

## The Gospel of the Kingdom

### Week 8 - Day 2: A New Kingdom: God's People

I grew up during a time when the Left Behind series was popular. The movie and the books dramatize the biblical prophecies in Revelation. Left Behind tells the story of the end times in which Christians have been raptured (taken into heaven), leaving the world in chaos and tribulation. When I was eleven, I remember watching the movie with my family and being terrified about the future. I faced my own tribulation as I was scared that I would be “left behind” by my family and friends. If the house was too quiet, I would make sure my family was still at home and not taken to heaven. Thankfully this fear hasn't become reality and I can happily say I'm no longer scared to be left behind.

Although the book of Revelation makes a potentially exciting story about the apocalypse, this book has so much more to offer. It brings a timeless truth that challenges God's people to endure hardship, remain faithful, and to anticipate Jesus' return as king. This encouragement was for the seven churches it was written to, but also for God's kingdom people now and in the future.

John wrote the book of Revelation to seven churches as both an encouragement and challenge. This apocalyptic letter uses visions, symbols, and Old Testament references to reveal the final fulfillment of God's promises and plan. Though the warnings and imagery in Revelations are scary, they help give believers a unique heavenly perspective on earthly events. We don't need to fear the end of the world or persecution because our hope is in the future that Jesus will redeem all things. Let's explore how this is revealed in Revelation.

**Revelation 1:4-6 John, to the seven churches in the province of Asia: Grace and peace to you from him who is, and who was, and who is to come, and from the seven spirits before his throne, and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father—to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen.**

In John's welcoming part of the letter, he reminds the churches of who God is and who they are. That God is eternal and revealed through Jesus. That Jesus is faithful, rose from the dead and is sovereign over everything, even sin itself. He also reminds them of their identity and their purpose. That they are loved, freed from the kingdom of sin to be a part of His kingdom family, and His representation to the world. We must all be reminded of who God is and who we are in Jesus if we are to remain faithful. As we'll see, it is when God's people are prideful, apathetic, or compromising that they lose their identity and purpose.

**Revelation 2:2-5, 7 I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked people, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false. You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name, and have not grown weary. Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken the love you had at first. Consider how far you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place... Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who is victorious, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.**

In Revelation chapters two and three, Jesus addresses the specific problems that each church faced. Jesus calls some of them apathetic because of their pride in their wealth and affluence. Others were called out for compromising morally to the standards of their culture. However, some are acknowledged for being faithful and therefore suffered persecution. Jesus warns the churches that a tribulation will come that will test their faithfulness. These challenges are nothing new for God's people. The timeless question is how His kingdom people will respond. Continuing on, we see what faithfulness looks like in the face of persecution and God's future plan revealed.

**Revelation 5:1-3, 5-6 Then I saw in the right hand of him who sat on the throne a scroll with writing on both sides and sealed with seven seals. And I saw a mighty angel proclaiming in a loud voice, "Who is worthy to break the seals and open the scroll?" But no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth could open the scroll or even look inside 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 triumphed. He is able to open the scroll and its seven seals." Then I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing at the center of the throne...**

Though this scene and imagery may seem weird and shocking to us, it is packed with importance. John is shocked when he expects to see a triumphant king, represented by a lion, but instead sees a bloody lamb. The Old Testament promise of God's future kingdom was initiated and fulfilled through the crucified anointed one, Jesus. Surprisingly, he overcame sin and death by dying and sacrificing himself as the Exodus Passover lamb. Because of this, he is eternally praised and worshiped.

**Revelation 5:9-10 And they sang a new song, saying: "You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased for God persons from every tribe and language and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth."**

As the redeemer of all things, Jesus makes a way for us to be adopted into God's family. We see that His sovereign plan is to guide all of history to its final conclusion, which is represented by this scroll. As we have seen in this study, God's sovereign plan is to finally establish His kingdom on earth where He rules over His people with love and purpose. Though this was

always God's plan, we have seen how evil and human establishments choose to resist Him. These forces not only rebel against God but also challenge and persecute God's people. However, we see the reward for those that endure faithfully.

**Revelation 7:4, 9, 14-15** Then I heard the number of those who were sealed: 144,000 from all the tribes of Israel...After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands...And he said, "These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore, "they are before the throne of God and serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will shelter them with his presence.

John sees God's kingdom family, a multiethnic gathering, as a fulfillment of God's ancient promise to Abraham. They are in God's presence because they've been redeemed by Jesus' work and have endured suffering. This is the ultimate picture of what the church is to resemble here on earth and one day in heaven. Those who put their faith in Jesus will be persecuted, but their past sufferings will be nothing compared to their future reward. Even though evil and earthly kingdoms are the source of this oppression and great suffering, they will ultimately be held accountable for their actions. This is portrayed through images of divine judgment.

**Revelation 15:5-7** ...You are just in these judgments, O Holy One, you who are and who were; for they have shed the blood of your holy people and your prophets, and you have given them blood to drink as they deserve." And I heard the altar respond: "Yes, Lord God Almighty, true and just are your judgments."

**Revelation 20:10** And the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown. They will be tormented day and night for ever and ever. Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books... Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. Anyone whose name was not found written in the book of life was thrown into the lake of fire.

In order to restore and redeem, God will hold accountable those who refuse to repent of how they've participated in ruining His world. The same physical and spiritual destruction that evil has done will justly become its own ruin and judgment. This is in stark contrast to the actions and the reward of those who are God's people and in His kingdom. Ultimately, evil and those who choose not to participate in God's kingdom are destroyed. Through judgment: sin, death and evil can no longer hurt God's new creation and his people. Finally, we are given a glimpse of God's promise and kingdom ultimately fulfilled.

**Revelation 21:1-3** Then I saw “a new heaven and a new earth,” for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Look! God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God.

John portrays the kingdom of God as the union of heaven and earth in the new Jerusalem. Jerusalem was the first city where God’s presence dwelled in a holy temple. It was a place in the Promised Land where God’s people could come to worship and meet with Him. Now in this new Jerusalem it will be ruled by king Jesus, different from the old city that was corrupted by most of Israel’s rulers. In this new city, there will be a new way of living as God’s people.

**Revelation 21:4-5** ‘He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death’ or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.’ He who was seated on the throne said, “I am making everything new!” Then he said, “Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.

In this new place all things will be made new including God’s kingdom family of people. Sorrow will be replaced by joy, death will be exchanged for life, and pain will be changed into wholeness. The *kingdom of God* is our future hope and destiny as God’s people. Though there are many trials presently and anxieties about the future, we have a secure hope that God will fulfill His promises and redeem all things. Maybe not today, maybe not tomorrow, but someday soon. In the meantime, let us rest and participate in the work that Jesus started and will complete one day: that he will redeem and make all things new.

-Ryan Gee

**Share the Gospel:** We have a future hope where God’s kingdom people will live in our King’s presence in a new and restored world.

Personal Observations, Reflections, and Prayers:

