

We've had 6 weeks of Epistle readings from Revelation this Easter. And thus far I've preached on 3 of them. Today I want to make it 4, and I want to talk about today's reading, the last verses of Revelation. They are also the last verses of the New Testament. Also the last verses of the Bible.

This last section functions as an epilogue to the book of Revelation. But this epilogue is not just tacked on. In very real ways it's a challenging section that challenges the reader to live in the light and in the knowledge that the rest of the book of Revelation brings.

Revelation was written to be encouragement to a church undergoing persecution from the evil Roman Empire. And that message of encouragement is basically, 'Hold on, stand firm, keep the faith in the midst of adversity.'

But there are things Revelation does not say. Revelation has been about the defeat of the powers of evil, the defeat of Satan, the overthrow of the Roman Empire. But nowhere does it say that ordinary Christians have to do those things. Those are enormous tasks that require extraordinary power. In other words, those are things that God will do. Those things are not in our power. The task for the hearers of Revelation is to be faithful to that God, to trust him, to hang in there, to go the distance, even in the face of difficulty, persecution, and even death itself.

Which brings me to a couple of quotes from a couple of different Rocky movies.

In the first *Rocky* movie, the young unknown fighter has been given a title shot. Rocky is going to fight the heavyweight champion of the world, Apollo Creed. But the night before that fight, Rocky realizes that there's no way he can win. He says, "I can't do it... I can't beat him... I ain't even in the guy's league."

But then he reveals what his true goal is. He says,

"All I wanna do is go the distance. Nobody's ever gone the distance with Creed. And if I can go that distance, ya see, and that bell rings, ya know, and I'm still standin', I'm gonna know for the first time in my life, ya see, that I weren't just another bum from the neighborhood."

Rocky knows he is in way over his head. But he simply wants to persevere. He simply wants to make it to the end of the fight.

And that same ethos, that same spirit is present 30 years later in the 6th Rocky movie, *Rocky Balboa*. Rocky is now the washed-up former champion who is attempting to have one last fight. In a conversation with his son, Rocky speaks some powerful words about perseverance.

Rocky says:

"Let me tell you something you already know. The world ain't all sunshine and rainbows. It's a very mean and nasty place and I don't care how tough you are it will beat you to your knees and keep you there permanently if you let it. You, me, or nobody is gonna' hit as hard as life. But it ain't about how hard you hit. It's about how hard you can get hit and keep moving forward. How much you can take and keep moving forward. That's how winning is done!"

That's the message of Revelation. There are some terrible things that can happen to you in life, and, yes, there's plenty of scary stuff in Revelation. Next Fall I want to go through all of that stuff in detail in our adult Sunday School class. But the bottom line in the midst of difficult times is to keep your faith, to stick with God, and to trust in him.

Revelation is about revealing. Revelation gives Christians inside knowledge. Things in the world can be turbulent, chaotic, dangerous, even deadly. The forces of evil are out there attempting to do their worst. But be faithful. God is in charge. In the end, God will win. God's will WILL be done on earth as it is in heaven.

This message goes back to the promises we made at our baptisms. Open a prayer book real quick. Page 302. In this part of the baptismal service, there are three questions of renunciation, of turning away, and three questions of affirmation, of turning toward.

3 questions of renunciation, right in the middle of the page:

"Do you renounce Satan and all the spiritual forces of wickedness that rebel against God?

Do you renounce the evil powers of this world which corrupt and destroy the creatures of God?

Do you renounce all sinful desires that draw you from the love of God?"

That's what Revelation is asking of us. To continue to renounce these things. But not in our own power. We can't personally defeat Satan and all the evil powers that run rampant in our world.

Thus, we make 3 affirmations, bottom of page 302:

"Do you turn to Jesus Christ and accept him as your Savior?

Do you put your whole trust in his grace and love?

Do you promise to follow and obey him as your Lord?"

These are promises to live the faithful Christian life, to turn and return to God. To trust his grace and love and power. To follow him.

And in case we forget, or in case we backslide, we make another promise. Flip over to the next page. At the bottom of p304, look at the promise:

"Will you persevere in resisting evil, and, whenever you fall into sin, repent and return to the Lord?"

Will you continue to do these things, will you persevere? And when you get off track will you get back on track?

And the answer is, "I will, with God's help."

That's what Revelation is encouraging us to do. To keep moving forward faithfully. Resisting evil. Following God. And relying upon God's help.

But there's one more piece of Revelation. One piece we tend to not dwell on very much in contemporary Christianity. And yet, it's part of the grand climax and joy of chapters 21 and 22. It's looking at things from a heavenly perspective. And not only that, looking at things from an eternal perspective.

That's so difficult. Our current world looms so large before our eyes. It surrounds us on all sides. Our current world fills our vision and inundates our senses. It is a part of us, and we are a part of it. And when our brief lifespans are done, the world keeps marching on without us.

But Revelation encourages us to take another look. This world is actually what is temporary. We are the ones who will continue on. And this is a tough perspective for us to wrap our minds around.

It used to be said of Christians that they were so heavenly minded that they were no earthly good. But this is no longer the case. These days, we tend to be so focused on this world that we ignore the next world. And yet the next world, the new heaven and earth, is where we'll be spending the greatest part of our existence.

And that's why I love a classic reminder from C.S. Lewis. It is from his children's stories, *The Chronicles of Narnia*. This is from the 7th and last book in that series, *The Last Battle*. It is from the final chapter, "Farewell to the Shadowlands." The term, "Shadowlands" comes from platonic philosophy. The suggestion is that what we see in our world is only a shadow of the glories that await us in the next.

In *The Chronicles of Narnia*, various children have been magically passing back and forth between this world and Narnia. In the first book through a wardrobe. In other books through a painting, or by touching magic rings, or by sitting on a bench. But they always return home to this world afterwards.

In the beginning of the 7th book, the children are pulled into Narnia during the middle of a railway accident. And then, towards the end of the book, they go to yet another land. This other land seems more like Narnia than Narnia itself. It also seems more like England than England itself.

It is described as the "real England" or the "inner England," or the "real Narnia." It is an absolutely wonderful and glorious place. And yet, Aslan, the lion, the great Christ figure of the book, notices that the children look sad.

One of them explains that they wish they could stay in this wonderful new world. But they know the pattern. They know that they must return to their own world as they have every other time they've visited Narnia.

Then Aslan says, "Have you not guessed?" And the children feel a stirring of hope in their hearts. And Aslan continues, "There was a real railway accident... all of you are—as you used to call it in the Shadowlands—dead."

The children are dead, and yet this is not sad news for them. For they will now stay in this new world forever. In fact, Aslan speaks words of great joy: "The term is over: the holidays have begun. The dream is ended: this is the morning."

And then, in the final paragraph of the book, C.S. Lewis writes in words a child could understand about the joys of heaven. Words a child could understand. And perhaps, they should be words every Christian adult should also try to understand about the joys of heaven. He writes,

"And as (Aslan) spoke He no longer looked to them like a lion; but the things that began to happen after that were so great and beautiful that I cannot write them. And for us this is the end of all the stories, and we can most truly say that they all lived happily ever after. But for them it was only the beginning of the real story. All their life in this world and all their adventures in Narnia had only been the cover and the title page: now at last they were beginning Chapter One of the Great Story which no one on earth has read: which goes on forever: in which every chapter is better than the one before."

What wonderful words from C.S. Lewis. What wonderful words from the book of Revelation. This world is only the cover and the title page of THE great story. This world is only the barest beginning of our lives. God will bring a new heaven and earth. We will dwell with him, and he with us, forever. And every chapter will be better than the one before.

The Spirit and the bride say, "Come." Even so. come Lord Jesus!

To the one seated on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!