

Rappahannock Christian Church – 11/14/10

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Communion Meditation

You know, church is all about trust. We *trust* in Something.

People trust in all sorts of things. After all, when I sit down, I trust that the chair will bear my weight and I will not fall. I have faith that when I turn on the faucet, water will come out. In this way, trust and faith are part of our everyday lives. But the trust that we hold in common as Christians is something more than this everyday faith that we have in things.

Our trust is in Jesus for our salvation. This is far, far more important than the mere trust that we put in everyday items. And, this trust is vital. We would never be able to trust in ourselves, or anybody or anything else, for this salvation. Never could we stand before God and say, “Look at me, I stand here in my own virtue and righteousness.” Instead, Jesus Christ offers us the gift of His own death and His righteousness. Now *that’s* the foundation I’d rather claim! *This* is Someone I can *trust*, and this is what we have here at this Table. This Table is a reminder of the Reason that we can trust.

Let me read you these words from Matthew, where he tells us about what Jesus said for us at that last supper:

Matthew 26:26-29 – Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, “Take and eat; this is my body.”

Then he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, saying, “Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you, I will not drink from this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom.”

Judgment Day

Here we are again. Our Scripture for today is a whole chapter in Revelation. We’re going to break with Revelation here for awhile. Just so you know, we will come back and finish after the holidays.

We are at a good breaking point because all we have left are the last two chapters of the book and, unlike much of what we have been reading, they are about the glorious consummation of it all.

As I read today’s text I want you to notice that there 3 sections to this chapter. Please listen for them.

Revelation 20 - And I saw an angel coming down out of heaven, having the key to the Abyss and holding in his hand a great chain. He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil, or Satan, and bound him for a thousand years. He threw him into the Abyss, and locked and sealed it over him, to keep him from

deceiving the nations anymore until the thousand years were ended. After that, he must be set free for a short time.

I saw thrones on which were seated those who had been given authority to judge. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony about Jesus and because of the word of God. They had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years. (The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended.) This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy are those who share in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years.

When the thousand years are over, Satan will be released from his prison and will go out to deceive the nations in the four corners of the earth—Gog and Magog—and to gather them for battle. In number they are like the sand on the seashore. They marched across the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of God's people, the city he loves. But fire came down from heaven and devoured them. And the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown. They will be tormented day and night for ever and ever.

Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. The earth and the heavens fled from his presence, and there was no place for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what they had done. Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. Anyone whose name was not found written in the book of life was thrown into the lake of fire.

Yes ladies and gentlemen, the "day of reckoning" is what we have just read about.

I remember when I was just a kid of 12 or 13, I was messing around in my room and somehow a shoe went through a window, shattering it. Oh my! There was no hiding this! I knew I had to tell my parents. I was sick and afraid of what my dad would say.

Now in fact, those of you who know my dad know that he's not a volatile man, and when I told him, he reacted calmly, much as you would expect him to. But *I* sure wasn't feeling calm about it!!!

Now, here in Revelation we have an account of a great day of reckoning that is to come, and I wonder if it will be as terrible as we have imagined or if we will be pleasantly surprised at the benevolence and grace of our Heavenly Father.

Before we talk about the Judgment, though, I want to touch quickly on the first two sections of the chapter. The first is about a time of 1,000 years ("the millennium") when Christ will reign, with some of the martyrs, on earth.

This may sound a little odd, since the first of two great battles, the battle of Armageddon, has already been fought and Satan's armies have been destroyed. Are these martyred saints reigning over their fellow believers during the millennium? Are Christians the only people left on earth? Somehow, that doesn't sound right to me. This passage in Revelation says nothing about those over whom Christ and the saints will rule. But there is no reason to assume that when Satan's armies are destroyed all non-believers on the planet are destroyed. So here during the millennium the earth is probably still populated with Christian and non-Christian alike.

Some people choose to take the 1000 years figuratively. According to them "1000 years" simply means a very, very long period of time. It could be the entire Age of the Church - with Christ reigning over the Church, the Kingdom of God on earth. I suppose that could be what John meant. But it seems simpler to take it literally. What the text actually says is that those people who have been beheaded for their testimony for Jesus are to be rewarded with this special time of honor and power.

The second section of the chapter describes a second huge battle. The first, which is described in the previous chapter, is instigated by the Beast and his followers. This battle in chapter 20 is instigated by Satan.

You know, if I were a Hollywood producer, I would hate this text. John just offers *no* details! He doesn't tell us anything about these battles. It would be MUCH more exciting and dramatic if the forces of evil gained the upper hand, and then God's forces surged back to victory -something like that! But John doesn't seem interested in the details of these battles. What he focuses on is the outcome! He says that in the end fire comes down from heaven and fully destroys God's enemies.

In other words, there is no hint anywhere in these accounts that God, or God's Champion, the rider on the white horse, is ever really threatened or in any real danger. God is in complete control. That God will win these battles is unquestioned.

Now let's take a look at the judgment.

It says that a great white throne is set up and books are opened. The dead are raised, and are judged according to what they had done in life as recorded in the books.

It also says that the "Book of Life" is opened. The Book of Life was mentioned back in chapter 13. Those whose names were written in The Lamb's Book of Life were the ones who refused to worship the Beast and receive his mark on their hands or foreheads.

What is interesting to me is that back in chapter 13 the names were already recorded in the Lamb's Book. So when we come to the Great White Throne judgment, the Lamb's

book is not blank. The names of those who are saved from death are already written there. The names are not written in the Lamb's Book on the basis of what the other books say. It is not on the basis of one's deeds that one's name is recorded in the Lamb's Book of Life.

So how do you get your name written there? I want MY name to be written there! John doesn't say. This is something we have to figure out based on what we know of the Gospel.

Since this is *The Lamb's Book*, I think it is safe to assume that the names in the book are the names of Jesus' followers, His sheep. And how do we become one of Jesus' sheep? Well, perhaps the best way to answer that is to look at what the Apostles themselves had to say when they brought the Gospel message out to the world.

For example, in Acts 16 we have a story of Paul and Silas, who were beaten and imprisoned and yet sang songs of praise to God in prison. In the night a miraculous earthquake threw open the prison, but Paul and Silas did not try to escape. The jailor, who heard and saw all of this, ran in and fell at Paul and Silas' feet and asked, "What must I do to be saved?"

This is the question. "What must I do to make sure my name is written in the Lamb's Book of Life?"

Now listen to Paul. He doesn't say, "Well, clean up your life. Make sure you don't lie or murder anyone and you'll be just fine." No! Paul says, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved."

John himself, in the opening words of his Gospel, tells us that Jesus came to His own people, the Jews, but they did not receive Him. "But to all who receive him, to those who believe in his name, he gives the right to be called children of God" (John 1:12). So if we "receive" Christ, if we believe that he died for our sins and we trust him for our salvation, then our names will be written in the Lamb's Book. It is not a matter of maintaining a perfect record. It is a gift. It is a matter of trust.

Okay, getting back to the text. We still have some issues here.

It appears that we have these different books. People are judged from the books that record their deeds. But what's the point? The Book of Life trumps all of the others! If your name isn't written there, you are condemned already. It doesn't seem to matter what the other books say! So why bother to open them?

Well, maybe people's lives are rehearsed to remind people of what they had done? Maybe it is to remind them of occasions when they could have trusted Christ, but decided to go their own way instead?

Whatever the case, the remaining question is about whether or not believers in Christ are part of this judgment. It makes no sense to me, if I understand the Gospel of Christ correctly, that Christians, in the end, will be punished for sins. The Good News of Jesus' death and resurrection is that he died to cancel my sin. I am washed "white as snow." How can I then be punished for sins? Was Christ's blood insufficient payment? Was God not satisfied, so in the end He must punish us anyway? This would be to deny the efficacy of Christ's atoning death. I don't think that God would do that. Maybe, for the Christians, this judgment is only to determine rewards? That's what some commentators maintain. That would make sense theologically, but we must admit that the text doesn't say this.

The most important part of all of this, though, is that we have our names written in the Lamb's Book of Life.

Right now, I'm going to say something to you that I know I've said many times before. It is just so very important that you understand this. – If you should die this very night, and find yourself standing before God, and He asked you, "Why should I let you into my heaven?" What would you say?

The right answer would be, "Because your Son died for my sins. It has nothing to do with my life, my goodness, my worthiness. I am entirely unworthy! But because of what Christ did for me on the cross of Calvary, I claim a place in your Kingdom. By your grace, my name is written in your Son's Book of Life."

Benediction

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. – 2 Corinthians 13:14