 6 who have been beheaded say, how long, Lord, how long until you bring justice to this whole situation?

And the Lord says, wait a little longer, we're not done yet. And then you get to Revelation 12 and it talks about that battle in heaven. And those in heaven say, we overcame by the blood of the Lamb and the testimony of Jesus, the blood of the Lamb. And they are the ones saying, woe to you on earth, because you've got a lot of stuff to do deal with. But they also say, you will overcome by the blood of the Lamb.

So when we enter into a relationship with Jesus, it's His blood that cleanses us, takes away our sins, and allows us to have the hope of eternal life. We're given the Spirit of God. We have the hope of eternal life because of the resurrection of Jesus, that he is the resurrection of life. So as we take communion this morning, be mindful that we are communing with each other, but we're also communing with Jesus. And he overcame death.

And we will overcome death too. We may have to suffer persecution, we may have to suffer in all kinds of ways, but it's worth it in the end. And we will triumph because of the blood of Jesus. So let me pray and we'll take communion. Father, we thank you for this message that tells us that we are victorious in the end.

And I don't know how many times in Revelation it talks about the blood of Jesus, but it's a lot. And the emphasis is this is the means of victory. God, there are so many things that want to shake us up, create confusion, cause questions, tempt us with compromise, help us to stay focused on the message that Jesus is the way, he's the truth and the life. And it's through him that we enter into this place where there is no more death, no more crying, no more mourning or pain. All that's going to be passed away according to Revelation 21.

And so we long for that day. As we eat this bread and drink this cup, we proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. So help us to be strong, help us to be faithful, to not be afraid. We are heartbroken a lot because of what goes on in our lives and all around us. But help us not to be afraid.

We thank you in Jesus name. Amen.

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