



REVELATION AND THE END OF THE WORLD

SMALL GROUP
STUDY GUIDE

ZUMBRO LUTHERAN CHURCH
FALL 2012

A Glimpse of Heaven

OPENING PRAYER: Holy Lord, we long for a glimpse of your eternal kingdom. As we see and experience suffering and injustice on earth, help us to trust that your will is being done, and that with your help we can persevere and be faithful. Amen.

KEY VERSE:...and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes. —Revelation 7:17

CHECK-IN: Reconnect with people in your group.

Much of the focus of this section of Revelation is on worship in heaven. In that light, what's one of the most meaningful parts of worship (on earth, of course) for you?

SECTION SUMMARY: As this section begins, we catch with John the first glimpse of God's radiant throne. Even as chapter 3 ends with Christ knocking at the door, here the door is open to us – so we can see what has been promised, and what those who do not yet have faith are missing. John hears the sound of worship – the redeemed praising, singing and giving thanks to God. In the midst of this steps the Lamb, who has taken his place as the savior of the world. The Lamb is the only one worthy to break the seals of the scroll that sets forth God's will and plan for redemption.

As those seals are broken one by one, they seem to unleash terrible calamities and suffering on earth. John is alluding to very real threats his readers faced: violence, economic hardship, persecution and martyrdom, death. Does this mean God causes these things to happen? Does it mean they are God's will? Or is John offering reassurance to those who are experiencing or witnessing them that God is still present?

Note: If you missed the sermon on Sunday, you can find a copy on the website at www.zumbrolutheran.org, pick up a copy at the ushers' stand, or hear the podcast version on itunes.

REVELATION 4:1-6 (New Revised Standard Version)

After this I looked, and there in heaven a door stood open! And the first voice, which I had heard speaking to me like a trumpet, said, 'Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this.' At once I was in the spirit, and there in heaven stood a throne, with one seated on the throne! And the one seated there looks like jasper and cornelian, and around the throne is a rainbow that looks like an emerald. Around the throne are twenty-four thrones, and seated on the thrones are twenty-four elders, dressed in white robes, with golden crowns on their heads. Coming from the throne are flashes of lightning, and rumblings and peals of thunder, and in front of the throne burn seven flaming torches, which are the seven spirits of God; and in front of the throne there is something like a sea of glass, like crystal.

Around the throne, and on each side of the throne, are four living creatures, full of eyes in front and behind.

Chapter 4 starts with a glimpse of heaven. But John is careful not to describe God's being.

Why do you think that is?

Does that help or hinder your imagination of God?

REVELATION 5:1-14 (New Revised Standard Version)

Then I saw in the right hand of the one seated on the throne a scroll written on the inside and on the back, sealed with seven seals; and I saw a mighty angel proclaiming with a loud voice, 'Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?' And no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll or to look into it. And I began to weep bitterly because no one was found worthy to open the scroll or to look into it. Then one of the elders said to me, 'Do not weep. See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered, so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals.'

Then I saw between the throne and the four living creatures and among the elders a Lamb standing as if it had been slaughtered, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth. He went and took the scroll from the right hand of the one who was seated on the throne. When he had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell before the Lamb, each holding a harp and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. They sing a new song:

'You are worthy to take the scroll
and to open its seals,
for you were slaughtered and by your blood you ransomed for God
saints from every tribe and language and people and nation;
you have made them to be a kingdom and priests serving our God,
and they will reign on earth.'

Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels surrounding the throne and the living creatures and the elders; they numbered myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands, singing with full voice,

'Worthy is the Lamb that was slaughtered
to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might
and honour and glory and blessing!'

Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, singing,
'To the one seated on the throne and to the Lamb
be blessing and honour and glory and might
for ever and ever!'

And the four living creatures said, 'Amen!' And the elders fell down and worshipped.

What words or images stay with you?

At the beginning of chapter 5, John hears the trumpets and expects to see the Lion of Judah, a powerful descendant of King David who will peacefully restore Israel. But instead, in walks "a Lamb standing as if it had been slaughtered." The Lamb is Jesus. It is the prevailing image of Revelation. Still, even in the book of Revelation, God's coming reign sounds triumphant.

What does the image of the Lamb say to you about Jesus?

How does that image transform our view of God's coming reign?

In John's vision, the angel stands holding a scroll marked with seven seals. The Lamb is the only one worthy to break the seals. As the first four seals are broken, four riders on horses appear. Each brings terrible suffering: conquest, violence, economic hardship and death.

How do these violent images make you feel?

We often embrace the idea that God loves everybody, and that Jesus came to bring peace and love, not violence and unrest. But here God seems powerful and judgmental. It is as if John wants us to feel a sense of trepidation of what is to come.

Why do you think that is? Where is John trying to take us?

How do you respond to that image of God?

At the end of chapter 6, John cries out "who is able to stand?"

How would you answer that question?

What does that tell us about our need for faith?

REVELATION 7:13-17 (New Revised Standard Version)

Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, 'Who are these, robed in white, and where have they come from?' I said to him, 'Sir, you are the one that knows.' Then he said to me, 'These are they who have come out of the great ordeal; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

For this reason they are before the throne of God,
and worship him day and night within his temple,
and the one who is seated on the throne will shelter them.

They will hunger no more, and thirst no more;
the sun will not strike them,
nor any scorching heat;
for the Lamb at the centre of the throne will be their shepherd,
and he will guide them to springs of the water of life,
and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.'

We read these verses on All Saints' Day. They evoke the words of several Old Testament prophets (Ezekiel 37:27, Isaiah 49:10, Isaiah 25:8).

What does this image say to you about eternal life?

How does the fulfilling of these promises add to your understand of the book of Revelation?

GROUP PRAYER: Lord, we remember these saints who have gone before us...

CLOSING PRAYER (in unison): As we face each day here on earth, give us strength and compassion in the face of suffering. Give us confidence that you keep your promises. Give us the sure and certain hope of resurrection and eternal life in your presence. And give us faithful hearts that trust in you. Amen.

HOMEWORK: Revelation 8-12