

## **Apocalypse Now: Session Four**

### *The People of the Lamb: What does Revelation tell us about the Church?*

*Then I looked, and behold, on Mount Zion stood the Lamb, and with him 144,000 who had his name and his Father's name written on their foreheads. And I heard a voice from heaven like the roar of many waters and like the sound of loud thunder. The voice I heard was like the sound of harpists playing on their harps, and they were singing a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and before the elders. No one could learn that song except the 144,000 who had been redeemed from the earth. It is these who have not defiled themselves with women, for they are virgins. It is these who follow the Lamb wherever he goes. These have been redeemed from mankind as firstfruits for God and the Lamb, and in their mouth no lie was found, for they are blameless.*

- Rev 14:1-5

### **A Tempted, but Faithful People**

- The letter to the seven churches presents the perpetual temptations God's people face.
  - o Summary of temptations:
    - **Ephesus:** lost their original love (Rev 2:4)
    - **Smyrna:** thrown in prison (Rev 2:10)
    - **Pergamum:** persecution and the Nicolaitan teaching (Rev 2:13-15)
    - **Thyatira:** tolerance towards Jezebel (2:20)
    - **Sardis:** a reputation of life, when spiritually dead (3:1)
    - **Philadelphia:** intimidation from the synagogue of Satan (3:9)
    - **Laodicea:** lukewarm and self-deluded (3:15-17)
- "to the one who conquers"
  - o Repeated at the end of each letter with a promised blessing
    - **Ephesus:** "I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God." (Rev 2:7)
    - **Smyrna:** "will not be hurt by the second death." (Rev 2:11)
    - **Pergamum:** "I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, with a new name written on the stone that no one knows except the one who receives it." (Rev 2:17)
    - **Thyatira:** "I will give authority over the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron, as when earthen pots are broken in pieces, even as I myself have received authority from my Father. And I will give him the morning star." (Rev 2:26-28)
    - **Sardis:** "will be clothed thus in white garments, and I will never blot his name out of the book of life. I will confess his name before my Father and before his angels." (Rev 3:5)
    - **Philadelphia:** "I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God. Never shall he go out of it, and I will write on him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which comes

- down from my God out of heaven, and my own new name.” (Rev 3:12)
- **Laodicea:** “I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I also conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne.” (Rev 3:21)
  - These seven rewards all point towards the blessing we receive at the New Creation.
    - “The one who conquers will have this heritage, and I will be his God and he will be my son” – Rev 21:7
    - See also the seven “blessed” statements in Revelation which likewise show that the blessings God pours out on His people all have to do with the coming New Age of the New Creation.
      - 1:3; 14:13; 16:15; 19:9; 20:6; 22:7; 22:14
  - What does it mean “to conquer”?
    - “And they have conquered [Satan] by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death.” – Rev 12:11
    - We do not conquer the way the dragon conquers—through violence, intimidation, coercion.
      - “Also it was allowed to make war on the saints and to conquer them.” – Rev 13:7 (cf. 11:7)
    - We conquer through taking shelter under the blood of the Lamb, remaining faithful amid temptation, even to the point of death.
    - “The one who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I also conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne.” – Rev 3:21
  - How does one remain faithful?
    - Endure
      - “If anyone is to be taken captive, to captivity he goes; if anyone is to be slain with the sword, with the sword must he be slain. Here is a call for the endurance and faith of the saints.” – Rev 13:10
    - Sovereign Grace
      - “and all who dwell on earth will worship it, everyone whose name has not been written before the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who was slain.” – Rev 13:8

### **A Weak, but Bold People**

- The Church is depicted as vulnerable and powerless
  - “I know that you have but little power, and yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name.” -Rev 3:8
  - Two prophets quickly killed, leading the whole world to rejoice (Rev 11)
  - A pregnant woman and infant child, pursued by a ravenous dragon (Rev 12)
  - A conquered people by the power of Rome (Rev 13, 17)
- The Church is depicted as bold and courageous

- The Ephesian church is commended for “hating the works of the Nicolaitans, which [Jesus] also hates” (2:6). Pergamum is rebuked for being tolerant of their false teaching (2:14-15).
- The two prophets speak so powerfully against the evils of the world that fire pours forth from their mouth to consume their adversaries. (Rev 11:4-5)
  - “I am making my words in your mouth a fire, and this people wood, and the fire shall consume them” (Jer. 5:14).
  - The two prophets have the power to work great miracles and signs (11:6)
  - The world rejoices at their death “because these two prophets had been a torment to those who dwell on the earth,” (11:10).
- The prayers of God’s people cry out for justice and vengeance
  - “They cried out with a loud voice, “O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?” (6:10)
- The Church refuses to bow the knee to immense pressure
  - Because the church refuses to worship the beast, it will suffer persecution. (13:7-9)
  - Because the church refuses to take the mark of the beast, it will experience economic hardships (13:16-18)

### **A Suffering, but Triumphant People**

- God’s people suffer tremendously in Revelation
  - All Christians are depicted as martyrs in the book of Revelation: “It is not a literal prediction that every faithful Christian will in fact be put to death. But it does require that every faithful Christian must be prepared to die,” (Bauckham, *Theology of Revelation*, 92-93)
    - “When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the witness they had borne.” – Rev 6:9
    - They endure the “great tribulation” (Rev 7:14; cf. 1:9)
    - They are “conquered” by the beast (Rev 11:7; 13:7)
    - Babylon is drunk on the blood of Christians (Rev 17:6; cf. 18:24)
- God’s people are finally triumphant and victorious
  - The question of Rev 6:17, “for the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?” is answered by the very next section: the 144,000.
  - The 144,000 is not a literal number, but a symbolic number (12x12x1,000) intended to represent the *whole* of God’s people (see Schreiner, *The Joy of Hearing*, pgs. 122-128).
    - Notice vs. 9 where John, after *hearing* the numbering of 144,000, turns and sees “a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages.”
  - An army of saints

- “In the Old Testament a census was always a reckoning of the military strength of the nation, in which only males of military age were counted.” (Bauckham, *Theology of Revelation*, p. 77).
      - The 144,000 are depicted as a triumphant army, clothed in white, sealed to God and thus immune to the final judgment poured out upon the earth.
    - The army returns in Rev 14:1-5 as those who have refused the mark of the beast, bearing instead the mark of the Lamb, shaking the earth with the sound of their praise.
    - The army returns once more in 19:11-16.
  - God’s people are made glorious
    - The imagery of “white robes”
      - “These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.” (7:14)
      - “it was granted her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure”—for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints.” (19:8)
    - The beauty of the New Jerusalem (Rev 21:9-27)
      - The only other place that mirrors this description of beauty is of God’s throne in Rev 4:1-6.
      - Contrast with the gawdy, obscene “beauty” of Babylon in Rev 17.
  - Return to the rewards offered to the seven churches for conquering
    - Authority – rod of iron (2:27-28), crown of life (2:10), seated on Jesus’ throne (3:21)
    - Stability/security – a pillar in the temple of God (3:12)
    - Beauty – the morning star (Rev 2:28), white robes (3:5), crown of life (2:10)
    - Vindication – white robes and a name never blotted out (3:5); a new name (3:12); a white stone (2:17)
    - Fullness of Life – eat of the tree of life (2:7); the crown of life (2:10); hidden manna (2:17)

“We choose: we follow the dragon and his beasts along their parade route, conspicuous with the worship of splendid images, elaborated in mysterious symbols, fond of statistics, taking on whatever role is necessary to make a good show and get the applause of the crowds in order to get access to power and become self-important. Or we follow the Lamb along a farmyard route, worshipping the invisible, listening to the foolishness of preaching, practicing a holy life that involves heroically difficult acts that no one will ever notice, in order to become, simply, our eternal selves in an eternal city. It is the difference, politically, between wanting to use the people around us to become powerful (or; if unskilled, getting used by them), and entering into covenants with the people around us so that the power of salvation extends into every part of the neighborhood, the society, and the world that God loves.” – Eugene Peterson, *Reversed Thunder*