



St. Paul Lutheran Church

“Your Refuge from the Storm”

LifeGroup Study

July 28, 2024 Revelation 10; Psalm 49

READING RESOURCES: *Revelation and the End of All Things* by Craig R. Koester.

Community

TODAY'S THEME

A voice from heaven interrupts the final catastrophic judgment of the world. This message is good news for everyone who hears it.

WHAT DO WE WANT OUR SMALL GROUP TO KNOW?

To live as God's people is to experience both the sweet and the bitter. In fact, to live as God's people, we should expect both the sweet and the bitter. Our society is not much different than Ephesus. We have built temples for idols. We have conformed, living compromised, comfortable lives. This is a call for us to trust the cross, live into the Kingdom of God as a forgiven people, and confront society's claims of divinity.

WHAT DO WE WANT OUR SMALL GROUP TO DO?

We want our worshippers to appropriately judge those things in our society and lives that need to be straightened out and made right (examples include genocide, apartheid, racism, sexism, drug dealing, murder, and child abuse). We also want ourselves, as worshippers, to carefully examine our own lives, identify places where we are living in conformed and compromised ways, and make the necessary changes to join the transformative mission in the redeeming movement of God.

INTRODUCTION: BLOCKING THE BITTER

“Can't stand your grandmother's bitter Brussels sprouts? Instead of dousing them in butter or feeding them to the dog, you may soon have a scientific option – codenamed GIV3727.

“The recently discovered molecule is a bitter blocker that contains just the right combination of carbon, oxygen, and hydrogen atoms to protect your tongue from bitter substances. It's part of the latest fashion in the food industry – synthetic taste compounds pieced together in a laboratory that work like the volume knob on a stereo, turning the sensitivity of your taste buds up or down.

“With the synthetic approach, we can dream up chemical structures beyond what nature gives us to block different tastes,” said Jay Slack, a molecular biotechnologist.”

ICEBREAKER

What's your favorite sweet thing to eat? What will you simply not eat? Why? What comes to mind when you hear the word “bitter?”

PRAY TOGETHER

Father God, we know that life is filled with things that are bitter and sweet. Lead us, by your Holy Spirit, to understand our call to be

the lived witness of Jesus Christ in the world. Help us to hear your sweet words of hope in Revelation today, and commit ourselves to become part of your redeeming movement in the world. Open your Word to us in this time together. Amen.

Content

BACKGROUND

The letter of Revelation confronts a society that was steeped in the hubris of Rome and the imperial cult that grew out of this hubris. This included emperor worship and massive building projects to further that worship. The letter implies only sporadic and local persecution. Jews and Christians had a relatively peaceful relationship with their neighbors in Asia Minor. Many of them were wealthy (Laodicea, Pergamum) and living compromised lives with the dominant social order. However, if the visions in Revelation were true, the situation would have to change. Christians would have to be spiritually awakened and confront Rome's divine claims. This would certainly bring persecution.

Our text from Revelation leans heavily into Daniel 12, Ezekiel 3, and Jeremiah 15:16. One feature of Revelation is the presence of two interludes, one coming before the seventh seal is broken and the other before the seventh trumpet is sounded. These interludes give us some idea about how John understands God. The interludes interrupt the relentless pace of God's wrath. God is able to show restraint and complete control. God is not going berserk. God is not “seeing red.” John's visions reveal to us a God that is certainly passionate but able to self-reflect.

John was familiar with the Pauline letters and their use in worship. Revelation was a public letter intended to be read as a whole by the community in worship. If we were a part of this community listening to the first nine chapters of Revelation, we would be on the edge of our seats. Plagues have rained down, and still the people do not repent. Now this angel comes. Is there more judgment? This angel must be terrible indeed; the seven thunders are more frightening than ever. But a voice comes from heaven, creating space for God's Word, a Word that is both bitter and sweet.

(Read Revelation 10 together.)

BREAKING IT INTO PIECES

The Angel: The angel is wrapped in a cloud, with pillars of fire for legs, as a reminder of God's guidance (Exodus 13: 21). The rainbow signifies God's promise (Genesis 9: 16). The angel's face is like the sun; the image of Christ (Revelation 1:16). The angel speaks like a roaring lion, revealing God's self (Amos 3:8, Job 37:5). The angel has one foot on land and the other on sea, a visual of God's authority over all the earth, including Jew, Christian, and Gentile. The angel is a vision of a transcendent, loving God of the promise.

DISCUSSION What has this angel come to accomplish? Do you think there is any relationship between this text and the Aslan character of C.S. Lewis?

The Worship: The angel worships God, and declares that, despite the previous warnings and judgments, God's nature is not destructor. This worship echoes the worship in Revelation 4:11. The true nature of God is Creator; this is God's fundamental identity. God calls for people to repent; that repentance is not easy, and what they are "turning back to" is the creator God.

DISCUSSION What good news do you see here? How is the mystery of God revealed to you on a daily basis?

The Announced Fulfilled Mystery of God: The seventh trumpet announces the gospel of the Kingdom of God. The kingdom of the world has become the Kingdom of Jesus Christ (Revelation 11:15). This is the same Kingdom that was announced in Isaiah 2. This is good news! God has been consistent in imagining for us a reconciled and redeemed world.

DISCUSSION Look at Isaiah 2. Do you see the consistency of God as these two texts connect? What good news do you see here?

The Seven Thunders: John is able to write about the seven seals and seven trumpets, but not the seven thunders. Why? The prophet doesn't claim to know everything (1 Corinthians 13:12-13, 2 Corinthians 12:1-4). God's purposes are not ultimately destructive, but saving. There is divine mystery, and to try to understand or answer the whole mystery of God is to delay living into the mystery. The time of waiting and hoping is over. God is free to be God, not conformed to a code or an apocalyptic system. God is relational and flexible.

DISCUSSION Do you believe that God is relational and flexible? If the time for waiting and hoping is over, what's next?

The Little Scroll: The words "little book" are only used 3 times in the New Testament, and all three times occur in this text. The book was "little" in size to the angel, and appropriately-sized to be eaten by humans. But the distinction is not between big and little; the distinction is between sealed and open. What was previously sealed had been opened by the only one who could do it: the Lamb, Jesus Christ. John eats the scroll (Ezekiel 3, Jeremiah 15:16) so that he can know the message and make the prophetic announcements about many nations, languages and kings. God's word is for every tribe, every nation, giving hope to all people. This is a call for the faithful to reach out beyond themselves with the lived witness of Jesus Christ. This is a sweet word of hope, of salvation, but a bitter word because God's witnesses will be persecuted and God's Word will be ignored.

DISCUSSION All people? Everywhere? Really? Talk together about that! Talk about how this Word can be both bitter and sweet.

GOING DEEPER: JUDGMENT

To live in God's judgment is to live within God's redemptive purposes. As a society we have judged many things. We have judged genocide and called it horrendous. We have judged apartheid, racism, sexism, drug dealing, murder, child abuse, and found them abhorrent. To judge is to make right, to straighten out, and to redeem. God's intensive purpose in judging the world is not ultimately to blame, shame or deny, but to straighten out, redeeming the world. This brings shouts of joy from the lips of all creation. For God to interrupt God's judgment is a really big deal. It tells us that history is moving, is going somewhere under the guidance of God. The interruption has a purpose, and its purpose is to remind us that we are partners in this redeeming movement of God.

DISCUSSION How is this perspective on judgment different than what you may have thought before today? Does it give you encouragement to believe that history is going somewhere under the guidance of God?

Application

DISCUSSION

(Refer to the "what do we want our small group to know" section on the previous page.) How do we live conformed lives? Compromised lives? Comfortable lives? What does it mean to trust the cross?

This week, identify one area of conformity, compromise, and comfort in your life. Confront this one area this week, repent, pray for the Holy Spirit to be at work to change you, and come back to the group to report what happened.

PRAY TOGETHER

Lord God, you call us to repent, to admit our fears and failures, and turn in a new direction. You call us to reach out beyond ourselves with the lived witness of Jesus Christ. We want to become part of your dream of a reconciled and redeemed world. Teach us how to live into your prayer: "thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." Amen.

ADDITIONAL CONVERSATION AND REFLECTION

Prayer

REVELATION 15:3-11

These verses comprise a "song of salvation," and echo the words in Exodus 15. Giving thanks to God in prayer for God's goodness and faithfulness in our daily lives is a privilege that we sometimes overlook. As you read this passage, can you imagine music along with it? As you read these words, can you make them yours by recalling the things for which you are grateful today?

Revelation 10:1-11 NLT Then I saw another mighty angel coming down from heaven, surrounded by a cloud, with a rainbow over his head. His face shone like the sun, and his feet were like pillars of fire. (2) And in his hand was a small scroll that had been opened. He stood with his right foot on the sea and his left foot on the land. (3) And he gave a great shout like the roar of a lion. And when he shouted, the seven thunders answered. (4) When the seven thunders spoke, I was about to write. But I heard a voice from heaven saying, "Keep secret what the seven thunders said, and do not write it down." (5) Then the angel I saw standing on the sea and on the land raised his right hand toward heaven. (6) He swore an oath in the name of the one who lives forever and ever, who created the heavens and everything in them, the earth and everything in it, and the sea and everything in it. He said, "There will be no more delay. (7) When the seventh angel blows his trumpet, God's mysterious plan will be fulfilled. It will happen just as he announced it to his servants the prophets." (8) Then the voice from heaven spoke to me again: "Go and take the open scroll from the hand of the angel who is standing on the sea and on the land." (9) So I went to the angel and told him to give me the small scroll. "Yes, take it and eat it," he said. "It will be sweet as honey in your mouth, but it will turn sour in your stomach!" (10) So I took the small scroll from the hand of the angel, and I ate it! It was sweet in my mouth, but when I swallowed it, it turned sour in my stomach. (11) Then I was told, "You must prophesy again about many peoples, nations, languages, and kings."



Daily Walk on the Rock

July 28, 2024 Revelation 10; Psalm 49

Monday

REVELATION 16

The bowl judgments are God’s final and complete judgment of the earth. The end has arrived. What contents are in each bowl of wrath? Why are these plagues worse than the ones ushered in by the trumpets? The angel in charge of the waters reacts to the outpouring of God’s wrath not with pain or sorrow, but with a recognition of divine justice (5-6). Verses 9-21 tell us that the people realize these judgments come from God, but they still refuse to recognize God’s authority and repent of their sins. Instead, they curse him for sending the judgments. How would you explain the necessity of these plagues to someone who is not a Christian? What are you doing to “stay awake” in preparation for Christ’s return (15)?

Tuesday

REVELATION 17

The destruction of Babylon, mentioned in 16:17-21, is described in greater detail here. The great prostitute represents the early Roman Empire with its many gods and the blood of Christian martyrs on its hands. Compare the woman and the beast to the first and second beasts of chapter 13. What here is the ultimate sin (5-6)? It is easy for Christians to become infatuated with worldly power. Which wrongs in our society today have entrapped you from time to time? How has God enabled you to escape the snares of the great prostitute? Are you seeking a mind with wisdom (9)? What wisdom will you seek in the next few weeks? If you do not understand the meaning of the various beasts, have you at least been frightened by the power of evil? How will you change that fear into action and hope?

Wednesday

REVELATION 18:1-14

This chapter shows that everything trying to block God’s purposes will come to a violent end. How do the voices from the world greet the fall of Babylon (9-20)? Why do they mourn? Why does God judge Babylon so harshly (20, 24)? How are believers treated by the world today? Being wealthy, powerful, or famous often leads people to believe that they have no need for God, or anyone else. Why is that? What “items of merchandise” have you bought and valued more than God? Is there a part of your life that is falling apart or eroding right now? Ponder the most important lesson you have learned from this passage.

Thursday

REVELATION 18:15-24

Compare this passage with the following Old Testament prophecies about the fall of Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 19), Babylon

(Isaiah 13:47) and Tyre (Ezekiel 27-28). How are they examples of the fall of this spiritual Babylon? God’s people should not live for that which is worthless in eternity. This, then, is how you should live: Matthew 22:37-40! What actions will you take based on this insight?

Friday

REVELATION 19

Silence came with the fall of Babylon (18:22). What characterizes the new scene in heaven? Who participates in the praise? What is the most frequent refrain in the songs of praise? What do you learn about God’s character? How do you express your gratitude to God? Has your interest in worshipping and praising God increased or decreased since the beginning of your study of Revelation? Why? Do you think it is fitting that Christ has a name “that no one knows but himself” (12)? The rider wields a sharp sword in his mouth (15). Who are the combatants of this war (19-21)? Who wins? What hopes and fears does this triumphant picture bring out in you? How has Jesus been your deliverer?

Saturday

REVELATION 20

Why is Satan bound, and then freed for awhile (1-3)? What do you think life will be like without Satan deceiving the nations, but “the souls of those who had been beheaded for their testimony to Jesus and for the word of God” reigning with God instead? What is the final fate of the beast, false prophet, and Satan (7-10)? In 12-15 we are told the books will be opened. Who will be judged, and who will be exempt at the “great white throne” judgment? What do you find comforting and disturbing in this chapter? Imagine a book made of your life, with every thought and deed recorded and then read by all, including Jesus. How would you feel? Does that call for some changes in your life, beginning today? Spend time in prayer.

Sunday

PSALM 105

Like Psalm 78, this psalm is a lengthy run-down of Israel’s ancient history. The writer suggests that a valuable way to find God is to become familiar with the way God has helped his people in the past. Do you find comfort in remembering God’s wonders? How has God come through for you when you saw no way out? Consider how the Lord provides for you beyond your expectations. This is the day the Lord has made; give thanks to God and proclaim his greatness! Praise God for his love overflowing!