

Coming to morning worship in October

Revelation

There are so many different takes on how the end of time will be resolved that the tendency among believers is to either avoid studying the book of *Revelation* altogether, or to congregate only with people who already share one's end-time ideologies. In "camps" we can lob barbs and invective at others who see things differently. Some churches actually elevate a specific end-time posture to their published "Belief Statements" to the end that anyone who sees things differently would probably not feel very welcome. I cannot quite bring myself to draw such a line in the sand over events that have yet to take place.

Don't get me wrong. I am what is typically dubbed *amillennial* and am fairly entrenched in that position, but I stand in fellowship with some fairly-entrenched *premillennialists* - and - who knows? - there might even be an old-school *postmillennialist* running around the church. (**Relax**, I don't expect everyone to be familiar with all the terms - I'm working on a point.) As an *amillennialist*, I am a target for invectives like "spiritualizer" and "anti-Semite". One of the most popular writers on the topic from a couple of decades ago even tossed in "demon-possessed." Obviously, I don't care for hearing any of that, but neither do I like to hear invectives like "sensationalist", "literalizer" or "wild-eyed" tossed back at my brothers on the other side (or "dinosaur" if that maverick *postmillennialist* is indeed out there). Is it any wonder that so many churches avoid *Revelation* for as long as possible? Is it any wonder that so many believers now profess to be *pan-millennial* (it will all pan out)?

Before there were amillennialists, premillennialists (historic or dispensational), postmillennialists, preterists or semi-preterists, (see **Relax** from the previous paragraph) there were seven churches in Asia Minor struggling, against every wind of societal influence, to maintain their bearings as faithful witnesses for Jesus Christ. They were the primary audience of *Revelation*, and I am resolved to bear that in mind throughout our study of the letter. After all, behind every magnificent image in the book, there was a need for those churches to remain faithful, joyful peaceful and hopeful.

Revelation is not an end-time puzzle book. It is filled with images of hope and promise, for without hope and promise, it is impossible for churches to truly exist as outposts of the eternal kingdom. In spite of all that those seven churches were facing, hope and promise would help them (as it will help us) . . .

- 1) to keep our first love and to serve Him from that posture **(Ephesus)**
- 2) to maintain a confident witness for Christ in the face of severe testing **(Smyrna)**
- 3) to remain untingered when compromise with the culture seems to be the only means of spiritual survival **(Pergamum)**
- 4) to remain pure in a world filled with sensual enticements **(Thyatira)**
- 5) to resist a complacent posture of simply going through spiritual motions **(Sardis)**
- 6) to rest in the assurance of divine protection that comes from faithfulness **(Philadelphia)**
- 7) to cherish the presence of Jesus over the material counterfeits of "prosperity" and "success" **(Laodicea)**

So, we have our work cut out for us if we are to remain “seven-churches-centric” in our study of *Revelation* rather than “camp-of-interpretation-centric”. It is impossible that at the end of time, every camp of interpretation can be proven right. I suppose it *IS* possible that we might all be proven a little wrong here and there. Frankly, *Revelation* belongs to a genre of literature with which modern western readers have no other experience. But, believers from every era of Christianity have benefited and will continue to benefit from a message of hope and promise as they endeavor to endure as faithful witnesses for Christ. I think that we all can agree that the Victor’s blow was struck at Golgotha and that we now live in a period of “mopping up” before the final and certain consummation of all things. For this reason,

. . . Blessed is the one who reads the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it, because the time is near. – Revelation 1:3

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