

Hey, good morning. Good to see you today.

Since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe.

So when the world around us is shaking and quaking like it is right now with chaos and confusion, how do we remain unshakable? How can we have and maintain peace and joy and confidence when there are so many things that challenges peace, joy, and confidence? I think these challenges are sourced in the depths of hell. As I talked about last week, evil in all of its various forms, it's all around us and. And evil has a goal, and that is it wants to shake us to the point that we have faithless fear.

That's what evil wants. And I don't know about you, but I feel it. I feel challenged on a regular basis. And so I literally have to stop and take thoughts captive. And I have two choices.

One choice is, am I going to let this situation and the circumstances around it lead me to fear and anxiety, which, let me say gently, is really ultimately not trusting God? That's one option, is to go to fear and anxiety. The second choice I can make is, am I going to trust God with all the confusion, all the. All of the chaos, all of the questions, trusting him with things that we don't understand and things that don't make sense? That's the essence of faith.

It really is. And so trusting God leads to peace, it leads to joy, it leads to confidence. Confidence that we are God's beloved children and that everything's going to be okay. Now we may, and we will have to endure difficulties on our path to paradise, but the promise of no more death, the promise of no more mourning or crying or pain sustains. That's what keeps us going.

That's what keeps us in the right frame of mind. This is the message of revelation. This is it. This is a message of revelation. It's a message of absolute hope, which leads to practical peace, joy and confidence, even in the midst of painful persecution.

Persecution of Christians was very real in the first century, and it still takes place all around the world. We don't see it as much, but we know about it. People are dying for their faith. Last week we talked about the drama Revelation four and five. We just kind of sang about it, which I love that we talked about the scroll in the right hand of God, and the scroll is sealed with seven seals, meaning it's perfectly sealed and it's written on both sides.

And it's the future. The future is in the hand of God. And John Desperately wants to know what it is as he's peeking in this door. And he is devastated because no one is worthy to open that scroll and reveal the future. And in his devastation, he's comforted by a

heavenly elder and said, don't weep, because someone has been found who is worthy to open the scroll.

And on to the stage comes a lamb, a lamb who has been slain. And so we know it's Jesus. He is worthy. He is able to open the scroll. And the symbolism is so clear.

The future is in the nail scarred hands of Jesus. Jesus, who died, but came back, was resurrected, overcame death. And so then the drama continues. In chapter five, chapter six, Jesus the lamb starts popping the seals on the scroll, getting ready to reveal the future. And as he pops the seals, dramatic things start happening.

And so the first four seals are what reveal what the famous four horsemen of the Apocalypse, right? So we pop a seal, and here comes a horse. And another one, Another, another one. And so these horses represent conquest. They represent war.

They represent for famine and death, judgment of God upon the earth. But I tell you what, I love the fifth seal. I find the fifth seal so intriguing and so compelling. Revelation 6, 9, 11. When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God and the testimony they had maintained.

They called out in a loud voice, how long, sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood. Then each of them was given a white robe and they were told to wait, wait a little longer, until the full number of their fellow servants, their brothers and sisters, were killed just as they had been. So what do you say? What do you say to people who are being persecuted? What do you say to people who are trying, just trying to live their lives and trying to live good lives, live their faith out in Jesus Christ.

But because of their faith, because of their desire to please the Lord, they're facing death. What do you say to people like that? What do you say to a man or woman who is being detained by a big old Roman soldier who is gruffly asking, he's not really asking, he's making a statement. He's holding you there and he's saying, do you pledge allegiance to our Lord God, Domitian? Do you deny Jesus Christ?

What do you say to that soldier, knowing full well your answer is life or death? If you don't acknowledge Lord God, Domitian, you don't deny Christ, then you're going to die in front of your family, perhaps what do you do? Well, this is what's happening in Revelation. And you know what Jesus says about it? He says, don't be afraid of what you're about to suffer.

I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and

you will suffer persecution for 10 days. Number 10 just means extensive. You're going to suffer, be in prison for a long time. But here's what he says that's. That's relevant to what I'm saying today.

He says, be faithful even to the point of death, and I will give you life as the victor's crown.

This is kind of a heavy sermon today, but did you catch what Jesus is saying? He's saying, die if you have to. It will be okay. And to use the language of Revelation 21:4, I think Jesus saying, die if you have to. But know this, I will wipe that last tear from your eye, and then there'll be no more.

No more death, mourning, crying, or pain. All that stuff's going to be done away with. But he says, die if you have to. He says this because some of the followers, some of his followers are compromising their faith. They.

They were not standing strong. They were not being faithful to the point of death. And this is revealed as the seven letters are dictated by Jesus to the seven churches found in Revelation 2 and 3. Each of those churches is represented by a lamp stand. A lamp stand holds lamps that shine light.

And in Scripture, light is often symbolic of truth, righteousness, and the presence of God. And. And he's saying, listen, as a church, as my church, you have the responsibility to be my body, to continue and carry on the ministry that I started. And I need you to shine light in a dark world. I need you to show my love.

And you have a mission, and that is to stay strong and to stay faithful and to show the way of salvation and to show that the way to life is really through death. Death to your own desires and death to your own way of living, and in some cases, literal death. Jesus makes it clear, and this is encouraging. He walks among us. He's here today.

Jesus walks among his churches. And as he begins dictating his letter to the church in Ephesus, he says this in Revelation 2. 1. These are the words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand and walks among the seven golden lampstands. So Jesus is present.

He knows us. He knows his people. And as he walks among these seven churches, he sees strengths and he sees weaknesses. And as a result of what he sees, he presents some challenges, some loving challenges. And he speaks words of encouragement.

But can we say, and we're not really good about doing this sometimes, but he also speaks words of warning, words of warning to the church. And so let's, let's talk about those first. Let's get that, that part out. It seems that there are two main sources of problems for these

churches in Revelation. Two things that Jesus, that causes Jesus to warn them.

The two biggest threats are persecution from the empire, things going on on the outside that lead to the second thing, and that is compromise from within. That is spiritual and moral corruption. And those two are related. Feeling pressure from the outside. Just don't, don't admit that you're really following Christ and maybe you'll sneak by.

I just love early church history, so you get just a little dose of that. But for 20 or 30 years after the church was established, the perception in the Roman Empire was that Christianity was just a branch of Judaism and Judaism was a legal religion in the empire because I think of compromise. And so they didn't stand out. But around 60 A.D. the Roman Empire begins to see things and things start to change.

It was clear that Christianity was different than Judaism. And so when Nero wants to expand and do some things, he starts a fire to clean out some things. And people don't like it. So he, he blames the fire on Christians. And, and from that moment, the followers of Christ were seen as kind of weirdos, wackos and people not to be trusted.

They were seen as the distinct group of people. And it became clear that the Christians would not worship the emperor. They would not go along with the imperial cult of saying that the emperor was Lord God. The Roman Empire started picking on them. And it was during Domitian's reign from 81 to 96, that things really ramped up because he was an egomaniac that demanded people call him Lord God.

And it sees into that situation. That revelation is written and it's written to provide hope, encouragement, but it's packaged with a challenge from Jesus. The Christians were facing persecution and pressure from the empire in various ways, including economic pressure. Unless they took the Mark of the Beast, unless they had 666 and all those things they could not buy or sell. Now, I'm not going to go into that, but we have this website, our church website, Unshakable or search Revelation.

You're going to find all kinds of essays and documents about the Mark of the beast 666. But I will just say for today, they this is related to the worship of the emperor. Unless you worship the emperor, you couldn't get a card or whatever that would allow you to participate in the economy, and so you were being kicked out. Another option was exile, and that's to John, John on the island of Patmos. You know, for your faith, you just get shipped off to a desolate, rocky island.

But the big thing that comes up is death. Death. People were being put to death because they refused to worship the emperor Domitian. And we know about antipas and Revelation 2:13. We talked about him last week

being roasted in a bull, basically.

And there are numerous references to those who are martyred or will be martyred. And so the pressure from the outside, from the empire, was a contributor to the compromise on the inside. And sadly, many of the seven churches had significant spiritual problems that threatened their relationship with Jesus. Some were compromising with the culture around them. They were embracing various forms of idolatry so that they could get the card to trade in the culture and in the marketplace.

Some were involved in sexual immorality, which has always been a problem, but some were doing it in a cultic way. Some had become very apathetic and lethargic. It's like, yeah, well, what's it matter? Let's just go along to get along. The Ephesians had lost their zeal and their passion for following Christ.

And Jesus says, you're in grave danger. You are in serious trouble. The end of the road of compromise is deadly. Jesus does not want this. He didn't want it then, he doesn't want it now.

He stands among his churches to lovingly. To lovingly warn them and to plead with them and. And to encourage them. He says, I want you to change. I want you to come back.

I want you to be strong. I want you to be faithful. Faithful without compromise. I'll help you. I have grace even if you have to die.

This is what I want you to do. I want you to follow me. It's interesting that as Jesus reveals the future of the Roman Empire, which he calls Babylon, he calls it Babylon because Babylon is iconic for Jews in the idea of Babylonian exile. So Babylon stands for any empire that's oppressive and evil against God's people. And so as he talks about Babylon, he does not sugarcoat anything.

He says, listen, the empire will end. The empire will end. It looked like it wouldn't in the first century, but the Roman Empire will end. You may have to die for your faith before it does, but it's okay. That's okay.

Don't compromise. And as he reveals his things. He says, death for your faith, which allows you to overcome Satan, is the ultimate victory. Revelation 12:11. He says, they have defeated him by the blood of the Lamb, by their testimony, and they did not love their lives so much that they were afraid to die.

They're in the presence of God. Okay, so I know this is really, really heavy.

And I text him last night, that's really heavy. So he said, well, I

got a whole bunch of jokes about martyrdom and death. I said, okay, good.

But I want to say this reveals to me how seriously God uses church. It's not optional. It's a key to his plan of changing the world. And the church is to call, to shine like a light in the darkness, to be faithful witnesses, to resist the temptation to compromise. Because of our convictions, we're not going to compromise and conform to the culture.

It's a great responsibility. And we don't do it alone. And we don't do it without grace, and we don't do without understanding, because no one's perfect. We don't always get it right. We all make mistakes.

We all compromise at times. But I think what Jesus is looking for is, what's your desire? Do you really want to follow me? Do you really want to be my people? I just want you to understand what an elevated position you're in as my church, as my people.

I love you dearly. Nothing can save separate you from that. I just want you to follow me. And the road sometimes will be very, very difficult. What a privilege it is to be a part of his plan.

And what a comfort it is to know that he's present and sustains us. I'm going to ask Tim to come on up. Where'd you go, Tim? Is he in the room? There he is.

I was thinking about this, and I worked on this a lot, and it's like, this is just too much, too heavy. But then I thought, it really is what it says, and I don't want to shirk any responsibility. But I thought about a line that I learned many, many years ago, and that is, you're not ready to live until you're ready to die. And I think Jesus is saying, once you get to that point, which side are you going to be on? Hang on.

When you get to the point that you can face death and you're okay with that, then you're really ready to live. Because what. What is there that would create fear? I don't think there's anything. How are you doing?

I'm doing well, sir. How are you Good to see me. I need my notes. Oh, you do? Yeah.

So what do you, what do you think right now? Got any good jokes on martyr? I don't really. That was, that was a joke. I know it was.

It was funny, though, this idea, you know, when we think about persecution, martyrdom. I mean, I grew up in a church that when they preach on this, I mean, they would literally say what happened if a Russian. So it was always the Russians. For some reason, the Russians

came in and held a gun to your head. Would you denounce Christianity?

Would you deny Christ? Like, oh, hope that doesn't happen. But I always look to the side door just to make sure it wasn't happening. Then you got under your desk, got on your desk for the nuclear bomb. Yeah.

But even today, you know, there's this, There's. There's this reality that we live in this tension of being aware that persecution is happening around the world, that people are losing their lives because of their faith. I mean, I think of like India, people are going to prison. In some countries, Christians are being killed because they are of a Christian tribe and not a. Another tribe.

Brad told me last week. I was talking to Brad. Yeah. Just a few days ago, and he said that in Central India Christian Mission, about the hospital that we talked about last week, he said some of the pastors are being literally put to death for their faith. Yeah.

People, they know. And again, that's India. And you think, okay, well, that's not even a Christian country. So what? You know, they should, I guess they should just expect that if they're going to serve in India, which is not the correct assessment at all, but still, it's far enough away that you can almost distance yourself from that reality.

But then I've got friends in England who, if you pray in the wrong place at the wrong time, you could be arrested as well for praying in public here. You know, we're all aware of lawsuits that have come against Christians, so. So while in the west we don't experience martyrdom per se, persecution is. I don't want to under underplay the reality that Christians should expect persecution if we're, if we're holding to convictions that are biblical. So how would you process what we've talked about today?

How does that, how does that make any difference in your life? Well, I think it, it means that if I'm going to be. If I'm going to be consistent in following Jesus honestly and truly, then I cannot be surprised when I, when I, when the culture pushes back at me in some way, shape or form. I can't be surprised by that. I can't hold back because of that.

There is a real tendency. I think you talked about Babylon, and that's a. That's a big picture. You know, the. This whole culture that we live in, whatever it is.

For. For John, it was the Roman Empire. For us, it's. I mean, we live in a world that politically, economically, socially, there are so many things that Christians of serious intent should have concerns about.

That's our Babylon that we live in now. God told the Israelites, hey,

I'm going to send you to Babylon. This is way back in the Old Testament. If you need to know about that, read Nehemiah and Ezra and some of those guys. This is.

This is the place I'm going to send you into, this place of exile, Babylon. I want you to build homes there. I want you to build lives there, marry, grow gardens, have a great life there. But never forget that you're in Babylon. You're not in the place I've created for you.

So that's Jeremiah 29, which is often taken out of context. I have plans for you. But his plans were, you're going to be in exile, but while you're in exile, settle in, in a sense, but don't lose sight of where you came from and where you're going back. And that's not. Yeah.

How do we live that tension out today, then? Well, how did Daniel live out that tension? How did Mordecai and Esther live out that? How Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. They engaged with the culture.

They absolutely got in there and messed around with it. They didn't. They didn't step out, divorce themselves from it. They didn't. They didn't remove themselves.

But they knew that they're going to engage in the culture. They're going to come against the cultural king, whatever. Whatever that is. And if they do, they take the consequences for being faithful to God's call to them as a people. So while they're engaging it, they're not compromising.

No, no, no, no. Because Daniel gets in trouble, right? Absolutely. We've got a. We've got the story of the lion's den.

We've got the story of the fiery furnace. We've got Mordecai and Esther both coming within inches of losing their own lives because of. Because of being faithful to what God told them to do. So I think we have to. We have to recognize it.

There's no good joke here. I'm sorry, I can't find a funny story in. In this reality, the truth is sometimes the word of God's not always fun. It's not always fun, but it's a serious message that I believe unless we grasp this somehow, we are positioning ourselves to not really have the deepest sense of peace and joy. And.

And we'll be tempted to just go along. Well, you've got the seven. The churches that. I mean, this is the tension all those seven churches were in. Yeah.

How do we. How do we be faithful without compromising who God's called us to be? So of those seven churches, which one. I know we probably all haven't read them today, but are there any of the seven churches that really stand out to you and how. How would you describe them and

why?

So this is a plus and minus for me. So you think about the church in Ephesus, and God said, your works are great. You're doing really good stuff. And I think about Sherwood Oaks and our mission partners around the world. Wonderful investments globally around the world that we are serving.

But. But God says, yet you. You don't really know how to love. And this is not an indictment on Sherwood Oaks. But I'm saying as a church, sometimes we can be so good at helping those far, far away, and we don't really care about the people that are right in front of us.

Because you've lost your first love. You've lost your first love. You don't love Jesus and you don't love each other, which is how we express. Express our love for Jesus the way we need to do. We can send money, we're good at writing checks, but we're not that great at living in.

In love with each other. So I think that Ephesus, Laodicea is the other one, though. That's the one that, that, you know, they had all the money. They. They were.

They had all the stuff that. And that's the one Jesus says, because you're not hot or cold, your lukewarm will spit you out. Now, sometimes I think people misunderstand that and say, well, you're not supposed to be so extreme and on fire for the Lord, or you're not supposed to be totally cold. But that's not what he's saying. I think a few years ago I went and visited seven churches of Asia Minor with a Lily Grant.

And there's a place not far from Laodicea that's famous for its hot springs and mineral water. Beautiful. And it's very therapeutic. And then in Colossae, there's this cold, rushing water And I think Jesus is saying, hey, be of value. There's nothing worse than when you're needing a hot something and it's just lukewarm or when you need a cold drink and it's tepid.

So here's my. Here's my funny. No, you got a joke, I got a funny. So the, the Lions Club breakfast. The pancake breakfast, great thing.

The only drawback to the Lions Club breakfast is the coffee is neither hot nor cold. It is always that tepid. And you don't speak, spew it out of your mouth, you drink it politely. But it's like, now I just want to go to Starbucks and get a real cup of coffee. I don't even like Starbucks.

But. So we got a couple more minutes, three minutes maybe. How do you. You. Tim wrote this question himself.

Where do you personally feel tempted to compromise with your faith right now? Okay, so this goes back. I'm not trying to put. No, no. But this.

But I'm glad you asked that. I did put it down because I thought this is a. This is one that, in the interest of full transparency, here's the place I live.

I am very comfortable in my Babylon. I've created sort of a great life in Babylon. And I don't like to get pushback. I am a go along to get along kind of guy as much as possible. And so I live with three teenagers who are the products of how Babylon can fall apart and get dysfunctional.

And living in that space where I want to love them really, really well. I live in. I have to recognize their reality. And there's a temptation always to pull back on. On my own biblical, like, here's where I stand and here's where I will not move from this spot.

So that is probably the, the compromise is the big deal for me. Persecution is out there. I know, but I don't experience persecution. What I experience is the temptation to compromise with what I know to be true. And here I will stand and will not move.

It's easier. It's easier to come. Well, it is. And there's. And it's not just easier, but there's also like, how do we love people in Babylon and not.

And not dismiss them, not reject them, not even. Not. Not offend them. But offensive is like a buzzy and fuzzy word. But how do we live with them and also step in incarnate into their reality and hold to our own at the same time?

And that can be. I mean, that you have to be led by the spirit. And there's many times where I'm like, I need a little more direct intervention by the Spirit to give me wisdom on how to do this. And to me, you made me think about Jesus and the criticism of him. He eats with sinners and hangs out with the wrong kind of people.

Because some. Some would say, well, you're not supposed to compromise, so you shouldn't hang around with those people. Yeah, and Jesus hung around with those people, but he didn't. I see memes that are so wrong occasionally. And, you know, Jesus accepted everybody.

Well, he. He hung out with everybody, but he wasn't accepting of their behavior. He was there to try, help them to understand there's a better way to live. Like the woman caught in the very act of adultery. Go now.

Leave your life of sin. I don't condemn you. But anyway, listen, I want you to lead us into communion, but as you do so, you might talk a little bit about how we have hope today, how the church gives us hope, our church, specifically, some of the good things. And I don't know, that ready to live, ready to die thing is on my mind too, but how are you going to work it out? Because I.

I know you will. So I'm gonna. I'm gonna step off. I appreciate that confidence. Where does come from?

Back in the. Back there. I'll take yours.

I don't know. I don't know if you all live in this sort of. This. This tension as well. Like, how do I live in the culture and yet live apart and outside the culture?

How do I sort of manage the different people and their stories and love them in the middle of that stuff? How not to condemn them and speak condemnation of lies, speak life into their lives? And how do I invite them out of that Babylon culture, that Babylon mindset, into what Jesus calls the kingdom mindset where he says, you know, anytime you're walking in a direction towards God, you're getting closer and closer to the kingdom. And anyone can be. Can come into that if they.

If they choose to do so through Jesus. That's how we do that. The communion time that we're going to have today, we always use it to point to the sacrifice of Jesus. And it's because of the cross that we are invited to become part of his kingdom, become part of his family, uses different metaphors to describe this new place of relationship with Jesus. That is.

That is personal and close and transformative in our lives. But it's also, as we take the bread and the cup, it's an acknowledgement that now we're in it, we've crossed that borderline from Babylon into the kingdom and we are now identifying with who Jesus is and what Jesus wants. The Babylonian culture, the Roman culture, the American culture, all of that system is of secondary importance. And the first and primary importance is what Jesus wants. And so it's a sense of us putting our hand over our heart and pledging allegiance.

I pledge allegiance. We, we've got a flag over here. Many of us grew up in schools where we pledged allegiance. But communion is a moment where we say, I pledge allegiance to something greater even than the Roman eagle or the American flag. We pledge allegiance to Jesus and we pledge allegiance to the kingdom that is not of this world, but the kingdom of heaven.

Your will be done here as it is there. And that's the place and point of allegiance that we make. So as we take the bread and the cup this morning, this is in a sense our pledge of allegiance. So I want you,

if you're taking that with us this morning, if you, if you are recognizing yourself as a follower and a disciple of Jesus, we invite you to participate. Participate with us.

No matter where you've come from, other churches, whatever. If you say, I'm a follower of Jesus and I want to follow Jesus, we invite you to take this with us. But it is a, it is an allegiance meal here. We're raising a cup, we're taking some bread, and we're saying we belong to you first and foremost while we live in Babylon, we are not of Babylon. Amen.

Heavenly Father, we thank you this morning for this reminder. Yes, in this world we will suffer trials. In this world, we can expect to experience tribulations. In this world, the systems are aligned against the kingdoms of Heaven. My kingdom that I've been placed in, the kingdom that others have been placed in the world system is going to pressure us, try to pressure us to deny and reject the kingdom of heaven for the temporary temptations and pleasures of the world.

So Lord, we pray one that you would give us strength and endurance to withstand that pressure and instead set our resolve, set our mind to follow you. No matter. No matter. As we take the bread, as we take the cup this morning we say, lord, we belong to you. Thank you for loving us and inviting us in to become citizens of this eternal kingdom that has no end.

And in it we give thanks and praise to Jesus, our Savior, our Lord and our soon coming King. Amen.

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