



*“THE BIBLE: REVELATION”

Biblical Text: Revelation 21:1-7

Dr. Michael F. Gardner, Senior Pastor
Old Mission United Methodist Church

*(Open Bible) **“Brothers and sisters, never grow weary in doing good...”*¹ (2 Thessalonians 3:13)

I found that verse in my daily devotions this week. **Now that’s a word I need.** How about you? I am weary. I am exhausted with all the election year ads, *yard signs every three feet, including the ones put up at the Church without permission,” voter surveys,” “robo-calls,” Facebook posts, crazy talk of “rigged elections,” and charges that “American freedom will come to an end” if our favorite candidate isn’t elected.

*I love what Andy Stanley said to his congregation in Alpharetta, Georgia last Sunday, *“Knock it off! You’re scaring the children!”*² And he’s right. Consider the message that our political preoccupation is giving to our own children: *“If we don’t get the right person elected - it’s the end of the world. * If we don’t fix the economy - it’s the end of the world. If we don’t “fix” the supreme court - it’s the end of the world.”*

***We need to just stop it. Nothing could be further from the truth!** The end of the world isn’t near – the end of the election cycle is – and not a moment too soon!

Besides, the world in God’s hands, not ours. Thank God. And nothing is more important than faith in him! God can be trusted - even when humans can’t. God keeps his promises - even when humans don’t. Faith in God is the opposite of fear.

Listen: **“There is no fear in love, for (God’s) perfect love casts out all fear.”*³ (1 Jn. 4:18)

But we do fear – so many things. Those of us who are Christians know better - so why are we so fearful? In part, it’s because politicians often exploit our fears.

But it doesn’t have to be that way! Don’t fix your eyes on the news. Don’t fix your eyes on social media. Don’t fix your eyes on D.C. Fix your eyes on Jesus. *

And if you are under 35 or under 18 – for the love of God don’t fix your eyes on those in my generation and older – too many of us have given up hope, or have become cynical, or negative. Don’t fix your eyes on us. Fix your eyes on Jesus! Remember - **once upon a time, people your age followed Jesus, and they changed the world**

And whatever your age may be, whatever you see in the media, whatever you hear “might” happen - don’t grow weary or lose heart!

¹ 2 Thessalonians 3:13, paraphrased by the author, based on the *New Revised Standard Version Bible*.

² Andy Stanley, Pastor of Northpointe Church, Alpharetta, Ga., 10/16/16 *Ministry Briefing*, Copyright © 2016. All rights reserved.

³ Op. Cit., 1 John 4:18, paraphrased by the author.

I've read to the end of this book –* and as it turns out, God has the final word!

And that is precisely the same message that *John of Patmos, shared around 1900 years ago with the Churches of Asia Minor in the Book we call **“The Revelation.”*

The problem is that the dominant interpretation of Revelation promotes fear and worries about the end of the world, blames barcodes and a new world order, and says *a day is coming soon when believers will be raptured to heaven and the sorry rest of us will be *“left behind.”* **Most of us have heard that version of Revelation.**

The Late Great Planet Earth *sold thousands of books for Hal Lindsey in 1970's, when he predicted that the world would end by the year 2000. When the book became a movie in 1979, and I was a young pastor, I got an anonymous note in the mail with these words highlighted, * *“One liberal minister was left behind.”*

But, as you see - I'm still here! So is Hal Lindsey who lives very comfortably in a mansion in Palm Springs. More recently, the *Left Behind Series* * made millions for Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins. What a swindle! I know that sounds harsh! But the only thing that was *“left behind”* when Tim LaHaye died this past summer, was a net worth that had made him one of the wealthiest Christian authors, ever.

Something is wrong to me about capitalizing on people's fears! And I don't care whether you are a pastor, Christian author, or politician. **Wrong is just wrong.** The real story of Revelation is about faith rather than fear. Listen to Revelation 1:4-5:

**“John to the seven churches that are in Asia: Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come... *and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, who is ruler of the kings of the earth.”*⁴

John was writing to Christians in Asia Minor, modern day Turkey, not to frighten them, but to encourage those who were undergoing great persecution. Notice his words – *“Christ is ruler, even over the Kings of the earth!”* And listen to vs. 18-19.

“Do not be afraid! I was there at the beginning and I will be with you until the end! And I alone hold life and death in my hands!”*⁵ **Once you know that you need have no fear.

Patmos is actually an amazing place to visit –breathtaking. *It lies sixty miles off the coast of Turkey. This tiny island is however the easternmost property of Greece. *

But, at the time John was exiled there it was a desolate place, a prison island, at the farthest and most remote location possible. It was where the Romans sent dissidents who were far too popular to be killed but whom they needed to get out of the way. That was the case for *John, who was an *important leader of the Eastern Church. *

⁴ Revelation 1: 4-5, paraphrased by the author.

⁵ Revelation 1: 18-19, condensed and paraphrased by the author.

The monastery of St. John *is located high on the hill above the harbor. The tenth century old bell towers and whitewashed stone parapets are beautiful. *And Orthodox monks still live and work and worship there today, in homage to John.

The Grotto of the Apocalypse*, where it all happened, is located back down the winding road, carved into and then inside the mountain. * When I visited the island several years ago, I was in awe of John’s faith and that of the monks who still maintain his witness there, in the place *The Revelation was written.

And that vision begins and ends with an assurance that God will be with us, that he will help us overcome any obstacle or fear, and that he hold history in his hand.

Listen to the words of our text, near the end of the Bible. Revelation 21:3-4:

**“Behold, the dwelling of God is with his people. They shall be his people, and God himself will be with them; *He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more ... for the former things have passed away.”⁶*

Most interpreters of Revelation don’t share that message! Neither do most politicians. Why? Because Good News doesn’t sell as well as Bad News! Because if you can take a bunch of white, middle-aged, middle class Americans, and tell them what to be afraid of – that’s how you sell books, or yourself for that matter.

But we do not need more fear today! It doesn’t square with the promises of God, and it plain just isn’t true. It does not take courage to invoke fear. It takes courage to proclaim faith! **And that’s the message we need today!**

I still remember being in awe during the morning prayers at the *Monastery of Patmos, as I heard the monks singing, beautifully, some ancient text in Greek. I asked the Abbot what the words meant. And he said. It is from Revelation 7:10, **“Salvation belongs to our God, who sitteth on the throne and to the Lamb.”*

That message was authored nineteen hundred years ago by John of Patmos. But his message is as relevant here in the United States and in Kansas City as it was to the ancient Christians of Asia Minor long ago! And we don’t have to go into exile or half way around the world to find it and benefit from it!

Salvation does not belong to Wall Street, or to Washington DC, or to Republicans or to Democrats, or any of the Presidential candidates, but to only to God who holds the world and your life and mine in the palm His hand! (Underscore of final song begins.)

And if you listen close, you can hear choir of angels singing his song: ***“Don’t be afraid! Don’t give up! I am with you! And I will never leave you! Do not be afraid! “***

⁶ Revelation 21:3-4, paraphrased from the Revised Standard Version Bible. Copyright © 1946, 1952, and 1971 the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved.