

**What about...? Revelation Wrap Up**  
**1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, Rev 20:1-10**

*Play song "Coffee" by Josh Woodward*

Friends do the words of this song feel familiar to you? They do for me "A firm routine of work and sleep and coffee, I'm not boring, I just stick to what I know!"

And this is what we know...get up get to work, get some coffee... get the kids to school, get the chores done, , do the laundry, do the groceries, get some coffee... get to meetings, make the phone calls, pay the bills...get some more coffee. Week after week, month after month, year after year...

And friends, pretty soon without even realizing it we begin to evaluate everything around us by what we know, by how well it fits within this comfortable routine we have for ourselves – and that can include our faith-

get up get to church, get some coffee! Sing the songs, listen to the sermon, get some coffee... right?

And we begin to evaluate the effectiveness of our faith on how well it translates into practical results for the routine of our everyday lives.

Is the bible giving me enough practical advice on how to deal with the stress, relationships, finances and parenting? Is it speaking to me daily about things in my life that I need help with? Is it inspiring me?

If the answer is "only sometimes... or maybe no..." then immediately we suspect that something isn't right – it isn't working for us, it's not fitting into our life, it's not addressing what we deem to be important and have thus centered our lives on.

So when it comes to books like Revelation, which are full of vivid images whose meanings are obscure, it's very easy to dismiss because it doesn't immediately relate to our lives or our current situation, it's not very practical.

But perhaps we realize that “this is the bible” after all, and therefore the Visions of Revelation must be important – and so we can’t just ignore them... so how can we fit these visions into our daily life?

So, we try to figure out how Revelation might be connected to some current events going on around us that we’re concerned about – and because Revelation is full of symbolic imagery that’s pretty easy to do.

So we’ve had people claiming that the reference to the mark of the beast in Rev 13:18 and how it’s connected to buying and selling means that it’s talking about bar codes, debit cards, or warning us about a gov’t scheme to put ID chips in our hands...

Others have stated that Babylon, the Great Prostitute from the 6<sup>th</sup> Vision is a symbol of the Pope, and the Vatican, because Babylon sits on the beast, whose seven heads are seven hills - which is a reference to Rome... and lots of people have an excuse to dislike the Roman Catholic Church.

And others are constantly watching political developments in Israel and the Middle East trying to connect them to the references in Rev 11 about the Holy City, and about the armies of Armageddon that cross the Euphrates River in Rev 15...

And it’s a popular pastime amongst the religious right to take the references about the antichrist from 1 and 2 John, and description of the beast from earth in the 4<sup>th</sup> vision and pin that on whoever is currently leading the democrats...

You wouldn’t believe how often Obama’s picture came up when I was searching for images about the beast to accompany the Vision Presentations.

And when we read the description of the locusts that come from the abyss in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Vision, it’s easy to think that perhaps the apostle John was seeing something from the distant future – like a military helicopter and doing his best to describe it in his own words...

Now – I’m just as concerned as the next guy about too much big brother gov’t and the dangers involved in that, and while I respect the Pope, I don’t think he’s infallible... and Middle Eastern political developments are always concerning, and I don’t agree with all of Obama’s policies.. and I can see how the description of the locusts could be applied to a helicopter...

But as someone who has done a fair bit of study and received a fair bit training to understand and teach the scriptures - I’m just not convinced that this is the way in which the way in which Christ intended the Visions of Revelation to speak into our lives, and to the concerns of the world we live in.

It’s too simplistic, it’s too focused on our immediate situation and it would mean that this book would have had nothing to say to the early church or any group of Christians until 1947 when Israel became a nation state.

Not to mention that such interpretations show complete disregard for taking the bible literally, because there are

different kinds of literature in the bible, and each needs to be handled in its own way.

So, when you encounter attempts to interpret Revelation and connect it to current events in this manner, friends - disregard them...

Instead, as we’ve seen in our overview of the seven visions, Revelation doesn’t necessarily address our current situation – as much as it defines it!

It helps us understand what it means to live in the time between times – between Christ’s first and second coming.

It tells us that we live in a time where Christ is still with his church; even if we can see him!

It encourages us to stay faithful to Christ in the midst of the opposition, persecution and temptation that we will inevitably experience if we are serious and committed to following Christ.

It reveals to us that there is a deeper spiritual conflict going on and that people and things are either for Christ or against him, there's no neutral ground...

And it makes us aware of how all the events that we see going on in this world around us – disaster, war, famine, disease, economic hardship...

These are not just random occurrences, but they are all factors in God's plan to move history towards that day when Jesus Christ will return to make all things new.

And so friends – we might say that Revelation speaks most directly to our lives because it reveals to us what we should truly center our lives on!

A pattern that is a bit different than a firm routine of work and sleep and coffee...

So in this regard the Visions of Revelation more are like that movie "An Inconvenient Truth." Let me explain.

Because of movies like "An Inconvenient Truth" we all know about the phenomena of global warming and climate change, and we've seen the signs too – the weather seems different, storms are more frequent and severe, we have hotter summers, longer winters...

So we've come to believe this is the context in which live and pursue our daily routines, and the inconvenient truth has caused many of us to change the way we pursue our daily routines – we bike instead of drive, recycle more, we switch to compact fluorescents, we buy a hybrid, we purchase green products, and so on...

And what we've read from the scriptures this morning friends can also be considered an inconvenient truth.

Because, if we truly understand and believe what we've read – regardless of whether it's convenient it requires that we adjust our "firm routines of work and sleep and coffee" because its true...

So this morning as we wrap up our series on Revelation, I want to take a closer look at the reference in the 7<sup>th</sup> Vision to the thousand year reign of Christ and the phenomena of “the rapture” that has become associated with it and look at how this affects our context and daily routine just like global warming and climate change do.

But to understand what those implications are we need to understand what we’re reading, so let’s look at these elements of the 7<sup>th</sup> Vision in chapter 20.

First, John sees an angel binding the devil, locking him up in an abyss, and John understands that this action means that Satan is unable to deceive the nations of this world.

Then John sees those who have been martyred for their faith in Christ, seated with him in Heaven.

John understands that this means that those who are persecuted and killed for their loyalty to Christ have not been defeated, they’ve actually won – they reign with Christ!

And then John sees the devil let loose for a short time where he deceives the world in an attempt to do battle against God’s people – but the devil and his forces are effortlessly destroyed in final and complete judgment in the lake of fire

And somehow John can see and comes to know that these events take place over a long indefinite period of time, which he describes as 1000 years – a millennium. (and if you’ve ever heard Christians talking about pre-mill, post-mill etc... this is the millennium they are referring too)

So, while the length of this time period is indefinite – because we don’t know when Christ will return, the demarcation points and its characteristics are not, it has a beginning, a middle and an ending, and these are important to note.

The event which marks the beginning of this time period is the binding of the devil, which was accomplished at the first coming of Jesus through the ministry as he resisted the temptations of Satan in the wilderness and cast out demons, and proclaimed the good news of the kingdom of heaven.

Listen to what Jesus says in Luke 11 <sup>20</sup> *“But if I drive out demons by the finger of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.”* <sup>21</sup> *“When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own house, his possessions are safe.”* <sup>22</sup> *“But when someone stronger attacks and overpowers him, he takes away the armor in which the man trusted and divides up his plunder.”*

At Christ’s first coming Satan was bound, his power was limited, and He cannot prevent the nations from responding to the good news of the kingdom of God anymore.

However – while he may be bound, Satan has not yet been destroyed. And while he cannot deceive, he can still incite persecution and provide seductive alternatives which appeal to our sinful nature.

So, those whom Christ has delivered from the power of the devil, who stay faithful in spite of what the devil can still do - and seem to have been utterly defeated from a human perspective are actually the victors in the 7<sup>th</sup> Vision.

They are rewarded for their loyalty unto death by receiving positions of authority with Christ in heaven where they reign with him.

This is the background for Paul’s statement in 1 Thessalonians 4:13 when he says *“We do not want you to be uninformed about those who sleep in death”*

In other words – death, for those who follow Christ, by natural causes or by persecution – only ushers us into the presence of Christ in heaven where we reign with Christ.

This is why Christ said to the thief on the cross *“truly I tell you today you will be with me in paradise!”* (Luke 23:42)

So this vision reveals that what characterizes this “1000 year time period” – which is the time between times - is a futile and unsuccessful attempt to get rid of the church through the persecution of Christians.

Instead we are assured that disciples will be made of all nations - just as Christ had commanded.

However, this activity will not continue indefinitely.

To show that the Devil truly deserves the judgment that is coming to him, he will be released for a short time and he will go right back to his old habits of deceiving the nations, and effectively prevent the church from making disciples.

Furthermore, he will gather together all those who do not follow Christ together for one final attempt to destroy the Church.

However for this action he and all those who have gathered to destroy the church will be swiftly destroyed – their final and complete judgment symbolized in the vision where John sees them cast into the lake of burning sulfur.

What a vision of comfort for those Christians of all ages who have suffered persecution and have been tortured and killed for following Christ.

What a vision of insight for those of us who live in times and places where we do not experience this kind of persecution for following Christ.

And what a reminder about the time in which we live – a reminder about becoming so wrapped up in our firm routines of work and sleep and coffee that we forget this is the Millennium!

We live in a time where Christ reigns in heaven!

This is the time when we ought to be wrapped up in the firm routine of disciple making, sleep and coffee in order to fulfill the great commission. - Because the devil has been bound!

But it won't last forever...so friends we must strike while the iron is hot!

So knowing we live in this context means we might adjust our daily routine to something like getting up and spending time in prayer and scripture – and then getting coffee.

Or being intentional about taking the opportunities that come up during the day with family, friends, co-workers - whoever to share the gospel – to tell them that a better day is coming - and then drinking coffee!

And perhaps it also means that we need to routinely make worship a part of our week-end activities – where we can gatherer together to praise God... and drink coffee!

Also we might need to adjust things so that we routinely give back to God 10% of what He gives to us in order to support our church's efforts to make disciples and to provide funds to purchase coffee ☺

Are we in the habit of routinely inviting people to church with us, routinely attending Christ Care groups, routinely looking for ways to serve with our gifts in the Body of Christ so that

more people might become disciples – because we've served them a nice cup of coffee!

You get the picture....

But friends, the inconvenient truth in all of this is that success in making disciples in the times between times, victory during the 1000 years is achieved through sacrifice and suffering.

Scripture tells us that we must be last before we will be made first, (Mark 9:35) that we must be weak in order to be made strong (2 Cor 12:10) that if they persecuted and killed the master, how much more the followers... (Matt 10:24)

But... the inconveniences friends - the challenges, difficulties, set-backs, or even persecution and martyrdom, they don't mean defeat – ultimately they mean victory!

And we need to look at 1 Thessalonians 4 give for a wonderful description of how this victory will ultimately play out at the



return of our Lord Jesus – the end of the thousand year period where Christ’s reign in heaven will come to earth.

One day He will come down from heaven, and none of his followers dead or alive will miss it... because those who died during the millennium will be resurrected to their new bodies...

and those who are still alive at the time will be transformed - and all of us will be caught up, or “raptured” to use the Old English term, into the clouds to meet Christ in the air.

Now friends this isn’t a vision – it’s Paul’s description of the actual event, and it sounds pretty incredible and pretty hard to miss - Christ descending from the clouds and people all over the world being transformed and resurrected and rising up into the air to meet him!

So this is why the term “**rapture**” gets all the attention – it a bit out of the ordinary and spectacular, but it’s really Christ’s

**return** that we should be focusing on, because it helps make sense of why we are caught up in air, or “raptured.”

Paul and the rest of the New Testament writers use a particular word for Christ’s “return” and in vs. 15 we would read “we who are still alive, who are left until the “*parousia*” of the Lord”

And while we might technically translate it is as “coming or return” there’s a great deal lost in translation.

You see in the ancient world a “parousia” was what happened when a King made an official state visit to one of his cities.

And when this happened, the leading citizens and dignitaries of that city would go out and receive him when He was a short distance outside the city and they proceeded to honor him and show support for his rule by following him back as He made his entrance into the city.

So friends the “rapture” isn’t about us leaving this world to reign in heaven with Christ for a thousand years as some interpretations would have you believe.

The rapture is how we are enabled to meet the coming Jesus as the returning King of this world at his “Parousia.”

As his followers, we are considered to be the leading citizens and dignitaries of this world... so we will meet him on his return as he descends from heaven and we will accompany him back to the earth as He brings the Kingdom of Heaven in its fullness – Victory!

And at that time the indefinite period of the Millennium will give way to the infinite age of the New Heavens and the New Earth, where - as we heard the 7<sup>th</sup> Vision say loud and clear last week...

*“The dwelling of God is with humans, and He will live with them. They will be his people and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their*

*eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away!”*

(Rev 21:3-4)

Amen!

So, friends as we wrap up this series on Revelation and you’re reflecting on what specific things you can take and apply to your day to day life of work and sleep and coffee...

Reflect on what we’ve covered today – reflect on what it means to live in the time between times, to live in the thousand year reign of Christ - and keep this in mind, as you go about your daily routines – let it always be on the horizon of your consciousness.

Think about it, ponder it, meditate on it – as you drink your coffee... so that it shapes your outlook and your actions – even more so than the realities of flooding or global warming and climate change have – because as Paul says “*we do not*

*grieve like the rest of mankind who have no hope!" (1 Thess 4:13)*

So help out with flood relief, continue to give to the poor and needy, heal the sick, comfort the lonely, teach others about Christ – but do so as a statement that one day there will be new world where there will be no more poor and needy, no more sickness, no one who is lonely, and no one who does not know Christ!

Friends one day it will be so - because we know... Christ has died, Christ has risen, and Christ will come again.

Amen.