

Bode. Hello, Bode. Hello, Bode. Armand. There we go.
Hey, good morning.

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

In 2015, 21 men were kidnapped by ISIS militants along the Mediterranean coast in Libya.

Most of the men were Egyptian migrant workers and most of them were Christians of the Coptic Orthodox tradition. Tradition. They were captured because they were Christians. ISIS released a professionally produced propaganda video entitled A message signed with blood to the Nation of the Cross. The video showed the captives dressed in orange jumpsuits being led along the beach before being brutally executed by beheading.

It was designed to terrorize Christians. The men were killed specifically for being followers of Christ. The ISIS executioners referred to them as people of the cross. The video shows that the men were told, if you renounce Christ, if you deny him, then we'll let you go. If you do not, then you'll be executed by the sword.

None of them, not one, denied Christ. And 20 of the 21 died by the sword because of their faith in Jesus. But then There was a 21st man. He was from Ghana. He had not been a Christian.

His name was Matthew. The executioner saved him for last.

And then when he was asked what he believed, he looked at the 20 who had been beheaded and said, their God is my God. He was then beheaded alongside them, publicly proclaiming a shared faith in Jesus Christ.

What does that tell you about the power of enduring suffering and even dying for Christ? The faith of those 20 was so compelling that Matthew believed. It kind of reminds me of the thief on the cross. The power of enduring persecution and death for the sake of Jesus is a compelling motivator for those who are about to suffer. The Egyptian Christians didn't need to preach a sermon.

Their courage, their peace, their faith and fidelity to Christ spoke volumes. They had an unshakable hope that caused Matthew to say, their God is my God. Tertullian, an early Christian writer and theologian who lives in the first and second centuries, or second and third centuries, said, the blood of martyrs is the seed of the church, meaning that in times of severe persecution, the church doesn't survive. It thrives. It thrives.

And in Revelation, Jesus, through John, powerfully reminds his people to thrive in the face of death. And he presents this compelling scene,

scene after scene, of those who died for their faith. And in Revelation 6, there's a picture of the souls of those who have died. And where are they? They're in the very presence of God, safe and secure.

And then in chapter 20, he says this. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony about Jesus and because of the word of God. And they are pure and they are secure in the presence of God because they followed the Lamb. The Lamb who was led to slaughter, but trusted his father. Peter writes in 1st Peter 2, 2124, he says to this, you were called because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example that you should follow in his steps.

He committed no sin and no deceit was found in his mouth. When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate. When he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly. He himself bore our sins in his body on the cross so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness.

By his wounds, you have been healed. In Revelation 5, I just love it. Revelation 4, John is invited by Jesus to come and look in a door into heaven. And he sees things in chapter four. And then in chapter five it continues.

And when John looks into heaven, he sees not a lion that is ferocious and vicious destroying aggressively its prey. That's not what he sees. Instead, John sees a lamb looking as if it had been slain, standing in the center of the throne.

This is the paradox, the power of the God's kingdom. The one who is victorious, Jesus, the Lamb, the one who conquers, does so not by power and might, but by surrender and giving his life. This is the Jesus that we're called to follow. This is the one we worship. Jesus wins a victory over Satan through the cross.

And by the resurrection, he now reigns. He reigns victorious. He reigns now, not in the distant future. Jesus is not only victorious, not only in control, but he is present. He's present with us as he reigns.

He's present. Jesus is present for those of us experiencing tribulation. He was present to those experiencing tribulation in the first century as the madman Domitian, the Roman Emperor, is beheading people because of their faith in Jesus Christ. The word tribulation, when you hear that word, I think it's pretty packed with lots of things for lots of different people. When you hear that word, I want you to hear a word that comes from the Greek.

That's just a word. And it means pressure. It means being pressed. It's translated in lots of different ways, including persecution,

distress, trouble, and tribulation. Before Jesus dies, he prepares his followers for his departure.

In John 14, 15 and 16. It starts, Let not your hearts be troubled. And then he goes into saying, listen, I've got to go. I'm going to leave you, but I'm not going to leave you alone. I'm going to leave you with a counselor, a comforter, an encourager, the Holy Spirit.

And as Jesus talks about all these things, he says this as a conclusion. I have said these things to you so that in me you may have peace in the world, you will have tribulation. But take heart, I've overcome the world. So we are living in tribulation. And so was John.

John writes in John or Revelation 1. He says, I, John, your brother and partner in the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance that are in. Jesus was on the island of Patmos on account of the word of God and of the testimony of Jesus. He says. He says a lot of stuff there.

He says three things that I want us to note. He says, I am experiencing tribulation. I'm in the tribulation. And he says, he's in the kingdom. He's in the kingdom of God, over which Jesus is king and reigns.

And then he says, I am patiently enduring and I want you to patiently endure the suffering, the tribulation, the trouble, the persecution that's taking place. So those who follow the Lamb, which I hope is everybody in the room, we experience trouble, distress, pressure, tribulation. It started with Jesus, it continued with the first century church, and it continues now. And what it requires is patient endurance. That's sourced and rooted in hope.

Which then, in the midst of all that pressure and being pressed together, tribulation trials, it produces peace, joy and confidence. This means that we're not waiting for the tribulation to start. We're in it. We're not waiting for the kingdom of God to come someday in the future. We're already a part of it.

We're not waiting for Jesus to reign. He already is. He's reigning. We are. We are waiting for his return where everything will be made right and new.

And we'll talk about that in a couple weeks, where there will be no more pain, no more crying, mourning death. All those things will be gone. Okay, now I'm going to get in trouble. Okay, Tim, you ready?

It would be your job to fix it. I just want to speak very carefully and very humbly. Okay? And I do mean this. There are lots of different views about how all this plays out in the end, right?

We all know this. Lots of different faithful Christians that have different ideas about the end times, and I'm one of them. We all have different views. Some teach that the church will be raptured before a seven year period of the Great Tribulation. This view, which is pretty, pretty prominent and lots of ways dominant, sees that Revelation is mostly in the future and not as something that was happening in the first century.

I respect that. I respect these views and the people who hold them and will not argue, will not debate. I will also say I want you to be a Berean. I will say that these views, relatively speaking, are fairly new. Rapture theology and association with literal thousand year reign on Earth mentioned in Revelation 20 really were developed by a man named John Darby who lives in the 1800s.

He took 1st Thessalonians 4 and said, Hey, I see something here that others don't see. And so he built it from there. I will say for most of church history, the first 1800 years of church history, this view was not. It was not present, it just wasn't there. It was not until the 1800s that that it all developed.

And then it became extremely popular with the Scofield Bible in 1909 and then it just kind of evolved from there to become mainstream. And then it got really popular with Hal Lindsay's book The Great Late Great Planet Earth and Tim LaHaye's Left Behind series. Okay, I just want you to dig in and think about it. Look for yourself. And we have lots of material.

I don't know if we can put the website up here, the QR code. We have a webpage that's devoted to this series and it has all the different views about the millennium premillennial post. Millennial Amillennial has all the different conversations about the beast, the mark of the beast. Tribulation has all these different views that you can dig in and really do the research. But I just wanted to expose you to some things this morning.

There's videos and podcasts on there, two great videos by the Bible Project that really get at Revelation. It's just wonderful. The podcast I listened to Friday that's on there, his whole point is there's no need to be anxious, there's no need to be worried about the future. We need to be secure and confident. And when we take the view of Revelation that has been dominant through history, the way I look at it, this understands Revelation as not a strict timeline of future events, but as a symbolic and spiritual vision of the world that we already live in.

The struggle between God and Satan, between good and evil. And it's kind of presenting the same view about three different times in Revelation. And it's saying, listen, you don't need to be afraid. You don't need to be anxious. Be confident.

It's all okay. It's going to be okay. Don't be afraid. This view says that the tribulation is ongoing reality of Christians living in a fallen world. Revelation 7:14 speaks of the great multitude in white robes, waving palm branches in the presence of God.

And we're told these are the ones who died in the great tribulation. They have washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb and made them white.

Should be a slide for that. It's a picture designed to comfort God's people in the first century. And it's comfort that's going on today for people going through trials and tribulation, people especially facing death because of their faith as they follow the Lamb. As John sees the people of God who have died and are now pure and secure in the presence of God, he describes them and then he says this. Revelation 14:4.

He says, they follow the Lamb wherever he goes.

They follow the Lamb wherever he goes.

That's a beautiful statement. It's a beautiful statement.

We don't conquer. We don't conquer by taking control. We don't conquer by being in power politically. We don't conquer by any of these worldly means. We conquer by holding fast to Jesus, patiently enduring tribulation as we follow the Lamb wherever he goes.

We may not be called to die for our faith. Doesn't look like that's happening right now in our culture. It may. We may not be required to die for our faith, but we are called to live for Christ no matter what.

We follow the Lamb not by escaping suffering, but by walking through it with an unshakeable hope. The Lamb who was slain and has been raised leads us. And one day he will wipe every tear from our eyes. And then there will be no more death, mourning, crying or pain. I guess the main message I want to say today, Tim, you can come on up.

Is don't be afraid. Whatever you believe, there's no need. There's no place for fear. We follow the Lamb wherever he goes. The Lamb is on the throne.

He's leading us to that presence of his. He knows what it means to suffer. He walks with us through our suffering. It's all going to end well. So what do you think about that, Tim?

Oh, you're going to drag me into your controversy? No, I. This idea of not fearing, I mean, this was. This again. I think we've talked about

this.

For me, the Book of Revelation has always been from the, from young age, the Book of Revelation has been a great, a great tool for evangelists and revivalists to get you to the altar to repent and get right with God before all hell breaks loose. Literally. But again, when you read through the, through the Book of Revelation, the, the center point and the centerpiece of this is always Jesus and God's in control. So as you were talking, I was thinking about Psalm 46 where the Psalmist writes this. And this is way back at David's time.

And David says this. God is our refuge and our strength. And he says, look, the earth may shake and the mountains may fall into the sea. It gets pretty crazy. The world life does.

It did for him, it does for us and will. It will continue to get crazy and crazier. He even says this. The Lord, look how, look at the destruction that, that God, that God causes. He causes wars to happen, but he also causes wars to cease.

And so what's the proper response for all of us who are watching God do this thing where, where, where wars are going on? But he's the one that's in charge of it, and wars and peace is happening, and God is the one in charge of that. He tells. He speaks to David and says, listen, just be still. Just be still and watch and know that I am God.

And. And he ends the Psalm, Psalm 46 way I will be exalted in the heavens and I will be exalted in the earth. So just, just chill. Just wait. Just be patient.

Don't give up. Don't give up. You may die for Christ, but the goal is to die in Christ. So don't walk away. Don't lose the faith that you have because of fear.

God's not given us the spirit of fear. Yeah, you know, we talked a little bit about it. Seems like some people really, really want to figure out when the end is going to come and all this. Yeah, Jesus says. Jesus even says, yeah, he said, I don't know when it's going to.

But his point in Matthew 24 and elsewhere is be ready. Just be ready. Even in Acts 1 is this when it's going to happen and when the kingdom be restored, Jesus said, hey, just go wait in Jerusalem and be faithful to me. Don't be afraid. Just live for me.

Follow me, follow the Lamb and everything will be okay, no matter how it unfolds. Yeah, I love that. Just follow the Lamb, Follow Jesus where he leads. As we come to a time of communion, that little part about just being still, you know, last week we were talking about just all of this puts me in mind again. I go back to David all the time, maybe because of my time leading worship and the impact that David's

psalms have on worship in the church.

And time and time again, David just takes us back to this place where he returns his vision, he returns his. His hope. He cast his eye onto the Lord and not to the other stuff going on. And in this, that place in Psalm 23 we talked about last week, where it says, Jesus prepares this table before us in the presence of our enemies. And this is sort of the tie in for me with the being still and knowing that God is God.

Be still and know that God is God. This moment that he invites us to right now, no matter what sort of chaos your life is going through, upheaval. I don't know all of your stories, but I know a few. There's stuff going on. We have.

We have death, we have struggles, we have financial stuff. We've got scary stuff in relationships going on. We've got frustrating things where you're like, God, why don't you fix this thing or that thing? And God says, just be still and watch what I do. And this is the.

This is the moment where he says, be still. Hey, come over here and sit down and let me. Let's eat together. Let's have a meal together. So this.

This moment, this invitation of Jesus with the bread and the cup to me is just this invitation for, For Jesus, for me to. To sit still, to. To entrust to him the stuff, all the stuff, the scary stuff, the hard stuff, the. The. The mysterious stuff and say, lord, I just want to be here.

Here. You're here at this table. I'm coming to this table. Speak to me. Give me peace.

Let me be still and know that you are God. Heavenly Father, we thank you that the invitation we have to be at this table is all because Jesus loved us. He overcame the enemy by dying. He overcame our enemy by dying. He overcame the power of the enemy over us by dying for us.

It's because of that that we're invited to this table in the first place. And so, seated here with the lamb that was slain, we say thank you for the cross. But we know that the story doesn't end there. As we sit still and watch and observe how God works around us and in us and through us, we see time and time again victory, hope, promise, and the fulfillment of every word that God has spoken coming to pass in good ways. You are.

You're. You are a good God. We live in this place of goodness with you. And we can trust you. Even in the places where it's not yet perfect, where it's not yet beautiful.

We know that in your time, it will be made beautiful. It will be made

perfect. And so we just wait. We are silent. We be still.

And we listen and learn and learn to love you and follow you. So,
Lord, thank you.

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