

OUR FUTURE

Sermon Notes

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ABOUT THESE NOTES

Kenneth Schenck's book, *Our Future*, draws us forward to the victory of Jesus Christ in the book of Revelation. As John showed the world his revelation of Christ's return, we see a clearer picture of what the church is to look like until that glorious return. The aim of these notes is to put action to our profession of faith. If we do this, Christ will be visible in tangible ways.

You and your congregation will discover numerous lessons about personal spiritual growth and endurance as you preach on *Our Future*. Serving as Jesus' witnesses was not an easy assignment in the first century, nor is it any easier today. Nevertheless, the Holy Spirit empowered the early church, and his power is still available.

TURN YOUR EYES UPON JESUS

Revelation 1:10–18

INTRODUCTION

Have you experienced a hard trial in which you received a clearer understanding of who Jesus is? Sometimes we have to be flat on our backs to look up and see Jesus in his glory and power. That was the apostle John's experience. The Roman Empire had banished him to the Island of Patmos for speaking boldly for Jesus. Undoubtedly what was the Roman Empire's way of silencing John's witness was God's way of expanding it to the whole world through John's writing of the book of Revelation. So what turned out to be a bad day from a human standpoint was John's best day because he received an important visit from the risen Lord.

SERMON OUTLINE

I. John's Vision of Jesus

A. In the Midst of Seven Golden Lampstands (Rev. 1:12–15)

The lampstands are identified in verse 20 as churches. Revelation 2–3 identifies them as seven churches in Asia Minor. Jesus is alive and exercising authority over the churches. Do we yield to his authority as the head of the church (Eph. 5:3)? What John saw compares to the image of the Ancient of Days presented in Daniel 7:9. Jesus is eternal, and therefore he conquered death.

His eyes see all things (Rev. 1:14). His feet were like bronze, similar to the bronze altar in temple, where sacrifice for sin was made and his voice was like the sound of rushing waters (v. 15). Probably the sound calls attention to the Savior's authority.

B. Holding Seven Stars (Rev. 1:16)

Jesus is seen holding seven stars and speaking with authority (v. 16). According to verse 20, the seven stars are the angels, perhaps messengers or secretaries, of the seven churches. Jesus' face was brilliant, likely a reference to his resurrection glory and purity.

II. John's Response to the Vision

A. Reverence (Rev. 1:17)

John's immediate response to the vision was to fall like a dead man at Jesus' feet (v. 17). How do we view Jesus? Do we think of him as a celestial Santa Claus or as the Sovereign Lord and Savior? Is he in heaven awaiting our every command, or is he there to accept our deepest love and worship?

B. Assurances (Rev. 1:17–18)

Jesus comforted John. He told John not to fear, and declared that he was the eternal one, the First and the Last (v. 17). He also declared that he was dead but was now holding the keys of death and Hades (v. 18). We do not have to fear death and Hades if we know the one who holds the keys to both.

CONCLUSION

From a human perspective, what started out as another day of banishment on a remote island turned out to be what must have been the best day of John's life. He saw the risen Lord and received a command from him. When we undergo severe trials, let's ask the Lord to for a clearer view of himself, and ask, "What shall I do, Lord?" (Acts 22:10).

THE POOR RICH CHURCH

Revelation 3:14–22

INTRODUCTION

How does God determine how rich or poor a church is? Does he examine the budget, measure the size of the buildings, or find the average income of the membership? No! When God measures the wealth of a church, he puts the tape around the heart, and determines a church is rich by the amount of its reliance on the Holy Spirit, the depth of its faith, and the extent of its devotion to Christ. In his last letter to the churches of Asia Minor, Jesus rebuked the church at Laodicea for thinking it was rich when it was actually poor.

SERMON OUTLINE

I. A Faithful Analysis (Rev. 3:14–16)

Jesus identified himself as the “faithful and true witness” (v. 14). He would not give a false report of the church’s condition. He said the church was neither hot nor cold (v. 15). Laodicea’s water supply came from Hierapolis, a few miles north. The water was hot when it left Hierapolis, but lukewarm when it reached Laodicea. Like its water supply, the church’s spiritual condition was lukewarm, and Jesus was ready to spit the church out of his mouth.

Lukewarm-ness is apathy or lethargy, an uncaring attitude toward God and his work. A lukewarm church may launch and maintain programs without dependence on the Holy Spirit and feel confident in the size of its offerings without having love for the Lord.

II. A False Concept (Rev. 3:17–18)

The Laodicean church boasted that it was wealthy and needed nothing, but Jesus said it was wretched, poor, blind, and naked. He urged the church to buy from him genuine gold, white clothes, and salve for its eyes (v. 18).

Laodicea had a thriving banking industry, but material wealth could not make the church rich in God’s sight. The city produced wool, but only Christ could cover the church’s nakedness. Further, the city was famous for its eye salve, but only Christ could treat the church’s blindness.

It is entirely possible for a church to have a false concept of itself. It may fill in a self-evaluation form and reach wrong conclusions. What every church needs is to submit to Christ's evaluation and respond appropriately.

III. A Fervent Invitation (Rev. 3:19–22)

The risen Christ appealed to the church at Laodicea to be earnest and repent (v. 19), and he made a promise. He would raise the repentant church from its low estate to the high estate of sitting with Christ on his throne (v. 20).

On pages 40–41 of his book, *Our Future*, Kenneth Schenck writes:

Jesus' words to the church at Laodicea end with a familiar memory verse: "Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me" (3:20). What a spectacular invitation! None of us is beyond hope. God wants us all to be part of his kingdom. There is no one he wants to destroy. There is no one he wants to judge. He is knocking on our heart's door. All we have to do is answer and fellowship with him. Indeed, those who make it to the end will reign with him. We will sit with him on his throne in the kingdom.

CONCLUSION

Compared with churches in Third World countries, our church might be considered materially rich, but what is our Lord's evaluation of us? Is it time to ask him?

LOOK UP!

Revelation 4

INTRODUCTION

Who can deny that world conditions are alarming? Terrorism, shooting sprees, and a lack of fear of God are rampant. Peace is something nations talk about but fail to bring about. Indeed, the outlook is bad, but the up-look is helpful if we look up to heaven. Revelation 4 gives us a much-needed glimpse into heaven.

SERMON OUTLINE

I. We See Our Victorious God

A. Seated on a Throne (Rev. 4:1–3)

A throne speaks of power, majesty, and sovereignty. God is all-powerful and nothing escapes his attention, whether in the world or in our lives. Satan, godless nations, and atheists have tried unsuccessfully to dethrone him, but he is still on the throne. To us, it is a throne of grace, but to all who reject the Savior, it is a throne of judgment.

B. Surrounded by Adoring Saints and Angels (Rev. 4:4–8)

Much discussion focuses on the identity of the twenty-four elders who surround the throne. Some say they are the twelve patriarchs of Israel and the twelve apostles. Others identify them as the redeemed of Israel and the church. The fact that they wear white crowns identifies them as redeemed, and the crowns identify them as victors (v. 4). The Holy Spirit attends the throne (v. 5), and a sea of glass spreads out from the throne. There is no need of cleansing from sin in heaven

Four living creatures sing ceaseless praise to God (vv. 6–8). Perhaps their “‘Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty,’ who was, and is, and is to come” (v. 8) declares the fact that God is triune and eternal.

II. We See a Victory Celebration

A. A Coronation (Rev. 4:9–10)

When the living creatures sing, the twenty-four elders ascribe glory honor and thanks to God, fall down before him, and lay their crowns before the throne (vv. 9–10). The crowns may have been given to the elders for faithful service on earth, but the elders gladly lay them before the throne. What a privilege to return crowns to the Giver!

B. An Ascription of Honor (Rev. 4:11)

The elders acknowledge God's right to receive glory, honor, and power (v. 11), because he created all things. This mighty creation includes us. Do we praise him as we should? Do we live every day for his glory?

CONCLUSION

Have you ever been caught in a thunderstorm? Darkness surrounded you, and thick clouds enveloped you. But then the darkness rolled away, the clouds lifted, and a ray of light appeared on the horizon. Looking up at the light changed your mood and lifted your spirits. Similarly, when life's dark circumstances trouble you, look up to heaven, and see God seated upon his throne. Your mood will change from distress to hope, and your spirit will rejoice.

TWO FAITHFUL WITNESSES

Revelation 11:1–11

INTRODUCTION

God has a remnant of witnesses in every period of history. For example, when human beings' thoughts ran constantly to evil in the days before the flood, Noah served as a powerful witness for God. In the times of the Judges, when everyone did what was right in his own eyes, God used godly judges to turn the backslidden nation of Israel back to him. Elijah and Elisha heralded God's Word when the people of Israel served Baal. And John the Baptist proclaimed the approaching kingdom of God and the King, when the nation had not heard from God in four hundred years.

The book of Acts spills over with the records of the apostles and other dedicated believers who proclaimed God's truth. Today, we are called and commissioned to be God's witness (Acts 1:8). According to Revelation 11, God will use two faithful witnesses in the end time to preach his message. Let's focus on these two witnesses and see what we can glean from them that will help us become stronger witnesses.

SERMON OUTLINE

I. Their Ministry (Rev. 11:1–6)

A. The Place Where They Minister

Jerusalem, “the holy city” (v. 2), “figuratively called Sodom and Egypt—where also their Lord was crucified” (v. 8). Jerusalem is pictured as controlled by the Gentiles, who profane the temple's outer court (v. 2). The city is immoral and idolatrous, like Sodom and Egypt. It is not cordial to preachers who declare God's message.

B. The Time of Their Ministry

In spite of intense opposition, the two witnesses keep on witnessing for over three years. How faithful are we to maintain a witness for as long as necessary and in the face of persecution?

C. Power of Their Ministry

They are empowered by the Holy Spirit (v. 4; compare Zech. 4:6, 11–14). Our ministry, too, will honor the Lord and accomplish his will if we rely on the Holy Spirit for power.

Those who oppose the two witnesses experience immediate judgment (Rev. 11:5). Many believers today are experiencing horrific persecution—even horrible execution—but God will judge their persecutors.

Like the prophet Elijah, God’s two witnesses have to power to withhold rain from the earth, and like Moses, they have power to turn the waters into blood and to strike the earth with plague (v. 6).

II. Their Identity

Perhaps the witnesses are Elijah and Moses. Probably most Bible students think so, but others think they may be Enoch and Elijah, or Enoch and Moses.

Those who favor Enoch as one of the witnesses point out that Enoch did not die but was transported alive to heaven (Gen. 5:24). They insist every man is destined to die once (Heb. 9:27). However, Hebrews 9:27 does not say every man is destined to die only once. You may recall that Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, but Lazarus eventually died again.

III. Their Martyrdom (Rev. 11:7–12)

God’s two faithful witnesses will be martyred. They will seal their witness with heir blood.

A. The Culprit

The beast is the killer. He is usually identified as a person, the Antichrist, but possibly the beast represents a powerful empire.

B. A Celebration

For three and a half days, the witnesses’ bodies will lie unburied in the streets of Jerusalem. Across the globe, unbelievers will gaze on the bodies (vv. 8–9). They will celebrate by exchanging gifts (v. 10).

Undoubtedly, man unbelievers today would rejoice if Christians’ voices were silenced. Our witness by word and deed convicts many who would celebrate our absence.

C. An Ascension

After three and a half days, God will breathe life into his witnesses (v. 11) and summon them up to heaven (v. 12). Just as Jesus ascended to heaven in a cloud, so the witnesses will ascend in a cloud (v. 12). Their fear-struck enemies will look on.

CONCLUSION

As we noted at the beginning of this sermon, God has had a remnant of witnesses in ever period of time. Many of them paid the supreme sacrifice for declaring God’s message, but they have received the crown of life (Rev. 2:10). The two faithful witnesses of Revelation 11 finished their task and then went to heaven where they, too, must have received the crown of life. Let’s follow the example of those faithful witnesses who went before us and keep our eyes on the heavenly prize!

BOWLS OF WRATH

Revelation 16

INTRODUCTION

Often good things come in a bowl. For example, who hasn't enjoyed a bowl of ice cream, popcorn, delicious fruit, or cereal? But when God pours out seven bowls on the earth, no one will enjoy them. They are bowls of his wrath (Rev. 16:1).

SERMON OUTLINE

I. The Contents of the Bowls of Wrath (Rev. 16:2–4; 8–21)

- First Bowl (v. 2): Ugly painful sores on those who have the mark of the beast and worship him.
- Second Bowl (v. 3): Sea becomes bloody and marine life dies.
- Third Bowl (v. 4): Rivers and springs become bloody.
- Fourth Bowl (vv. 8–9): Sun scorches humans.
- Fifth Bowl (v. 10): Darkness envelops the kingdom of the beast.
- Sixth Bowl (vv. 12–14): Euphrates dries up, preparing the way for demons to gather worldwide forces for battle.
- Seventh Bowl (vv. 17–21): Unprecedented earthquake, Babylon and great cities collapse, tsunamis, hundred-pound hailstones strike humans.

II. The Justice behind the Bowls of Wrath (Rev. 16:4–7)

A. A Statement about God's Judgments

An angel proclaims that God is just to send the judgments. We should remember that God is always just and righteous in his ways. He does nothing in a hasty, capricious way.

B. The Reason for God's Judgments

The recipients of God's judgments had shed the blood of God's saints and prophets, so now they would drink blood, as they deserved.

C. An Affirmation about God's Judgments

A word from the altar affirms God's justice.

III. The Hardness of Human Hearts in Response to the Bowls of Wrath (Rev. 16:9–10, 21)

A. The Wicked Curse God's Name and Refuse to Repent and Glorify Him

Why do unbelievers curse God for their punishments instead of repenting and seeking his forgiveness? Jeremiah 17:9 refers to the heart as “deceitful above all things and beyond cure.”

B. The Wicked Curse God for Troubles They Bring on Themselves

Instead of seeing the hailstones as punishment for their sin and as incentive to turn from their sin, the wicked curse God for sending the hail.

CONCLUSION

Two thieves were crucified alongside Jesus. One was unrepentant; the other was repentant. The repentant thief acknowledged that he and his partner in crime were getting what they deserved, and he turned to Jesus in faith for forgiveness.

Do you blame God and curse him for your troubles? Why not, instead, turn to him in repentant faith and receive forgiveness?

THE KING IS COMING

Revelation 19:11–21

INTRODUCTION

When a king or queen visits a country outside his or her realm, the host country flies into a flurry of welcoming activities, but when King Jesus returns to earth, the response will be far different because of who he is and the purpose of his return.

SERMON OUTLINE

I. His Character (Rev. 19:11–12)

In ancient times, a king would ride a white horse and lead his army into battle. When Jesus returns to earth, he will ride a white horse, and his name will be “Faithful and True.”

A. Appropriate Adjectives That Describe Jesus

He is faithful to keep his promise to come again. He is faithful to avenge the enemies of God and God’s people. He is also true to his word, and to execute judgment based on truth, not on hearsay or on the testimony of false witnesses. “With justice he judges and wages war” (v. 11).

B. He Has Penetrating Vision

No one can hide from him. He sees all, including the sins that unbelievers have committed in secret. He is also majestic, having many crowns on his head.

II. His Conquest (Rev. 19:13–15)

A further image of King Jesus shows him wearing “a robe dipped in blood” (v. 13). We might think the blood was what he shed for our sins on the cross, but it is the blood of his enemies.

A. Psalm 2

This psalm offers a prophetic glimpse of the war Jesus wages at his second coming. Masses of unbelievers, arrayed under their rulers, launch a final effort to dethrone God (vv. 1–3). However, God merely laughs at their efforts, and “terrifies them in his wrath” (v. 5). He is determined to install his King—Jesus—on Zion (v. 6). So Jesus returns to make war and take custody of Earth.

“The armies of heaven . . . riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean,” follow Jesus (Rev. 19:14). But only Jesus battles the Enemy. A sharp sword proceeds from his mouth and strikes down the Enemy. Also, he holds an iron scepter with which he will rule the nations (v. 15).

B. “Battle Hymn of the Republic”

The closing words of verse 15 remind us of the words of this hymn: “He is trampling out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored.” Thus, King Jesus will conclude the evil rule of man on the earth and establish his righteous rule!

III. His Acclamation (Rev. 19:16)

A banner on Jesus’ robe and thigh acclaim him, “KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS” (v. 16). At the cross the soldiers mocked Jesus. They placed a sign overhead that announced: “THIS IS JESUS, THE KING OF THE JEWS” (Matt. 27:37). At his second coming, no one will mock him. His sovereignty will be declared for all to see.

CONCLUSION

We may weep when we read the newspaper or watch the news on TV, because the world seems to continue its wicked ways with no concern about judgment. But we can rejoice when we read the Bible’s prediction of Jesus’ return as conquering King. He will judge the wicked and inaugurate his reign. Let’s pray, “Come, Lord Jesus!”