

Curtain Call

Scripture: Revelation 1-5
Date: November 8, 2020

WONDER – Revelation 1

DARK TIMES

In many theater performances - plays, musicals etc. – you might receive a program that listed what was going to happen and who was involved in the production. If we were to have received a program on January 1, 2020 the listed program would have been very different from what happened.

A viral pandemic called Covid 19 swept the globe distancing us physically, socially, emotionally and challenging us economically, psychologically. In addition racial tensions erupted – again – in the spring / summer but with an energy and anger not seen in recent months. It's like we received a program to the wrong event !!!

The Christian church in the first century were also in a context that had major swings. They had experienced the good news of Jesus Christ yet there had been many persecutions – from fellow Jews and the Roman leaders alike. Most of the apostles were martyred and gone and they were now on their own.

They – like us – might have wondered where God is in the midst of these dark times. How can we worship, how can we fellowship, how can we minister when everything seems set against us.

REVELATION

The book of Revelation begins with a word translated as revelation and the Greek word behind this is *apocalypse*. This is a word that many in today's culture see as an ending – a horrific ending - a tragic ending. But in the first century that word had a different meaning – it alluded to a beginning because it was an understanding of the opening of a curtain in a play or performance. It was a revealing of what was about to happen. More of a beginning than an ending.

WISDOM – Revelation 2/3

LETTERS – YOU'VE GOT MAIL

Into this place of wondering if God still is - God speaks. The covenant God, the relational God, the incarnate God speaks. He speaks in the form of a vision to a man named John and speaks through the form of letters to the churches he pastored.

This God continues to connect - this God continues to communicate letters of encouragement and letters of affirmation to the churches that He reigns over.

CHURCHES

The letters were addressed to the churches in Asia Minor - not to be inclusive of all churches but perhaps markers by which all churches can see themselves. The letters were written to Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodocia but would have been read by many others.

CHRIST

The letters which revealed the author in their greeting. Jesus reveals – apocalypses Himself – through descriptions that remind the readers – then and now – of Jesus’ glory. They were descriptions seen in the first vision to John in chapter 1 and were also repeated in the greetings to each church.

Ephesus – where Jesus walks amongst them is found in Revelation 1: 13, 20 & Revelation 2: 1 .
 Smyrna – where Jesus is the first and last / He who died and rose again is found in Revelation 1: 5, 17b, 18 & Revelation 2:8. Pergamum - where Jesus is the sharp double edged sword in Revelation 1: 16 & Revelation 2: 12. Thyatira where Jesus has eyes that are blazing fire and feet are burnished bronze in Revelation 1: 14 & Revelation 2: 18. Sardis where Jesus holds the Seven spirits of God & Seven stars in Revelation 1:20 and Revelation 3:1. Philadelphia where Jesus is holy and true & holds key of David in Revelation 1: 18 & Revelation 3:7 and in Laodocia where Jesus is the Amen, the faithful witness, the ruler of God’s creation in Revelation 1: 5 & Revelation 3: 14

COMPLIMENT / CRITIQUE

Jesus reaches into the context of each church indicating that He knows their context and indicating that He knows their condition. He knows the suffering and the persecution from without. He knows the strength – and the weakness of their hearts of faith and He knows the impact of their deeds of faith. To some churches He challenged them and to many He comforted them.

Ephesus - with its lost first love, Smyrna - with its suffering and persecution even unto death. Pergamum - with it’s compromise on a double edged sword, Thyatira - with its growth in faith but its allowance of corruption. Sardis - with its appearance of being awake but in reality asleep / dead, Philadelphia - with the offer of an open door to survive this world into the next and Laodocia - the church that is neither hot nor cold.

CALLING

But to each of these churches Jesus calls out. He calls out to listen to Him when He declares that those who have ears to hear – let them hear. He also calls out to them to persevere. To those who are victorious Jesus will give rewards – gifts.

There is a challenge – an opportunity – for the church to not be passive receivers but to receive and respond to the challenge from Jesus. To be His people, to be His church, to be His light in the world around us for His glory and by His grace.

WORSHIP – Revelation 4/5

SCROLLS - MYSTERY

John's vision from God continues as it transitions from the letters to the churches specifically to the letter to the church generally. There are many images, metaphors of what is next through chapters 6-21 but chapters 4 and 5 set the tone. The Vision continues with a mystery as the next act as there are scrolls presented in Revelation 5: 2 but no one is able to open them.

There is a lot of imagery in chapters 4 and 5 – a throne with someone sitting on it, twenty-four elders sitting on their thrones. There is thunder and lightning, there is a rainbow and there are four creatures - a lion, an ox and two other hard to describe creatures.

For many, the interest in Revelation is all about the mystery – what do the images and numbers mean? While they do have importance the greater focus isn't as much about the content than it is about the Christ – God Himself with us.

SAVIOUR - MAJESTY

If you've ever gone to a theatre and gone backstage - especially between productions - it is massive, it is complex and it is also very empty. In the movie (and play) The Wizard of Oz a character named Dorothy travels to meet a wizard that can help her get back to Kansas. But when she goes behind the curtain she finds just an ordinary man.

JESUS IS WORTHY

When we seek Revelation – and one able to open the scrolls – we don't want an empty stage or just an ordinary man. Fortunately, with Christ there is nothing empty and in Him is all fullness of life and wisdom and love.

The image offered in chapter 5 is that of a lion and a lamb. A lion – ruler / king and a lamb – innocent and a sacrifice. Jesus represents both and the text illustrates both in Revelation 4: 8, 11 and in Revelation 5: 9, 12.

JESUS IS WORSHIPPED

In these declarations Jesus Christ is worshipped by the images represented in the vision. He who is worthy is worshipped and He who is a mystery is also a majesty. The text declares these acts of worship in Revelation 4: 8 and Revelation 5: 11, 12-14.

These images are massive, they are majestic and they are mysterious. But they reminds us - in case we forget – that the church is about Jesus. His life, His death and His resurrection that calls the church into being, that challenges the church to become more and comforts it in its journey forward.

CURTAIN CALL**BEHOLD**

There is a Greek word *idou* that is used in Revelation over 20 times and has variances almost 100 times in Revelation. Its core meaning is Look but it's more than just seeing – it is a command an imperative. One of the keys to Revelation – the opening of the curtain and the unveiling of what's behind it – is to look. To look and see what God has to say and to look and see what God is doing.

For those who have ears to hear and for those who have eyes to see.
Come !

AMEN