

Good morning and Happy Mother's Day. I have a mother and married to one, and we have produced through birth or marriage, four others. So that's great. Happy Mother's Day.

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

Have you heard of the Stockdale Paradox? Jim Collins, in his best selling book, Good to Great, talks of meeting Admiral James Stockdale. Stockdale was the highest ranking US military officer in the infamous Hanoi Hilton, a POW camp during the Vietnam War. Stockdale was repeatedly tortured, had no rights, and was really unsure about his future. Would he live?

Would he die? He didn't know. He survived and was released in 1973 after seven and a half years in that concentration camp.

Collins was asked by Stockdale how he survived and Stockdale said, never lost faith in the end of the story.

After a long pause, Collins said, well, who didn't make it out? And immediately Stockdale replied, oh, that's easy. The optimists. The optimists did not survive. Collins was confused.

But optimists, I don't understand.

Stockdale said, the optimists, they're the ones who said, we're going to be out by Christmas, and then Christmas would come and Christmas would go, and then they'd say, we're going to be out by Easter, and Easter would come and Easter would go, well, we'll be out by Thanksgiving, and then it would be Christmas again. He said they died of a broken heart.

Stockdale, after a long pause, added, this is a very important lesson. You must never confuse faith that you will prevail in the end, which you can never afford to lose. Don't confuse it with the discipline to confront the most brutal facts of your current reality, whatever they might be.

Face the brutal facts of your reality while never losing faith that you will prevail in the end. There's a quote from Napoleon that I really like that's similar. He says that the role of leadership is to define reality and provide hope. This is what revelation is, and we're in the midst of a Revelation series. Sorry, Moms, if you're here out of context, but we're talking about revelation.

So Revelation faces and defines the brutal reality of evil persecution that's going on in the first century. And it gives hope, confident expectation of a glorious future in the presence of God. The story, as painful as it is in the present, it's going to end well. Do not lose

faith in the end of the story. As you deal with reality, you say, okay, well, how do you do that?

That's a good question. I think it's wrapped up in understanding what reality is. It's kind of a philosophical question, I guess. What is real? What is true?

A few years ago, I read a book that really stuck with me. It was John Mark Comer's *Live no Lies* and has lots and lots of stuff in it, really helped me. But one of the things was his concept of reality. He says something so simple, but deeply profound. Here's what he says.

Reality is truth, and truth is reality. Truth is what is real.

Lies are not real. Lies are distortion of the truth. And he would go on to say, truth is what God says. Truth is what God is. You remember what Jesus said in John 14, I am the truth.

And so here's the truth. God is on his throne, and he is in control of this world. And our task, my task, your task, our responsibility, is to believe what he says, even when it appears. Maybe that's not right.

A lot of times we're tempted to embrace fear. I like this acronym. You may have seen it. Fear is false evidence appearing real. It's a lie.

It's a lie. So fear is based on a lie lots of times. And we're not to embrace fear. We're to walk by faith, to live by faith. And the enemy?

We have an enemy that wants to shake us to where we end up living in faithless fear. He doesn't want us to believe. God wants us to trust him as he reveals what is truly real. So revelation, one way to think about it is it defines reality. It's brutal, but there's an aspect of it that's beautiful.

And as revelation defines reality, as brutal as it might be in some areas, it also provides hope in several different ways. But the dominant way, and I had not realized this until recently, the dominant way that Revelation provides hope centers around the throne of God, which is our focus this morning. The throne of God appears about 40 times in Revelation. And the idea, and we just sang about it, the idea is that God and the Lamb who was slain are on the throne, and they're in control. Not the empire, not the emperor, not the beast, not the dragon.

God alone is in control. A few weeks ago, we looked at Revelation 4 and 5, and it's very interesting. John is on the island of Patmos, and he receives this stunning revelation. And as he comes to, he is invited by Jesus to look through a door into heaven.

And what he sees is amazing. And this is after Jesus has dictated the

seven letters to the seven churches. And in Those letters. Jesus defines reality. Some of it's brutal.

He defines reality for them. He says, this is where you are. Here are your strengths, here are your weaknesses, and here's what needs to change. And while he's doing all that, he's providing hope. So he's defining reality and providing hope.

And then John is invited to see something that's very important for the churches to hear. The story can't end well. And so that hope filled, hopeful story begins and is rooted in the reality of God's rule. He's on the throne and he's joined by the Lamb who was slain, Jesus. Jesus wants John to know this.

He wants me to know this. He wants you to know this. So in chapter four, as John looks through that door, he suddenly sees the throne room of God in all of its splendor and majesty. As we sang, he sees colors, he sees sights, he hears sounds. It's just overwhelming thunder and lightning, a circular rainbow, all these beings and creatures crying out, holy, holy, holy.

It's an echo and a reflection of Ezekiel 1 where Ezekiel and his people needed to hear that God was on the throne when they're in Babylon, carried off into exile. The same story. Rome is now Babylon and they need to see God is still on the throne. He's on the throne. In Revelation 5, there's a stunning drama that we talked about a couple weeks ago, but it ends with the future being held by the Lamb who was slain is Jesus.

The future is in the nails guard hand of Jesus, who is also present in the throne room. And so chapter five concludes with this beautiful description by John. Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea and all that is in them, saying to him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise, honor and glory and power forever and ever. You know, as the Lamb talked about this last week, as the Lamb starts revealing the future by breaking the seals on the scroll, there are scary scenes of judgment in the form of conquest, war, famine and death. It's a brutal reality that's being revealed.

It's a brutal reality that John's recipients are living in. And then it's interesting to me, after six of the seven seals are broken, each revealing a scene of reality, there's a question posed by someone on earth who's experiencing this judgment. And they say, who can stand? Who can stand? Who can withstand what's happening here?

Who can withstand the wrath and the judgment of God and the Lamb? Revelation 7 provides the answer as there's a pause between the sixth and seventh seal. This pause is designed to encourage the church, to encourage us to provide hope in the midst of a brutal reality. As

judgment unfolds, as the conflict between good and Evil continues, Revelation 7 highlights the throne of God. The throne of God as the place of protection, of identity and worship.

Chapter 7 begins with a directive to pause judgment. Hold off. There's judgment ready to happen. And they're told to wait, to pause. Why?

Because God wants to protect his people. He wants them to know, hey, you are protected. And so God is going to protect his people. 144,000 people are signed, sealed and delivered. That's not a literal number.

It's 12, which is the number of religion. 12 apostles, 12 tribes, 12 gates. It's 12 times 12 times a thousand, which is the number of completeness. So he's saying, listen, if you are a part of the church, if you are part of my people, then you are signed, sealed and delivered. You're going to be fine.

Don't worry. So chapter seven shows us the 144,000 being sealed and. And of course, the new Israel is the church. And so it's just saying, you're going to be okay. You're going to be okay, those of you who are on earth.

But then, as John looks, he sees this multitude in heaven. A great multitude, he says. Nobody can count them. There are people from every nation, every tribe, every language, all kinds of people. What are they doing?

They are standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They are wearing white robes and they're waving palm branches. It's a sign of purity and security and victory. There they are. These are the people who have been persecuted literally to death.

They stand before the Lamb and the throne and they cry out, salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne and to the Lamb. Then all of heaven joins in in this dramatic worship. Amen. Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honor and power and strength be to our God forever and ever. Amen.

And then, for the sake of those on the earth experiencing a brutal reality, one of the heavenly elders asks, well, who are these people, these in white robes, who are they and where did they come from? And the answer is designed to be encouraging for those struggling and facing death. The ones before the throne, those in the presence of God and the Lamb, are those who experienced great trials and tribulation sourced in Satan. They died as a result of their faith, but they arrive and thrive because of the blood of the Lamb. Revelation 7:15 through 17.

Therefore, they are before the throne of God and serve him day and night in his temple. And he who sits on the throne will shelter them

with his presence. Never again will they hunger. Never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat down on them, nor any scorching heat.

For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd. He will lead them to springs of living water, and God will wipe every tear from their eyes. Man, it's pretty good stuff. So what do we do with it? I'm going to have Tim come here in a second.

But what are we supposed to do? I think the key is to stay focused on the throne.

When we do, you know what? We need not fear. We don't need to fear anything. Anything, Nothing. Because centering our lives in the throne of God provides us with the absolute and ultimate protection.

Even if we die, and all of us will, at some point, even if we die for our faith, we will be okay. Which is really better. By far. God will wipe that last tear from our eyes. And then there'll be no more death, mourning, crying, or pain.

Centering our lives in the throne of God reminds us of who we are. We are God's beloved children. He's going to take care of us. We are signed, sealed, and delivered now and forever. Centering our lives in the throne of God causes us to worship as we encounter him, as we see him.

And. And the Lamb, it demands my soul, my life, my all. As the song says, standing before the throne in the midst of a brutal reality. And you may be in the midst of a brutal reality right now, but standing before the throne in the midst of a brutal reality reminds us of how our story ends. It ends with us fully in the presence of God, with our hope fulfilled.

We won't need any hope any longer, because we will be there. Revelation 22, just about the end of the book says this. Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb. Down the middle of the great street, the city, on each side of the river stood the Tree of Life. So we're back in Genesis 1, where everything was great.

Access to the tree of life again, bearing 12 crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him, and they will see his face and his name will be on their foreheads. There will be no more night.

They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun. For the Lord God will give them light, and they will reign forever and ever. Amen. All right, Tim, are you available? I am available.

All right.

You doing all right today? I'm good. I appreciate you taking the lead on this series because you've done an excellent job. Well, you asked me to, and I always want to please you. Well, I appreciate that.

I wish others had that same attitude. Whoa. I should have got this out sooner. Are we. Are we doing it this way or you want to be buddies?

It's a little too close for me. I've still got some chest and cough stuff, so probably Tim and I roomed together in Israel, and he will not let that go. By the way, it wasn't as bad as he makes it sound. We both survived it. We did.

But the. The in Israel, the two single beds were butted up against each other and. Listen, what happens in Israel stays in Israel. Okay? Let's just let it.

Leave it there. All right. Hey, so thank you for allowing me to. To do this. I love Revelation.

I've spent. I've taught it numerous times and have just really enjoyed it. So I'm going to ask you some questions that you asked me to ask you.

It's easier this way. It sort of destroyed the moment of spontaneity. No, I think it just made it. It just made it real. It's a brutal reality, Tim.

It's a brutal reality. So as you have. You know, I've really thought about the throne of God like that before. So as you have that image, how does it challenge the fear based aspect of Revelation that many people grew up with? Oh, everything's good.

How does that. So this is why I wanted to ask the question. Because if you're like me, you did grow up in this place. When the preacher spoke on the book of Revelation, it was about the mark of the beast. Anyone say, yeah, it was about the four horsemen of the Apocalypse, pestilence, destruction.

It was about the. The dragon, whatever that was. It was about all these weird things. Sorry about that. And inevitably, there'd be an altar call at the end of the service, and people flocked to it because you got the feeling that the Revelation was really designed to scare you into heaven.

Am I the only one that felt that as a child, or is this someone else? Want to nod your head and go, yeah, I get. I get what you're saying, so. But when you read Revelation on your own, and especially when you

have someone who's working through it with you, what you realize is that the story is not about the beast. The story is not about dragons.

The story is not about this weird Mark. The story is about Jesus and he is the main character of this story. And what, what, what I remind myself all the time is that the Jesus of Revelation is the same Jesus of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. The same character of Christ that we see demonstrated there in the Gospels where he. Mercy, compassion, grace, yes, judgment, truth, all of those things are present.

But he doesn't become a different, a different Jesus. And more importantly, the God of Revelation who is, who is pouring out proper judgment on the earth is the same father who, who Jesus imaged in the Gospels, the same character Christ. So, so, so that takes it away from, it takes the focus away from all the interesting but ultimately small details and refocuses us on the Messiah soon coming king, who is our Messiah and our soon coming King, our father, our brother, who loves us and is going to, as you said, it's going to be, it's going to be good. It's going to be fine. You know, I was thinking about Isaiah 6 where King Uzziah dies, which meant there was a huge disruption.

Everybody's afraid what's going to happen next. So Isaiah has this image of God on the throne. Isaiah 6 and then Ezekiel 1, they're in Babylonian captivity. Image of God on the throne. Rome is called Babylon in Revelation.

So what do we have? We have this image of God on the throne. And so it just keeps going. Yeah. So I think it's very important.

So how do we stay rooted in God's authority when life feels out of control? So this goes back to this. Like you think about the Babylonians, you think about Daniel, you think about these seasons where people's lives really were chaotic, where it did not, it was not going to according to plan. And then you go to, I think it's later in Revelation maybe 17, where Jesus makes this pronouncement to all the people who are listening in and experiencing John's vision. And Jesus says, I am the Alpha.

And anyone know the Alpha and Omega now? Anyone know what that means? Alpha is beginning, omega is the end. So when you see the story, God selling through creation. Jesus was the Word at the beginning.

We sing a song like that, but he was, John says he was the beginning. He's the Word at the beginning. And Jesus says, I am also the final word, so I will be the Word at the end. And so everything, there's a lot in between the beginning and ultimately the end. We got new popes we got presidents, we got the price of eggs, we got persecutions all over the place.

So there's a lot between the beginning and the end. But at the end of

the day, Jesus says, oh, nothing's going to shake me from my throne and my power and my control, my sovereignty. I'm. I'm sovereign over all the nations. So whatever happens, I'm in charge.

I love one of the songs in Revelation 4, and we sang it today, too, is I am the God who was, who is and will be. So he is the same. God is in control. And so a lot of the stuff, I think, going back to the fear base, people think just want to push Revelation out so far, and it's a mistake. It's.

It's just a. It's a. It's the picture of good versus evil that's always been going on. Yes, There are some things yet to come, but it's. It's not.

It's not a big, scary thing for the future. We're living a lot of it right now. Yeah. Well. Yes.

Yeah. So how does worship, seeing the throne, real, everyday worship, help us endure the trials that we face, like the high price of eggs? I mean, what a persecution. Yes. Life is really hard for Christians right now when they go to grocery store.

So for me, worship is all about. It's singing on Sunday morning. Of course, that's part of this. But the everyday worship is really just recognizing the authority and sovereignty of God over our lives, the good and the bad days. But.

But this picture that I was talking about earlier is this idea of, we've had a lot of rain here recently, and I never have an umbrella when I need an umbrella. But an umbrella does an amazing thing. The rain can be pouring down, but a good umbrella will keep you from getting absolutely drenched. Now your shoes may get a little wet. You may step into some mud.

Yes, life happens. Those are the facts. That's the truth. Brutal. That is the brutal truth.

Our feet may get a little muddy and our shoes may get. And socks may get a little soaked, but we are not destroyed because of that, because we live under this umbrella. Someone described it one time to me as Tim, you seem to live under the umbrella of God's blessing. And I'm like, yes, but we all do who name Jesus as our Savior. We live under this umbrella of God's grace.

Grace and protection. And so whatever happens, in one sense, our feet may get a little muddy. We may experience it to some level. The Bible calls it tribulations. Yes.

Some trials, some stuff that we got to go through that is not fun. But it's just reality. Price of eggs is small compared to what other

people are experiencing. But none of that destroys us. None of it robs us of our faith.

None of it takes Jesus away or rips us from his grasp. No, we live under the umbrella of God's grace and protection. We. We're. We are his.

We belong to him. And because of that, we. That's, to me, is worship. Living that way. Yeah, I heard that.

It's really just going to be. Brella. But the guy paused. Brella. Sorry.

Brella.

I was thinking about this week. I said something about relationships that are not right. And today Mother's Day is powerfully painful for some people. I believe the story ends well and that relationships that were not right or good will be made right and good in the future. I guess I'm trying to say that knowing that God is on the throne and in control and is going to end the story in a good way for those who follow him, then everything's going to be made new.

Everything's going to be made right. So I have grief over relationships that aren't what they would have been, should have been, could have been. But I also take. I take some. I take a lot of hope in that.

In the new heaven and new earth, everything's going to be good, including relationship. Yes. Yeah. So I just. Today on Mother's Day, just think about that.

If you struggle a little bit with your mother, that kind of stuff, but you're not. Because you have a good mom. I do have a good mom. That doesn't mean that you don't have to. You know, you're going there.

All right, I'm gonna get off the stage and let you lead us into a communion thought. How would that be? Thank you, Alan. Thank you. How many more weeks do we have of this?

Should know this, but I've been under the weather, so I feel like my brain's. How many more weeks? This, next week? Our last week? No, we got two, three more.

In fact, two weeks from today, I'll be gone. And you're up for the Beast. Oh, great.

Show up for that. It's gonna be good.

Given the fact that we live in an imperfect world and given the fact

that we have some imperfect relationships, some of them are benignly imperfect. Some of them are not so benignly. Some of them are. You feel pretty aggressive sometimes that you're engaged with people who just have it out for you. Sometimes circumstances around us feel like they've got it out for us.

But again, we live in the umbrella of God's grace. David, the psalmist, wrote a very famous psalm, maybe you've heard of this, where he talks about the Lord being his shepherd, and we reference that in the sermon. But the Lamb, who is also the shepherd, leads us and directs us. And the shepherd does something interesting in David's psalm. The shepherd prepares a table for us right there when we are surrounded by adverse circumstances, adverse people, our own stuff that wants to war inside of us.

The Scriptures say that the Lamb, who is the shepherd, prepares this table and invites us to sit and eat. So this morning we are going to be presented with a little cup and a little piece of bread. It's hardly a feast, but in a spiritual sense it is, because it's rich, it's got good meat attached to this moment where we get to remind ourselves that, yes, the world out there, and maybe sometimes even the world in here, can be very turbulent, can be very chaotic, can be even a little scary. But we are invited to a place where we are seated at the table with Jesus. And I today am picturing this giant canopy just overspreading this giant table protecting us from the heat of the sun beating down on us.

And there, even with our enemies present and surrounding us, we are invited to a place where Jesus reminds us, I got this. Heavenly Father. This morning, as we take the bread and the cup, we remind ourselves that you've got this and you've got us. So as we come to the table, we come eager to remind ourselves the grace and protection we have in you. No matter what the world brings, no matter what the future brings, our hope is secure because it is founded in the solid rock who is Jesus, our Lord, Savior, shepherd and perfect plan.

Amen.

Thank you for listening to this message from Sherwood Oaks Christian Church. Did you know you can watch all of our video content, both current and past, on our YouTube channel. Visit [YouTube.com sherwoodoaks](https://www.youtube.com/sherwoodoaks) to watch messages, series and complete worship services.