

Pastor Don Nelson

Sermon: May 16, 2010
Beverly E.C.C., Chicago, IL

“THY KINGOM COME”
Revelation 11:15-19

→ **“The Holy Scriptures... are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that all God’s people may be thoroughly equipped for every good work”** (Second Timothy 3:15-17).

○ Some do not believe Revelation is at all useful. They accurately point out that it is hard to interpret and has frequently been abused, sometimes with terrible results. Then they go further and claim the book is so confusing, distracting, and divisive that it cannot be salvaged. At best, they disregard it. At worst, they deride it.

○ Some believe it is useful above all. To them it is a litmus test that saves us from false teachers *before* the tribulation, a forecast of how God will save his Church *from* the tribulation, a survival guide by which those who are left behind will be saved *through* the tribulation. At best, they obsess over it. At worst, they use it to hurt people.

Both groups are wrong.

◇ The question is *how is Revelation useful?* How does it **“make [us] wise for salvation”**? In what ways is it **“useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness”**? How does God use this book to equip us **“for every good work”**?

Let’s look for some answers in Revelation 11.

□ Verse 15 ~ **“The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Messiah, and he will reign forever and ever.”**

Revelation depicts two kingdoms at war.

- On one side is God’s kingdom, shining with goodness and life. It is ruled by God the Father, {Rev 1:4, 5; 4:5} **“who is, and who was, and who is to come”**; with God the Son, **“Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth”**; and with God the Spirit, also called the **“sevenfold Spirit of God.”**

- On the other side is the kingdom of the world, reeking of sin and death. It is ruled by {Eph 6:12} **“spiritual forces of evil”** embodied by an Anti-Trinity: {20:2} **“the dragon, that ancient serpent...the devil”**; Anti-Christ, seen as the {13:1} **“beast coming out of the sea”**; and the False Prophet, who is the {13:11} **“beast... coming out of the earth.”**

- Unlike most human clashes, the territory over which they battle consists not of real estate or material resources but of *people*, our hearts and minds. Thus, the Anti-Christ lusts to dominate {13:7} **“every tribe, people, language and nation,”** makes **“war against God’s people,”** {13:4} requires humanity to worship him and {13:16-17} compels them to participate in his system.

It often seems that the beast will win; yet, this book declares with absolute certainty that God will be victorious. By his death, resurrection, and ascension the Lamb has sealed our enemy’s doom. When the time is right, his kingdom will come in all of its fullness.

Many of John's images are figurative, yet the conflict he describes is 100% real. Battle is being waged around and in and through us even now.

◆ Revelation is {2 Ti 3:15} **“able to make [us] wise for salvation through faith in Christ”** by confronting us with the question of citizenship: *to which kingdom do we belong?* For whom do we battle? Which side are we on?

□ Verse 16 ~ **“And the twenty-four elders, who were seated on their thrones before God, fell on their faces and worshiped God.”**

● If the imagery of kingdom is too abstract, Revelation addresses the issue from another angle: worship. The book records seven great acts of true worship of God {4:8, 11; 5:9-10, 12-14; 7:10, 12; 11:15, 17-18; 12:10-12; 16:5-7; 19:1-8} , and refers to others {1:5-6; 14:3; 15:3-4}.

● That contrasts with the false worship of {13:4} Satan, {13:8} the Anti-Christ, and other {9:21} **“idols.”**

📖 Someone might ask, who could be stupid enough to worship *them*? But worship is mainly defined not by external forms but by internal attitudes. It is ascribing highest value and worth to someone or something. Thus, it is quite possible to worship an idol without physically bowing or singing their praises.

It is notoriously difficult to diagnose one's own idolatry, so here are some questions to consider:

○ Which is more frightening to me: the loss of my money or possessions, or the loss of my faith?

○ Which has a greater impact on my choices: God's approval or the approval of other people?

○ When I become aware that a behavior or relationship that I find pleasurable or rewarding is wrong, do I end it or continue it?

○ What would I die to protect? What can I not live without?

○ Is any object, achievement, status or relationship of such value that I am willing to compromise my ethical standards to protect it?

○ Is anything or person so important it would cripple my trust in God if I lost it?

◆ Revelation is {2 Ti 3:15} **“able to make [us] wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus”** by confronting us with the question of worship: *whom do we worship?* Who (or what) has first place in our lives?

□ Let's skip down to verse 18 ~ **“The nations were angry, and your wrath has come.”**

📖 (As an aside, God's wrath is not an outburst of emotional rage or a furious loss of control; it is a holy and just revulsion against that which stands against God's holy nature and will, against that which brings bondage and death.)

Continuing on: **“The time has come for judging the dead, and for rewarding your servants the prophets and your people who revere your name, both great and small – and for destroying those who destroy the earth.”**

⊕ Let us be clear: we do not earn salvation by doing enough good deeds to offset our bad ones. **“For it is by grace [we are] saved, through faith – and this is not from [ourselves], it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast”** (Ephesians

2:8-9). The reward in v 18 is the fullness of the gift of salvation, not compensation for merits one has achieved.

Nevertheless, righteous deeds are essential. As Ephesians 2:10 says: **“we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”**

→ Those **“good works”** are not optional, for {Jas 2:17, 22} **“Faith... if it is not accompanied by action, is dead ...faith [is] made complete by what we [do].”** Good works activate the salvation God is giving and manifest his presence in our lives. Philippians 2:12-13 puts it like this: **“continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you ... in order to fulfill his good purpose.”** Faith and active obedience cannot be separated.

In Revelation, the obedience of God’s people falls into three broad categories.

★ The first category of obedience is purity.

- Purity begins with Jesus. Revelation 1:5 declares that he **“has freed us from our sins by his blood.”** That was possible only because of his perfect spiritual and moral purity. And Revelation 1:14 states that the risen Lord’s hair **“was white like wool, as white as snow,”** a visual sign of purity.

- Therefore, in 7:9-17 the **“great multitude ... standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb... [are] wearing white robes,”** for they have **“made them white in the blood of the lamb.”**

- On the other hand, **“Nothing impure will ever enter”** [God’s presence] (Revelation 21:27).

→ Elsewhere, John affirms: {1 Jn 3:2b-3} **“Dear friends... we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. All who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure.”**

★ The second category is faithfulness.

- Faithfulness begins with the person and ministry of Jesus. At various places in this book He is called {1:5} **“the faithful witness,”** {3:7} **“him who is holy and true”** (meaning not only *honest* but *reliable, trustworthy, faithful* as well), {3:14} **“the Amen, the faithful and true witness,”** and {19:11} the One with the title: **“Faithful and True.”**

- In Revelation 2:10 Jesus directly says, **“Be faithful, even to the point of death.”** In 3:10 He commands, **“Hold on to what you have,”** (that is, be faithful). Revelation 13:10 notes that persecution **“calls for patient endurance and faithfulness on the part of God’s people.”** Again in Revelation 14:12 John says, **“This calls for patient endurance on the part of the people of God who keep his commands and remain faithful to Jesus.”**

★ The third category of obedience is love.

- Love begins with Jesus. In Revelation 1:5-6 John praises him **“who loves us.”** To his followers who have been persecuted the Lord says, {3:9} **“I will make them come and fall down at your feet and acknowledge that I have loved you.”** After Jesus rebukes the church in Laodicea He adds: {3:19} **“Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline.”** Later, the

New Jerusalem is described as {20:29} **“the camp of God’s people, the city he loves.”**

- It follows that in chapter 12 {12:11} a loud voice in heaven rejoices that the martyrs have demonstrated their love for God in that they **“did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death”**

→ First Peter 4:7-8 sets love in the context of the apocalypse: **“The end of all things is near. Therefore be alert and of sober mind so that you may pray. Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins.”** He uses the word *αγαπε* (agape), indicating that this is a matter, not of feelings, but of humble attitudes, kind words, and helpful deeds.

◊ Revelation **“is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness.”** It confronts us with the questions of innocence (*are we pure* in body, mind, and spirit?), loyalty (*are we faithful* to the Lord God Almighty and to the Lamb?), and love? *Are we loving God* with our entire being *and our neighbors* as ourselves?

The Book of Revelation is concerned with last things. However, its true value is not that it is a sourcebook for chart-making, or a roadmap to the future, or a proof text for theological hairsplitting.

It is most certainly not irrelevant to daily life in the present! The Book of Revelation is **“able to make [us] wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.”** Like **“All Scripture”** it **“is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that all God’s people may be**

thoroughly equipped for every good work,” both now and in the future, until the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.

This is the word of the Lord.